

Collaborative Pianists in South Africa: Comparative & Practice-Based Perspectives with Reference to Musical Theatre

by

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Declaration

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Abstract

There is a paucity of academic literature on the nature of collaborative pianism in musical theatre. The existing literature on musical theatre concentrates on defining the characteristics of the genre, the various composers who occupy the musical theatre canon, the different stylistic qualities indicative of certain decades, and methods of composition. Where the literature falls short, is in documenting the role and responsibilities of the collaborative pianist (also known as the rehearsal pianist). A possible reason for this gap in the literature is a lack of commitment and impetus to train répétiteurs for the opera and musical theatre genres specifically. In the South African context, this problem is exacerbated by the absence of a collaborative piano course with the purpose of producing répétiteurs for opera or musical theatre. Currently, specialization in the musical theatre genre is reserved for singers, dancers, and actors. The training of collaborative pianists, integral to the process of rehearsal and performance, has fallen by the wayside. This thesis addresses the gap and offers concrete suggestions towards the integration of collaborative pianism into postgraduate training. Due to the highly specialized nature of this type of employment, interviews with industry professionals were conducted as a means of determining the skills and qualifications collaborative pianists have in common. In addition, various sources of literature covering didactics, education policy, curriculum reform, demands of musical theatre employment and its inner-workings, all provide a theoretical basis from which to engage topics revealed by the interviewees. This study considers the education shortfalls that exist and suggests how these hurdles can be overcome through the restructuring of a postgraduate Honours course and internship opportunities. Given the commercial success of musical theatre in South Africa, ignoring the need for collaborative pianists in this lucrative sector of the music industry would be a mistake.

Opsomming

Die literatuur oor samewerkende pianisme in musiekteater is gebrekkig. Die bestaande literatuur oor musiekteater fokus op die definisie van die genre se eienskappe, die komponiste wat die musiekteaterkanon beset, hoe stylkenmerke oor tyd heen verander en op komposisiemetodes. Die literatuur dokumenteer egter nie die rol en verantwoordelikhede van die samewerkende pianis (ook bekend as die repetisiepianis) nie. 'n Moontlike rede vir die gaping in die vakliteratuur is die feit dat die noodsaak om samewerkende pianiste vir die opera- en musiekteatergenres op te lei dikwels nie raakgesien word nie en dat sodanige opleiding nie institusioneel ondersteun word nie. In Suid-Afrika is daar tans geen klavierkursus wat ten doel het om *répétiteurs* vir opera of musiekteater op te lei nie. Spesialisering in musiekteater is slegs beskikbaar vir sangers, dansers en akteurs. Die opleiding van samewerkende pianiste, wat 'n integrale rol in repetisies en uitvoerings speel, is tot nou toe bloot oor die hoof gesien. Hierdie tesis spreek die gaping in die vakletterkunde aan en bied konkrete voorstelle vir die ontwikkeling van 'n nagraadse kursus in samewerkende pianisme. As gevolg van die hoogs gespesialiseerde aard van hierdie tipe werk, is onderhoude gevoer met professionele beroepslui as 'n manier om die vaardighede en kwalifikasies wat hierdie musikante gemeen het, te bepaal. Daarbenewens bied die literatuur wat handel oor didaktiek, onderwysbeleid, kurrikulumhervorming en die praktyk van musikale teaterwerk en die eise wat dit aan musici stel 'n teoretiese basis vir die bespreking van onderwerpe uit die onderhoude. Hierdie studie ondersoek die gebrek aan gespesialiseerde opleiding vir samewerkende pianiste en dui aan hoe bepaalde struikelblokke uit die weg geruim kan word deur die herstrukturering van 'n nagraadse honneurskursus en internskapgeleenthede. Gegewe die kommersiële sukses van musiekteater in Suid-Afrika, sou dit 'n fout wees om die behoefte aan samewerkende pianiste in hierdie winsgewende sektor van die musiekbedryf te ignoreer.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction: Concepts of Collaborative Pianism in Musical Theatre	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Introducing the collaborative pianist	7
1.3 Rationale, aims and methodology	9
1.4 Literature review	11
2. In the Field: Notes and Revelations on Journeys from the Audition Room to the Pit	14
2.1 Defining the necessary skillset	14
2.2 Preparation, consistency, and interpretation	17
2.3 Stylistic vocabulary	20
2.4 Understanding the work environment	20
2.5 Into the pit	22
2.6 Out of the pit	25
3. Are We There Yet? The Collaborative Pianist's Plea for Artistic Knowledge of the Musical Theatre Industry	28
3.1 Education and training: what's good, what's bad, what's missing	28
3.2 Proposed course outline for répétiteur training in musical theatre	37
3.3 Opportunities for internship	40
4. Cue the Bows: Some Concluding Thoughts on Collaborative Pianism	43
Bibliography	47
Addenda	52

1. Introduction: Concepts of Collaborative Pianism in Musical Theatre

1.1 Introduction

This study is born of my experience of making a career shift from music educator to collaborative pianist in the musical theatre industry. My new work environment and the skills it required presented obstacles that, in retrospect, stemmed from a lack of experience and industry-specific knowledge deficiencies which, in my case, were intimately bound up with my training as a classical pianist. This thesis documents those obstacles and suggests interventions which could be instrumental in equipping BMus piano performance graduates with the skills to enter the performance sector of the musical theatre industry as collaborative pianists. The evidence gathered in various interviews with musical theatre industry professionals suggests that there is a great need for well-educated, experienced collaborative pianists. The number of employable collaborative pianists in musical theatre can easily be increased through adequate education and skills training at a tertiary level.

At South African universities, popular music and musical theatre have largely been ignored or eclipsed by so-called Western art music. With the exception of resident jazz and wind bands, Stellenbosch University offers a range of music degrees that remain beholden to an art music tradition (US Music, n.d.). University of Cape Town's South African College of Music has chosen to diversify its spectrum of courses offered by including opera, African music, and Jazz studies alongside 'Art Music', with various routes of specialization offered within each of these disciplines (SACM, n.d.). Neither institution offers a course in Popular Music Studies. The University of KwaZulu-Natal is the only tertiary institution in South Africa offering an undergraduate degree in Popular Music Studies.¹ The University of the Witwatersrand offers classical/jazz/musical theatre training for singers, whilst the Universities of Pretoria and the Free State limit the inclusion of jazz and popular music to

¹ A course outline is available here: <https://music.ukzn.ac.za/academic-programmes/popular-music-studies/> [accessed 1 September 2018]

history modules.² The University of Pretoria's Drama Department offers an undergraduate course with Theatre Studies as an elective subject in the final year of the degree, whilst Tshwane University of Technology offers a three-year, full-time National Diploma in Musical Theatre (NQF level 6) open exclusively to singers, dancers and actors.³

Internationally, collaborative piano has gained more traction. The Boston Conservatory at Berklee University offers a Masters' degree in Collaborative Piano.⁴ This degree is slanted to accommodate pianists intending to work as répétiteurs in opera. The same is true of the postgraduate degree offered at Guildhall School of Music and Drama for the specialized training of répétiteurs.⁵ The courses offered at Berklee and Guildhall include an overview of the history of opera, the didactics of singing, language/diction modules, and practical internships within the opera division of the school. Though the course is extensive and thorough, it does not cater specifically for the musical theatre industry. Whilst Liverpool University has degrees in Popular Music studies, it does not offer a course in collaborative piano, and does not cater for pianists in musical theatre.⁶

What should be clear from the above, is that whilst institutions around the country offer collaborative pianism—or something like it—under the banner of either accompaniment or ensemble, none offers a stream of performance study dedicated to the training of répétiteurs for the opera or musical theatre fields. This provides music departments with a unique

² In communication from Rhodes University, the difficulty of assessing collaborative pianism in the musical theatre context was cited as the main reason why this stream of study was not readily on offer to pianists (E-mail 2018a). UVS undergraduate degree syllabus available here: https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/librariesprovider20/faculty-library/syllabus-docs/syllabus-2011-2012.pdf?sfvrsn=7a3ef821_2 [accessed 1 September 2018]; UP undergraduate degree syllabus available here: <https://www.up.ac.za/en/yearbooks/2018/programmes/view/01132003> [accessed 1 September 2018]; Wits undergraduate degree syllabus available here: <https://www.wits.ac.za/media/wits-university/faculties-and-schools/humanities/wits-school-of-arts/music/documents/MUSIC%20Prospectus%202017.pdf> [accessed 1 September 2018]

³ UP Drama – <https://www.up.ac.za/yearbooks/programmes/view/01130117> [accessed 1 September 2018]; Tshwane University of Technology – Performing Arts degree: <https://www.tut.ac.za/faculties/the-arts/departments/performing-arts/about> [accessed 1 September 2018]

⁴ A course outline is available here: <https://bostonconservatory.berklee.edu/collaborative-piano/mm-collaborative-piano?pid=007> [accessed 1 September 2018]

⁵ Guildhall School – Répétiteur training course: https://www.gsmd.ac.uk/music/principal_study/opera/ [accessed 1 September 2018]

⁶ A course outline is available here: <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/popular-music-ba-hons/overview/> [accessed 1 September 2018]

opportunity to offer students something new and relevant. As Jordan Peterson suggests: "... if you're creative... you're going to have a hell of a time monetizing your creativity. It's virtually impossible. It's really difficult..." (Peterson 2017). What Peterson is referring to, is individual creativity—the ability to stand out in an industry (locally and internationally) packed with people in possession of varying degrees of formal training, experience, and talent. This need to stand out from the crowd becomes trivial in an industry where many individuals, all vying for the same employment opportunities, may render themselves ironically homogenous. Added to this conundrum is an unspoken reasoning that there is more valour and legitimacy in the much loftier pursuit of solo performance than collaborative work. "Music conservatories teach accompanying as a discrete area of study, and in recent years have renamed it "collaborative piano". This term is especially apt in a stage music setting, where a [musician] is not just an accompanist, but also a collaborator, performer and co-creator" (Church 2015, 1-2). "There has long been a stereotype in the performance community that accompanists are inferior musicians", remarks one observer: "[n]ot good enough for solo careers, they are hired to perform a service: to obey their musical partner's instructions without question" (The Strad 2010). It is unclear where exactly this notion of subservience comes from. Is it propagated by institutions of higher learning, by teachers and expectations, or is it merely another iteration of a romanticised obsession with the figure of the individual genius? In the context of Birmingham University, Alison Davies argues:

Despite claiming to offer a diverse student body every possibility of achieving 'professional standards' and the opportunity of building successful musical careers for the twenty-first century... the Conservatoire discursively constructs its musical training as something from which only the most 'talented' and dedicated students can fully benefit... the Conservatoire offers training that reflects the neo-liberal idea of a meritocracy whereby the degree of 'talent' and 'effort' that students bring to and invest in the learning process determines their subsequent musical progress and success. (2004, 804-5)

When pondering the number of graduates and their proficiency at the university where I am presently enrolled for a Masters degree, Stellenbosch University, one should first consider the implied mandate of a department called a "Konservatorium" rather than, say, a "College of Music". The earliest use of the word "conservatorium" dates back to the establishment of the Parisian academy of music (*Conservatoire de Musique*) by the National Convention in 1795

(OED 2018). It is implied that similar institutions around the world devote themselves to the study and instruction of classical music, typically of the continental European tradition (OED 2018). By this definition, Stellenbosch University's Konservatorium is mandated to teach only within the boundaries of the Western Art Music tradition, and it has largely done so. Other sources attribute the difference between conservatoires and colleges/academies not to the teaching of Western art as opposed to other music, but to the purpose of instruction. "The educational divide was clearly established, with only a little blurring", comment Wright & Ritterman (1994, 522): "universities offered three-year degree courses and music colleges offered a variety of self-validated diploma courses; academics went to universities, performers and practical musicians went to conservatoires." Wright & Ritterman (1994, 523) further argue that the distinction between these two types of institutions has become increasingly blurred as universities (traditionally concerned with academia) have attracted consummate performers as permanent members of staff. In turn, this has caused students to apply to an institution based on the calibre of staff members rather than, say, the reputation of that institution. On the subject of curricula, Wright suggests the following:

... challenges to the relevance of our provision, underline what should be a fundamental issue in the design of conservatoire curricula. For the contemporary profession demands an extraordinary versatility from our students. As well as being singers or players on their own instruments, they should be familiar with some instruments and music from other cultures. They have to be amateurs and entrepreneurs, teachers, administrators and skilled in business... In the course design of all conservatoires, should be the thought that there are several reasons why someone who has decided upon a performance-central training, may not continue to want, or be able, to follow that path. Whether caused by injury, illness, or the realisation that the ceiling of their ability is below that demanded by the profession, they should be helped to exploit other alternatives. (1994, 523)

If, for example, both Stellenbosch University and University of Cape Town are perceived as tantamount institutions, if both are respected and held in high regard irrespective of the differences in courses offered, why would prospective undergraduates or postgraduates choose one and not the other? Simon Marginson argues that, while "institutional reputation is known, teaching quality mostly is not. The acid test is that when faced by choice between a prestigious university with known indifference to undergraduate teaching, and a lesser

institution offering better classroom support, nearly everyone opts for prestige” (2006, 3). There is of course no concrete way of measuring the degree to which this statement is true, but it should provide music departments with an impetus to remain competitive – always vying for the best students, as a means of upholding the institution’s integrity and reputation.

Institutions offering tertiary training are mandated by the Department of Higher Education to “place South Africa on the path to competitive participation in a global economy” (Chisolm in Habib 2003, 268). This goal is to be paired with a philosophy that should “sweep away all remnants of apartheid policy and practice... [as] found in the National Qualification Framework (NQF)” (Chisolm in Daniel and Lutchman 2005, 269), first introduced in 2012 (SAQA 2018). The NQF “provided the basis for the vision of a core national curriculum which would integrate academic and vocational skills” (Chisolm in Habib 2003, 269). The need to integrate academic and vocational skills resulted in what Jonathan Jansen describes as “massification” (Jansen in Habib 2003, 291). The cause of this integration was due to the restructuring and merging of technikons/colleges (previously vocational institutions) with universities (traditionally academic institutions) (Ibid, 300). According to Jansen (in Habib 2003, 305), the “legal implications for colleges in terms of the *White Paper* (1997) ... was that colleges could either be established as autonomous institutions or as subdivisions that would be incorporated into an existing university or technikon.” This merging and restructuring of tertiary institutions meant the sharing of existing resources, but also of pre-existing debts and running costs. The higher education system has further been put under pressure by policy makers, as tertiary institutions are expected to even the playing field for all students irrespective of their background or circumstance, and to offer equal and fair opportunities across the board. In turn, Jansen predicted that “[greater] numbers of students will have to be accommodated ... Such ‘massification’ of South African higher education will necessarily involve different patterns of teaching and learning... In a situation of financial constraints, planning and negotiations will have to ensure wider participation is affordable and sustainable” (Jansen in Habib 2003, 292).

The different patterns of teaching and learning Jansen is referring to were embodied by the older Outcomes Based Education model of the 1990s in which outcomes were “seen as having to shape teaching and learning in the curriculum” (Chisolm in Habib 2003, 270). In addition to this rethinking of the curriculum, a peripheral eye was also cast on the notion of

globalizing the curriculum as a means of ensuring that South African graduates could compete on the international job market. Dunn and Nilan outline the delicate balance tertiary institutions are required to maintain to bring this mandate to fruition (2007, 266). They identify four main rationales for the internationalization of curricula at tertiary level: academic achievement, social/ cultural responsibility, political influence, and economic climate. The successful internationalization of higher education demands the upgrading of curricula with continual professional training and additional qualifications for academic staff. It requires putting South African institutions “on the map” through research and technical innovation, fulfilment of regional and continental responsibilities, and lastly it requires an increased revenue in order to sustain all of these upgrades and changes (Dunn & Nilan 2007, 266). Dunn and Nilan warn of the competing factors that could have hazardous effects on the delicate balance of philosophy, politics, finances, and policies of higher education institutions: decreased public funding; mounting student debts, low completion rates, low research output, a lack of sufficient academic policies, and government/ management inefficiencies (Dunn and Nilan 2007, 270). Ensor (2004, 348) confirms this trend elsewhere: “In developing countries, the problems facing universities are in crucial respects different from those that might constitute a European ‘crisis of the university’... India, with the second largest higher education system in the world, epitomizes the crisis of the universities of the poor: problems of continued expansion, deteriorating standards and limited resources, and the political complexities involved in achieving systemic reform”. Clearly, this problematic balancing act is not unique to South Africa. Roos adds that “[p]art of the explanation for this decline in student registrations lies in the jagged intersection of new funding constraints and changing vocational needs that emphasize the value of technical, financial, and management training” (2005, 52).

According to Asmal and James (2001, 192), “[t]here is no doubt that it pays to acquire a decent education”. In his book *Democracy and Delusion*, Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh (2017, 15) traces the rapid escalation of university fees both in the context of South Africa and abroad: “Since 1990, the cost of higher education increased at double the rate of healthcare and quadruple that of inflation”. The pursuit of tertiary education has become a significant financial burden. Students start their careers with proportionately larger debts than their predecessors. Given this context, it is crucial that students acquire skills aligned with the

demands of the workplace. The student debt bubble only increases when students lack the skills to transition smoothly into the workforce. It would spell disaster for a university if that debt bubble collapsed. It is therefore in the best interest of the institution and its students that the course content is relevant and applicable to the “real-world”. Chisolm (in Habib 2003, 286) explains: “Human capital theory rests on the assumption that education and skills lead to increased productivity, which in turn results in higher wages. School-effectiveness approaches in turn are based on the assumption that schooling outputs can be improved through correct calibration of the inputs”. In a study conducted by Simon Marginson, he found that “[applicants] had little detail of teaching quality and lifelong earnings in particular courses”:

They were making individualised choices, and saw higher education as a competitive market. But their mentality was crafted not in the actuarial imaginary of human capital theory, with its private rates of return to investment in learning; and not by screening theory, with equally calculable rates of return not to learning but credentials. Something much older was at work, more instinct than calculation: relative advantage. (2006, 4)

In other words, the demands of the job market are to be taken into consideration when formulating curricula. Tertiary institutions should continue to encourage the pursuit of academia, being cautioned not to ignore the vocational skills necessary for the modern musician.

1.2 Introducing the collaborative pianist

The title “collaborative pianist” has of late been adopted as the umbrella term for pianists utilizing a host of pianistic (and other) skills in varying musical contexts, whilst fulfilling an assortment of roles.⁷ Its arguably vague nature makes it difficult to pinpoint exactly what the duties of such a pianist might be. The term collaborative pianist refers to accompanists, répétiteurs for ballet/opera companies, and ensemble members irrespective of the genre of music or the role that these pianists fulfil. Church (2015, 1) elaborates further: “The term ‘accompaniment’ might imply that the music is somehow subordinate. In some ways it is, but

⁷ It is surmised that the term was first used by American pianist Samuel Sanders and was used more frequently after the 1990s as it was increasingly included in the course content of several institutions in North America (Foley 2005).

that does not make it any less essential. It does not renounce its identity because it is an appendage to something else. Rather, musical accompaniment is a form of collaboration”. Collaborative pianists are *not* soloists, though they might be required to perform with the same technical prowess within a collaborative setting.

Through observation in the field, it is apparent that rehearsal pianists embody many of the same characteristics of collaborative pianists. In the realm of musical theatre, they are simply known as “rehearsal pianists” and are required to possess a cumulative skillset. For the purposes of this study, I will continue to use the term “collaborative pianist” to include those pianists working in musical theatre, irrespective of the functions they serve (i.e. playing for rehearsals, auditions, or in the pit). Musical theatre’s collaborative pianists are typically classically-trained keyboardists, vocal coaches, répétiteurs, conductors and at times administrative assistants to musical directors. It is therefore advantageous for the collaborative pianist to have a good knowledge of poetry and song, the manner in which language is constructed, and how music is used as a vehicle to convey narratives (Foley 2007). The roles these pianists fulfil vary from production to production, as defined by the needs of the rehearsal process expounded by producers and directors. In any event, it is ideal for a collaborative pianist to be prepared for anything, at any time. A versatile approach will serve a young collaborative pianist well and will ensure that he/she continues to receive commissions for future projects.⁸

In a bid to maintain a larger profit margin, orchestrators and arrangers have revised scores to minimize the cost and number of musicians performing in the pit. Harmon and Warfield (2006, 1077) explain the lengths to which scores are reduced: “[...*Carousel*, a show that opened on Broadway with a pit orchestra of forty players... was reduced to eighteen players, which was accomplished by redistributing the lines of the excised parts among the remaining eighteen”. Church (2015, 23) echoes this by adding, “[unfortunately], the most popular means of cutting budgets is by reducing orchestra (and cast) sizes and replacing real instruments with synthesizers. The practice continues on Broadway despite its increasing profits”. This reduction of orchestra/ band size has spurred unions in the USA to step in as

⁸ See Dr Chris Foley’s blog for a more detailed list of occupations collaborative pianists might enjoy – not all of these have performance as their main activity. See <https://collaborativepiano.blogspot.com/2006/01/career-options-in-collaborative-piano.html> [accessed 1 September 2018]

mediators between producers (employers) and the musicians they employ. The union's mandate is to protect the number of employment opportunities in musical theatre, to protect the wage structure, and to limit the extent to which scores are reduced (i.e. the minimum number of pit musicians is calculated in ratio to the number of seats in the auditorium) (Church 2015, 25).

Due to the comparatively smaller number of employment opportunities in South Africa, collaborative pianists in particular need to remain competitive in order to maintain consistent employment. Uzzi & Spiro warn that, “[while] theory implies a positive relationship between small worldliness and success, research also suggests that connectivity and cohesion can be a liability for creativity” (2005, 463). In other words, in an industry where employment depends in part on existing professional networks, the danger is that there is little to no scope for employment of *new* collaborative pianists. Given that performance opportunities are not in abundance in South Africa, and in a bid to avoid performers pigeon-holing themselves, collaborative pianism offers pianists an alternate avenue of employment that would certainly provide them with more employment possibilities in a small market. There is a hesitance to hire novice collaborative pianists because of the well-founded assumption that these musicians are not specifically trained to operate in opera or musical theatre production settings. The risk of hiring someone without previous experience is that they may hinder the rehearsal process, which only adds to the stress of meeting demanding production deadlines. Those who have previously enjoyed employment *expect* to receive future contracts not on the basis of skill, but on the basis of their familiarity with industry professionals. This lack of competition in the job market makes it easier for more experienced collaborative pianists to become stagnant and complacent, resulting in a decreased quality of performance. This also renders the work environment saturated with skillsets that are outdated and unrefined, leaving little to no room for a new intake of collaborative pianists. Acquiring the skillset specific to collaborative pianism will render students more easily employable, not only in musical theatre or opera, but also in the context of schools that require music staff to put on school productions and revues.

Whilst there is no dedicated body in South Africa that protects the interests of musical theatre musicians or secures a basic minimum wage, there does seem to be a standardized gross

salary for musical theatre musicians of R6,000 per week (Gibson 2018). A standard rehearsal schedule for collaborative pianists working on a large-scale production is typically Monday-Saturday (10:00-18:00), for a period of roughly four to eight weeks. Thereafter, technical rehearsals are scheduled depending on when the technical departments (crew, sound, and lighting) have finished setting up the stage area, have been through their standard safety checks, and have declared the area safe to work in. Technical rehearsals can vary greatly in length, but all rehearsals are block rehearsals of three hours each. When the production is pressed for time (due to late arrival of shipping containers, or trouble wiring the lights and sound), collaborative pianists may be expected to play three three-hour sessions per day until the technical rehearsal process is completed. Once performances commence and the show starts “running”, rehearsals during the day are nominal.

1.3 Rationale, aims, and methodology

This study grew out of my own experiences and interactions with industry professionals in South African musical theatre. Due to my involvement in a number of musicals over the past year, much of the work presented in this thesis draws on participant observation as a means of investigating the parameters of collaborative pianism. Because my “field”, ranging from the orchestra pit to the rehearsal room, is unencumbered by the asymmetric power relations as well as the politics of representation that accompany much traditional participant observation in ethnomusicology and anthropology, I have taken the decision not to devote much space to a theorisation of this particular methodological choice. Participant observation in this thesis is realised through recollection, introspection, and self-examination based on my own experiences in the musical theatre industry. This arguably hybrid approach is typical of participant observation. “In a fundamental way,” writes Paul Pohland, “participant observation is a methodology in search of identity. The lack of consensus in aims, procedures, and outcomes is indicated by the variety of terms used to describe the methodology” (1972, 6).

The perspectives arrived at as a result of my active participation in the “field” are also indispensable given the comparatively limited literature on the subject of collaborative

pianism. Joseph Church confirms that, “[besides] a few basic handbooks, there is virtually no scholarly enquiry into the subject, and at present music direction is part of only a few college or university curricula” (2015, 6). Without any prior knowledge of the daily responsibilities of a collaborative pianist, the pressure to learn and survive on the job is that much greater. Due to this naivety, the initial experience of working in the musical theatre environment is stressful, and the pressure to perform enormous.

The aim of this study is to identify the vocational skills required to enter the workplace of South African musical theatre as a collaborative pianist. By identifying these skills, one may derive a host of potential academic solutions to the problem of filling the gaps that exist between the expectations of employers and the naivety of graduates wanting to pursue a career in musical theatre. The study hopes to outline the variety of roles collaborative pianists fulfil in South African musical theatre today, and the shortcomings that exist in a general BMus degree.

In keeping with Pohland’s philosophy on participant observation, “interviewing complements observing. One can hardly say that he has shared in the life of the people observed without interacting directly with them” (1972, 12). Six semi-structured interviews were conducted as a means of gaining different perspectives on the vocation of collaborative pianist in South African musical theatre. The resulting data is qualitative rather than quantitative. Interviews provide the study with poignant and detailed accounts of the practices and experiences of these industry professionals, and the unique backgrounds which have led all of them to musical theatre. Interviews will be supplemented throughout with secondary reading material, thereby grounding my own observations and those from the interviewees with recourse to the existing literature, and drawing out both points of divergence and convergence between them.

1.4 Literature Review

There exists a wealth of literature covering the multifaceted curriculum conundrum faced by higher education. These include curriculum reform (Dunn and Nilan 2007; Ensor 2004; Cross, Mungadi and Rouhani 2002; Jansen 2003; and Roos 2005), debates over vocational as opposed to purely academic learning (Chisolm 2003; Idolor 2005), relevance of course

content (Wright and Ritterman 1994; Davies 2004), and teaching methodologies and practices (Goodnough 2001; Parker 1979). David J. Elliott's book *Praxial Music Education: Reflection and Dialogues* (2005) discusses alternatives to traditional curriculum and pedagogies. The major theme of praxial philosophy "... is summed up by the word 'multidimensional'... a multidimensional concept of music and musical works, a multi-layered concept of musical understanding, a multifaceted concept of musical values, and a diverse approach to achieving these values" (2005, 7). On a different tangent entirely, are two sources of education philosophy. "The OECD PISA global competence framework" (2018) is a document detailing what has been defined as factors of global competency in students. "Enhancing Professional Knowledge: A Case Study of an Elementary Teacher" (Goodnough 2001) is a study which documents the application of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory in the context of elementary school instruction, and the positive impact it had on both the teacher and her students. These sources serve as a theoretical basis from which to compile a hypothetical structure and content of a postgraduate course in collaborative pianism in musical theatre.

In her article "Preparing professional performers: music students' perceptions and experiences of the learning process at Birmingham Conservatoire", Alison Davies touches on several themes associated with music performance as a career path. Among the topics discussed are the perception of talent being comparatively more prominent in some students than in others; the importance of teaching a broader-based curriculum that will allow performance students to be comfortably situated to perform Popular Music; strategies to equip students with a plethora of technological skills to ensure the production of multi-skilled, multi-faceted graduates; and the importance of ensuring that graduates are able to enter the work force with relative ease despite the Arts facing increasingly less Government support (2004, 806). The topics raised in Davies' article will serve as a good grounding for the questions that will be posed to all six interviewees in this study. The feedback recorded in these interviews will serve to document and describe these same issues in the South African context.

"Music Direction for the Stage - A View from the Podium" is a guide to musical directing by Joseph Church (2015). The author discusses every conceivable aspect of the pre-production, rehearsal, production, and post-production processes of bringing to life a musical theatre

work. Church offers insights into the many relationships that exist within the hierarchy of the production company—the production team, the technical teams, the creative team, the musicians, and of course the performers themselves. Echoing Kurt Adler (1965), Church suggests useful ways of rehearsing the score and parts, denoting the differences between mere accompanying and coaching. He outlines the roles and functions musicians serve in the context of musical theatre, specifically those of the rehearsal pianist, audition pianist, and keyboardist/ pit musician. Church discusses the ways in which conducting and accompaniment styles evolve throughout the process of production and how they affect the creative outcome. In addition, he describes the ways in which performance maintenance is administered and how the quality of the production is preserved.

Articles by Severyn Bruyn and Paul Pohland, respectively, have been most useful in demarcating the roles and responsibilities of a participant observer as researcher. Bruyn (1963, 224-5) identifies five characteristics of an objective participant observer:

(1) the participant observer shares in the life activities and sentiments of people in face-to-face relationships, (2) the role of the participant observer requires both detachment and personal involvement, (3) the researcher acquires a social role which is determined by the requirements of the research design and the framework of the culture, (4) the scientific interests of the participant observer are interdependent with the cultural framework of the people being studied, and (5) the social role of the researcher is a natural part of the cultural life of the observed.

Pohland confirms “the methodology characteristically embraces not one but a blend or combination of methods and techniques” (1972, 11). Two ways in which field notes can be recorded are (1) spontaneous conversations or interviews, or (2) extended intro-/retrospective notes by the participant observer (Pohland 1972, 11).

Six interviews were conducted as part of my research. They allow for insight and eye-witness accounts of the experiences of established collaborative pianists in the South African musical theatre industry. The interviewees are all considered industry professionals who occupy various ranks within the industry’s hierarchy. Three of the interviewees work as rehearsal pianists and pit musicians, two work as musical directors, and one is an international music supervisor. Though the international music supervisor is not South African, he has worked on

many South African productions and therefore is able to provide a unique evaluation of the local skillset compared to those of collaborative pianist in the West End or Broadway. In addition to the six interviews conducted, blogs by Jeremy Fisher (2014) and Tom Vendafreddo (2013) provide a unique glimpse into the vocational skillsets required in the musical theatre industry, as well as some detail about working conditions, routine, and job placement. Both of these men work as collaborative pianists in London's West End. Vendafreddo works predominantly as a rehearsal and audition pianist, whilst Fisher works as a vocal coach to singers, actors, and dancers. Supporting their arguments are sources such as Kurt Adler (1965) and Ginsborg, Chaffin and Nicholson (2006), who describe the necessary skills required to be a successful accompanist, coach, collaborator, and ensemble musician. In the context of my own study, these sources will provide useful comparative background that will elucidate the differences and similarities in relation to answers provided by the six interviewees.

2. In the Field: Notes and Revelations on Journeys from the Audition Room to the Pit

No one said that being invisible was easy.

Joseph Church (2015, 6)

2.1 Defining the necessary skillset

On his blog, “A Paradigm Shift in the Role of the Musical Theatre Accompanist”, Tom Vendafreddo outlines nine essential skills every collaborative pianist should possess (2013a). Though Vendafreddo writes in the context of playing for auditions, the same skillset is utilized during the rehearsal process. A collaborative pianist working as a professional musician must possess a well-developed piano technique, whereas classical training is an advantage (Zurnamer 2018). Proficiency and efficacy of playing the instrument is not something that can be compromised (Vendafreddo 2013a; Fisher 2014; Simpson 2018). In addition, proficient sight-reading skills are extremely valuable as most often the collaborative pianist will be required to learn new scores at a moment’s notice or sight-read on the spot (Lombard 2018; Vendafreddo 2013b; Kraak 2018; Zurnamer 2018). The ability to transpose on the fly is an additional advantage—the collaborative pianist may be required to play an audition piece a semitone or two higher/lower upon the director’s request (Adler 1965, 183; Vendafreddo 2013c).

The collaborative pianist will constantly find themselves in a triangular relationship between the conductor, score and performers. In some instances, the collaborative pianist will be required to follow the conductor in the traditional fashion: “... the person at the piano must have keen eyes and ears” (Vendafreddo 2013a). In other sections, the performers are granted more freedom for interpretation (especially in *colla voce* sections that imitate the recitative style) and the collaborative pianist must anticipate the singer’s phrasing and breathing (Vendafreddo 2013a; Simpson 2018). The collaborative pianist does not play a passive, incidental role but rather a subtly supportive one—reflecting and enhancing the interpretation

of the musical director, his/her own, and that of the soloist(s). Adler (1965, 182) explains, “[psychologically], an accompanist and coach must try to search for and understand where the roots of his soloist’s artistry lie. These roots are as varied as the individual artists”. Switching between these roles seamlessly is a hallmark of collaboration. In the context of duos, Adler notes that “... the art of accompanying and coaching is a continuous give and take, a moulding of two personalities into one” (1965, 182). There may also be moments during the rehearsal process when the collaborative pianist is forced to divorce his/her ears from listening to the performers and strictly follow a click-track.⁹ In any event, the collaborative pianist will most likely move between these roles within a single scene, and will have to adapt to each scenario as it presents itself during a performance (Lombard 2018). The onus rests with the collaborative pianist; “[complacency] is not a good stimulus for artistry” (Adler 1965, 182). Church confirms this notion by adding that “... the quality of rehearsal can very much affect the quality of performance... the two parts are inextricable” (2015, 182).

The importance of being a good accompanist cannot be emphasized enough. As Church points out, “... rehearsing, to those who truly appreciate the work, may be more fun even than performing” (2015, 181). Adler (1965, 182) adds, “[the] specific art of accompanying and coaching lies in the ability to deeply feel the soloists’ intentions and his (sic) artistry; to attune oneself to his (sic) artistic style; to recognize his (sic) artistic shortcomings and to make up for them by extending a helping hand to lead him (sic), giving him (sic) a sense of artistic mastery and matching it by following him (sic)”. In addition, the collaborative pianist is expected to be consistent in their playing of the score from one rehearsal to the next (Fisher 2014; Lombard 2018). As Church (2015, 96) further adds,

Rehearsal musicians, especially pianists, are crucial members of the music team. Reproducing orchestral music and popular styles accurately and consistently at the piano is quite difficult, yet essential for stage rehearsals. Moreover, especially with a new score, the way an accompanist plays the music in rehearsal becomes the “definitive” rehearsal version to everyone in the rehearsal room (directors, choreographers, performers, stage managers). It is also what orchestrators may hear as their source material during production. Rehearsal

⁹ A “click-track” is defined as “[a] series of audio cues used to synchronize sound recordings, sometimes to a moving image”. See <http://www.yourdictionary.com/click-track> [accessed 1 September 2018]

accompanists are usually pianists of the highest order. Drummers and percussionists make frequent appearances in rehearsals, too, and, less commonly, guitarists, bassists, and sometimes players of instruments specific to the material. Any of these participants might also make significant creative contributions to a production.

The start of the technical rehearsal process will see the rehearsal pianist replaced by a band or orchestra.¹⁰ The collaborative pianist can no longer serve as the accompanist but must learn to perform as an ensemble member (and might need to negotiate these roles as and when understudy rehearsals are required). The change-over to rehearsing or performing with the band or orchestra will result in a changed interpretation of the score (see the section entitled *Into the pit*).

Although not as critical as the skills touched on above, is a collaborative pianists' ability to conduct a choir or small ensemble in the absence of the musical director. The importance of conducting skills, no matter how basic, is not to be dismissed. Adler confirms this point: "... there are some top accompanists, vocal as well as instrumental, not so proficient in coaching as some others who, on the other hand, just have not got the pianist armament to make the playing of concert accompanists their life's vocation. Coach and conductor—that is a very good combination. Accompanist and conductor is rare..." (1965, 183). Often, a collaborative pianist will be required to rehearse ensemble members whilst the musical director rehearses the principle singers/actors in a separate venue. Jeremy Fisher confirms: "...you may or may not have a conductor there, and occasionally you are given the task of training the singers..." (2014). Depending on the composer and style of the music, these ensembles can be quite challenging to teach (i.e. the chorus sections in Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera*). Not only must the collaborative pianist know how to teach the different voice parts, he/she must be able to conduct from the piano, be able to sight-read all the voice parts across the staves, play the accompaniment, and listen critically to give feedback about pronunciation, pitching, rhythms, and phrasing. These responsibilities are what Adler describes as the difference between accompanist and coach:

¹⁰ Technical rehearsals refer to the period during which a production makes its transition from the rehearsal room to the stage. The technical rehearsal is an opportunity for the lighting and sound departments to learn and refine the visual cues of the show, and for the crew to know which scenery and props need to change/ move on command of the stage manager.

[The] main ingredients that go into the making of a good coach are: the ability to teach, an inner conviction that will establish authority and is based on knowledge, the assertion of leadership, and the love of imparting artistic guidance. (1965, 183)

One of the interviewees, Guy Simpson, expressed the importance of collaborative pianists being able to sight-read and perform a variety of scores with a sense of musicality (2018). The collaborative pianists' musicality will determine the manner in which the score is interpreted and performed. Knowledge of the repertoire and styles that exist within the musical theatre genre are thus highly advantageous (Vendafreddo 2013a). It is imperative for collaborative pianists to learn the score through an educated and informed lens. For example, one cannot approach a Rodgers and Hammerstein score the same way you would an Andrew Lloyd Webber score. Factors like the style, the period in which the musical was written, and the compositional fabric of the work should all be considered when collaborative pianists set out to study, prepare, and interpret any score. These technical and stylistic factors are what determine the integrity of the performance.

2.2 Preparation, consistency, and interpretation

One should approach any score from your experience as a musician, not from the point of view of your instrument. This would limit one's view of the field of play as it were ... My training taught me to look at the whole picture, then the details, and then the whole picture again. Also, it must be held in mind that there is far more at work in a single musical theatre show than just the score. Each element needs to serve the other. Yes, the music is one of THE core elements, but it is at the service of the other elements too. (Kraak 2018)

A collaborative pianist must comprehend the musical score in the utmost detail, not only having studied his/her own part, but also the parts of other musicians and singers performing alongside them. Lombard (2018) echoes Kraak's sentiments, adding: "I think the responsibility is to have a good command and knowledge of the particular production, before the pianist can assume his or her duties at the start of rehearsals". A collaborative pianist performing arias with a soprano, should as far as possible attempt to recreate the magnitude of the orchestration on the piano, with suitable orchestral effects and nuances (Lombard 2018). A collaborative pianist performing Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* in a ballet

class should keep in mind that there are certain markers within the orchestration that the dancers may find particularly useful to hear (those signalling stage entry/exit, the start of choreography sequences, etc.), whilst maintaining a clearly executed and steady pulse for them to follow (Kraak 2018, Lombard 2018). Prior to the rehearsal process, collaborative pianists should spend time listening to the score, determining the various stylistic qualities of the music, and understanding both the plot and how the music informs the story. Lombard (2018) explains just how well rehearsal pianists are expected to be prepared:

Once you get appointed for a production, you should have the score under your fingers on day one. But you should also have the score under your fingers in such a way that you are flexible enough to follow tempo shifts, tempo changes, subtleties, rubatos—all the kind of standard principles within a score. And also be able to incorporate certain highlights that might be suggested to play either from the musical director’s side or from the music supervisor in order to, again, help the rehearsal process along... The main role of a rehearsal pianist, again, is replacing the orchestra in the rehearsal room.

All piano reductions are not created equally—some are poorly written, older scores have not yet been digitized, and some scores remain awkward to play no matter how much time is spent practising them. Some scores include an excess of detail (i.e. Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story*). Vendafreddo (2013b) explains, “[though] it is not common, such arrangements do exist, and pianists must be ready to work with them. In order to effectively support the singer in this case, a pianist must focus on the bass line and the basic inner voices; they should not attempt to play much of the “auxiliary” instrumentation on the page”. Conversely, other scores are written sparsely with nothing but chord changes and rhythm slashes (i.e. Tim Minchin’s *Matilda*). Vendafreddo (2013c) comments on this aspect by adding: “[rarely] will a performer enter the room with only a lead sheet (a simple “fake book” version of the song with only the melody and chord changes notated); however, if he should, the pianist is then responsible for creating an accompaniment for the song ... Hopefully, the lead sheet is marked with some indication of style to inform the pianist whether it is swung or straight, fast or slow”. Whichever version of the score a collaborative pianist is confronted with, sufficient preparation and self-study remains his/her own responsibility. Common practice among veteran musical theatre collaborative pianists is to listen to recordings of the score dozens of times (Rienstra-Bakker 2018). This step of the preparation process allows the collaborative pianist to develop a sense of the overarching form and structure of the work, whilst also

becoming better acquainted with the stylistic trademarks of the music.¹¹ This act of critical listening to the score will ensure that practice time, which is usually quite limited, is utilized in a most productive manner (i.e. navigating passages that are technically demanding and anticipating tempo changes).

Watching film or digital video recordings of a musical will inform the manner in which the performers and collaborative pianists interpret and present the material in the rehearsal room. Studying video recordings of scenes will better a collaborative pianist's understanding of the use of underscoring, or the use of rubato as a means of accompanying certain onstage choreography.¹² Wherever the musical score falls short in its description of the onstage action (i.e. vocal cues omitted on the score, or physical cues needing to coincide with musical ones), a video recording will go a long way toward informing the performance. Once the recordings have been studied, the collaborative pianist will be able to rehearse the score with far more accuracy, i.e. anticipating and executing tempo changes with ease. The importance of repeating musical numbers consistently is especially evident in dance calls, where elements like rhythm and tempo are overtly mirrored in the choreography. It is never a bad idea for the collaborative pianist to memorize sections of the score—the more time spent watching and following the conductor (and choreography), the better. The collaborative pianist cannot afford to be complacent and should anticipate unique differences in each rehearsal/performance. The greatest danger a collaborative pianist faces is to stop watching the conductor or to stop listening to the onstage performers. No two performances are the same, collaborative pianists cannot take this for granted no matter how well-rehearsed the cast or band may be (Lombard 2018; Kraak 2018; Zurnamer 2018). As Adler so aptly puts it, “[complacency] is not a good stimulus to artistry” (1965, 182).

To a lesser degree, it is important for the collaborative pianist to study the voice parts in ensemble sections. From time to time, collaborative pianists might be required to make recordings of voice parts for performers who are not musically literate. It is important for

¹¹ Due to the length of musical theatre works (averaging about two hours, excluding interval), it is important that the collaborative pianist understands the tension build-up in each scene but also in relation to the Act as a whole.

¹² No scene-change music or underscoring is ever released on album recordings of shows, therefore the only way a collaborative pianist could hope to listen to the music and discover its purpose in the show would be to consult bootlegger video recordings.

collaborative pianists to note in their score which performer is singing which voice part, as the performers might be reassigned to another part at a later stage of the rehearsal process, or simply might forget which part they were assigned initially. In either scenario, the collaborative pianist is expected to have this detail notated. It is also up to the collaborative pianist and conductor to listen and evaluate the validity and integrity of the performance of the score on a continuous basis. If, in an ensemble setting, an alto strays onto a soprano line, for example, the collaborative pianist is expected to speak up, point out the mistake, fix it, and continually listen that the correction has been made.

2.3 Stylistic vocabulary

Stylistic vocabulary is the accumulated knowledge of a style or genre that informs the way in which the music is performed. Stylistic vocabulary, for example, is knowing the various musical contexts in which different ornamentations exist. In terms of popular music, stylistic vocabulary would be the knowledge of different rhythmic patterns and the unique ways in which they are accented (i.e. Brazilian *choro* vs. Cuban *montunos*). Ideally, even the classically-trained collaborative pianist should be well versed in “vamping”, basic jazz improvisation, and the reading of chord charts to substitute any part of the reduced score which may fall short of representing the desired musical effect or style (Vendafreddo 2013a; Vendafreddo 2013c). These skills will be invaluable when performing the piano reduction of Tim Minchin’s *Matilda* score, for example: scenes like “Loud” make use of interchangeable notation styles (i.e. chord charts and slashed bars versus traditionally notated bars of music). The expectation is that the collaborative rehearsal pianist is well-versed in reading *both* notation styles, and comfortable enough to realize the score without any hinderance (Lombard 2018).

The influence of popular music on musical theatre is clear. Musicals written in particular eras reflect the popular music, orchestration, and instrumentation conventions of the day (compare, for example, Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Sound of Music* of the 1950s with Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *Evita* of the 1980s). It is therefore important for the rehearsal pianist to have a good general knowledge of the popular music styles representative of the 20th and 21st centuries (Vendafreddo 2013a). This includes everything from jazz to rap, cabaret, and rock ‘n roll. It is important for the rehearsal pianist to listen to many different styles of

popular music to gain a better understanding of each, thereby informing the manner in which they perform orchestral reductions in the rehearsal room. The extent of their stylistic vocabulary will determine how successfully they simulate a swung 12-bar blues or an Argentine tango. Versatility is the ultimate prize here.

2.4 Understanding the work environment

You have to be able to be a jack of all trades – you have to be able to run vocal warm-ups; you’ve got to be able to teach vocal harmonies; you’ve got to be able to not just sit in the rehearsal room and play the piano. It becomes a kind of a job that evolves

(Lombard 2018)

Collaborative pianists aren’t hired off the street, so to speak. Several aspects of a collaborative pianist’s experience and skills are weighed before hiring one to play for the rehearsal process. These include, but are not confined to, the following: competency and efficacy on the instrument; experience; knowledge of the musical theatre genre as a whole; employment history (musical directors often consult with each other on which musicians to hire); and the ability to work harmoniously with others (Kraak 2018). The importance of diplomacy is echoed by Church: “One must put the right musician for the team in each chair, rather than necessarily the best musician in each chair... For all the creative thought put into perfecting an ensemble, if its members do not get along, the effort is for naught” (2015, 108).

At the outset, employment in the musical theatre industry is largely dependent on who you know, and who could potentially refer you to a musical director for the position of rehearsal pianists or pit musician (Lombard 2018; Simpson 2018; Zurnamer 2018; Kraak 2018). In the context of the West End, Fisher (2014) writes:

The other possibility, and one that is often overlooked, is to contact the West End orchestral fixers.¹³ An orchestral fixer will liaise with the producers of a musical to book the musicians for the run of the show. They will sometimes employ or recommend pianists for the rehearsal period, even if they are not booked for the performances.

¹³ Fixers are third-party individuals who act as casting agents for musicians. They recruit musicians for projects when the musical director has trouble finding players for specific parts. The fixers in turn negotiate a fee for the sourcing of these musicians. Usually, fixers will look for band/orchestral musicians, but can be consulted for sourcing rehearsal pianists or band keyboardists too (Church 2015, 96; Fisher 2014).

The small-world mindset of the theatre world is described by one commentator as being a double-edged sword: “[Repeated] interactions tend to create expectations of trust and reciprocity that ‘roll over’ to common third-party ties, increasing the likelihood that risks of collaboration or creativity are spread among friends of friends” (Uzzi and Spiro 2005, 463). Whilst good relationships are fostered in these smaller communities, the hidden danger is that those community members become complacent and become “a liability for creativity” (Uzzi and Spiro 2005, 463). Church testifies to this practice by adding that “[some] music directors and contractors simply hire the same orchestras again and again. Whereas loyalty to musicians is valuable... it is hard to imagine that precisely the same combination of people will serve equally well in a wide variety of musical contexts” (2015, 109).

The collaborative pianist might be required to give musical direction to the singers in the absence of the conductor/musical director (Fisher 2014); be required to facilitate a vocal warm-up for the cast (Church 2015, 217); or be consulted by the choreographer for certain musical references (Church 2015, 227). Whilst the collaborative pianist has licence to inform all other performers of musical details in the rehearsal room, he/she most often isn’t recognized as an authoritative figure in the presence of the conductor, musical director, or musical supervisor. The collaborative pianist provides no input into the manner in which certain scenes are rehearsed, for instance. This responsibility lies with the musical director (Church 2015, 223). The collaborative pianist is dictated to by the creative team (director, conductor, supervisors, choreographers), as they see various needs arising from the rehearsal process. All matters of contention with regards to the interpretation of the score are deferred to the musical director or musical supervisor present in the room.

What may prove difficult for a collaborative pianist transitioning into the pit, is the realization that he/she has no authority in the pit, nor any say in the way the score is interpreted by the new constituency of musicians. That sovereignty is reserved only for the conductor and to a lesser extent the Assistant Musical Director (AMD). This can be a point of contention for conductors to manage with the utmost diplomacy. As Church (2015, 96) notes: “Keyboard players from the pit are quite often next in line to the podium. If they were involved in rehearsals as accompanists, the music director may have designated them as associates or assistants from the outset.”

2.5 Into the pit

The way in which the score is performed in the rehearsal room is accepted by singers and dancers as a truthful representation of the full score and its arrangement—all the more reason for the collaborative pianist to execute it with accuracy. Another reason a collaborative pianist needs to be exceptional in his/her representation of the score, is that it makes for an easier transition to the onstage technical rehearsals in which the singers, dancers and actors are introduced to the band/orchestra for the first time (Kraak 2018). At this juncture, the musical director/supervisor would want as little disparity between what was heard in the rehearsal room and that which is being sounded from the pit (Lombard 2018).

During the rehearsal process, the collaborative pianist will most often be playing on an acoustic piano or alternatively an electronic piano/keyboard (not necessarily with weighted keys) and a detachable pedal. Upon entering the pit, the acoustic instrument is nowhere to be seen. Instead, the collaborative pianist is now confronted with a keyboard, three pedals, a small personal mixing desk with headphones, a laptop computer, and two standing speakers that flank either side of the performer. All of these ingredients constitute one keyboard in the pit. In most big productions there will be two or three keyboard players in the pit (depending on the arrangement of parts). On occasion, the conductor himself might be playing one of the keyboards whilst simultaneously conducting the show. The performers are therefore no longer in complete control of the sounds they produce. Church (2015, 30) explains: “[it] has become virtually impossible to eliminate amplification; it is too central to modern music and stage performance, and audience members’ ears have been trained to expect it”.

The keyboard itself has weighted keys that simulate the touch of an acoustic piano. These keyboards, usually of the Kurzweil or Yamaha variety, are highly sensitive to touch and are therefore very responsive to the performer’s articulation. This means that the classically trained pianists’ technique will translate beautifully onto the instrument, with the execution of ornamentation, articulation, and phrasing being exceptionally clear. However, the collaborative pianist will not exclusively perform a piano patch for the entire duration of the

show.¹⁴ The keyboardist will perform a variety of string, brass, or woodwind patches. Due to the limited availability of some instruments, notably the harp, these parts of the orchestration are reassigned to the keyboards. A collaborative pianist will be required to switch between patches numerous times within a single scene. The use of patches demonstrates the use and increasing inclusion of technology as part of performance practice.

Not only does the keyboard simulate the sound of a solo trumpet or an entire string section, but it responds to the keyboardist's articulation in a very real way. For example, if the collaborative pianist is performing a section designated for French Horn, striking the keys with more velocity would result in the notes sounding like they are being tongued. In the same patch, the pianist would have to rely on finger legato to maintain a legato phrase, because the sustain pedal would make the overtones of the French Horn overlap and result in a muddled sound. The collaborative pianist has no way of making the French Horn sound muted, though, as this has to be programmed in a separate patch. There are numerous idiosyncrasies for every patch, and the only way a collaborative pianist will come to know and understand these quirky details is through experience of playing the instrument.

This element of the performance is where most classically trained pianists feel wholly out of their depth. They are still playing a keyboard, but they are essentially posing as a clarinetist for two phrases, and then as a harpist for the next four phrases. Approaching patches with the understanding that the collaborative pianist is simulating sounds of *other* instruments whilst playing their own, goes a long way toward making an easier transition into the pit and onto the keyboard in particular (Lombard 2018; Zurnamer 2018). The success of the collaborative pianist transitioning onto a keyboard rests on their ability to remain aurally aware and critical of their performance of instrument patches—the ear has to determine whether or not the performer is presenting a convincing performance of the pseudo-piccolo and adjust the approach or articulation to better suit the instrument being simulated.

Apart from the keyboard itself, three pedals are used. The sustain pedal functions as it would on a standard acoustic instrument, except it reacts differently in other instrument patches like strings or brass. The second pedal, the patch-change pedal, does exactly what its name

¹⁴ A patch is best described as a means of having one instrument pose as another, i.e. one plays a violin patch on a keyboard. What is heard is a solo violin line, but it is being performed by a pianist on an electronic keyboard/ piano.

suggests. The reason keyboardists have this pedal at their disposal is because scenarios arise when the collaborative pianist has certain physical constraints and is unable to manually change the patch on the interface of the keyboard itself. The third pedal is the volume pedal. It is connected to a device that displays the volume level on a scale of 1-20. This pedal requires fine footwork, as the collaborative pianists' foot rests on it at all times and is responsible for maintaining the volumes of sections but also any articulation related to volume changes (i.e. crescendo, decrescendo, sforzando, fortepiano). These pedals are arranged according to the collaborative pianist's preference, though the standard setup seems to be volume pedal on the left, sustain pedal in the middle, and patch-change pedal on the right.

A small personal mixing desk allows for the collaborative pianist to adjust the volumes, balance, and stereo of all the other performers in the pit in his/her own headphones. It is virtually impossible for a collaborative pianist to hear the true balance of the band in the pit. This is due to the fact that certain instruments are naturally louder than others; the physical space between musicians makes it difficult to hear each other (the layout of each pit is unique to each venue); and some instruments are amplified only in the larger space of the hall, not in the pit at all. The personal mixing desk is a way of measuring one's own presence in the performance, and can be the most helpful tool for any collaborative pianist who is accustomed to relying on their ears to determine volume balances in an ensemble setting.

The laptop computer, usually of the Apple Macintosh variety, is responsible for relaying the order of patch-changes to the keyboard itself. The laptop can be used to update edited patch-changes or change the order of patches. The laptop therefore acts as the keyboard's brain for the duration of the show. Unfortunately, technology isn't perfect, and instances have occurred where there has been a delayed relay of information and instruction between the laptop and the keyboard. In these cases, the collaborative pianist will be required to reboot and recalibrate both the laptop and the keyboard. This can be quite nerve-racking for the collaborative pianist who generally doesn't have much time at their disposal between scenes. The two standing speakers that flank the collaborative pianist feeds the keyboard's sound into the pit. The purpose of these speakers is for the other "natural" instruments to have a pitch reference if they have chosen to play without their headphones and personal mixer. It is

assumed that the keyboardist will use his/her headphones and not the standing speakers to monitor the sound of their instrument.

2.6 Out of the pit

A very important person in the audition room is the audition pianist. Audition piano is like music direction in miniature. (Church 2015, 130)

The rehearsal/collaborative pianist in musical theatre will be required to play for casting auditions, most often without much prior notice of repertoire. These auditions are usually conducted over a period of three to ten working days, depending on the magnitude of the cast and the number of roles to be filled. The rehearsal pianist will most likely only have a few days to prepare the audition material (made up of excerpts from various sections of the musical being auditioned for). These excerpts will encompass the most challenging parts of the score for both dancers and singers. Auditions for singers and dancers are carried out simultaneously at the start of the audition process, but later the creative team (comprising of the producer(s), supervising director, choreographer, and musical director) will sit on the same panel and audition prospective candidates individually. Playing for both the vocal and dance calls provide a unique set of challenges for the rehearsal/collaborative pianist, each furnishing their own element of unpredictability. Church (2015, 130) cautions that “[a] bad audition pianist can demolish a casting session... Casting directors will usually consult the music director before hiring audition pianists”.

Dance auditions are most often conducted in large groups. Depending on the roles being auditioned for, dancers may be grouped according to gender, height, or even training background. A dance audition can last anywhere between one to three hours, depending on the number of people auditioning. Apart from the audition material provided to the pianist prior to the day of the audition, the choreographer might require the audition pianist to

improvise at length for what is known as a ballet barre class.¹⁵ This allows choreographers to facilitate a comprehensive warm-up for the dancers, but also doubles as a means of seeing which of the candidates demonstrate good ballet technique. Once the business of the warm-up is complete, the choreographer proceeds to teach the “audition step” for the relevant role being auditioned. Here, the rehearsal pianist is required to play the audition material at an initially slower tempo, eventually reaching the intended tempo of the section once the dancers have mastered the “audition step”. Throughout the audition process, it is imperative for rehearsal pianists to play with an exaggerated sense of pulse, whilst maintaining an immovably steady tempo. This style of playing will lead to a metronomic sound; however, it creates stability for the dancers, many of whom often struggle to hear the pulse when the music is performed by a piano instead of an ensemble or band.

Voice auditions are typically carried out individually. On occasion, dancers who are auditioning for a small singing role will be auditioned in groups, though this is not standard practice. The great difficulty with “vocal calls” is that singers will always audition with *their* choice of material first—meaning the audition pianist has no warning or time to rehearse the song being auditioned. Sight-reading is the order of the day in this instance, and so—unless perchance the singer arrives with a song already familiar to the pianist—the audition pianist is at the mercy of the singer (Vendafreddo 2013a). Sometimes the singers choose to “cut” certain verses or sections of the song, so as not to bore the audition panel (Vendafreddo 2013b). If at any time the panel feel they have heard enough, they will stop the singer and either move on to the audition excerpts, or simply thank the singer for their efforts and show them the door. For the audition pianist playing for “vocal calls”, chances are they will spend most of their day sight-reading a host of varying music examples. A singer’s choice of audition repertoire will be determined not only by the voice type and its training, but by the general style of the musical in question. For example, a singer auditioning for a role in *Phantom of the Opera* will most likely choose to audition with an aria or a lied. This sort of

¹⁵ I, for one, am not entirely comfortable improvising in a room full of people, so I have searched far and wide to find material specifically written for ballet barre classes. Though these might be a little old, they remain relevant. Ballet barre classes are not standard warm-ups for dancers in musical theatre, as not all productions demand ballet technique or movements from the dancers. In a production such as *Phantom of the Opera*, there will always be ballet barre class, as there are whole scenes choreographed with ballet in them. In other productions such as *Matilda* or *Sound of Music*, the singers and dancers do a basic warm-up that may comprise of yoga, Pilates, or basic Latin dance movements. In these instances, warm-up exercises are dictated by the dance captain or choreographer.

repertoire will best demonstrate the singer's ability in a more classical style, as demanded by the show. Conversely, a singer auditioning for *Chicago* will more likely present the audition pianist with material from a cabaret or a jazz standard. In either scenario, the audition pianist will not survive without keen sight-reading skills and a vast knowledge of various types of repertoire. It is also worth mentioning that some singers do not themselves possess good note-reading skills and are prone to learning the music by rote. As a result, these singers don't necessarily understand how a piano score works, or what it *should* look like.¹⁶ In these scenarios the audition pianist often resorts to improvisation (Vendafreddo 2013c).

¹⁶ I have on occasion been presented with nothing but lyrics on a page with chords written on top of them – no indication of tempo or time signature. A colleague once regaled me with a story of how a singer entered the audition room and presented her with a drum kit part to play from. What else to do but improvise? This is where experience and general knowledge of musical theatre repertoire will be very useful for the audition pianist.

3. Are We There Yet? The Collaborative Pianist's Plea for Artistic Knowledge of the Musical Theatre Industry

It is difficult to ascertain the industry requirements for entry-level collaborative pianists in musical theatre, largely due to a lack of formal agreement on and communication of what the necessary skillset is. The trend that has been observed in this study is that the generally accepted level of qualification for anyone wanting to work in musical theatre (both locally and abroad) is that of a BMus degree with a performance specialization (whether focused on solo, accompaniment, or ensemble playing), although the small sample of interviewees means that no conclusive answer can be reached in this study. All but one of the interviewees hold a formal undergraduate degree in music in the Western Art Music tradition. The exception is Mr Rienstra-Bakker, who is largely self-taught and received minimal formal training at secondary school level (2018). Collaborative pianists who hold postgraduate performance degrees may enjoy preference because they are more experienced musicians, but even they encounter shortfalls in their training as it pertains to musical theatre (Lombard 2018). This section of the study seeks to determine the disparities between this training and the professional demands on collaborative pianists in musical theatre.

3.1 Education and training: what's good, what's bad, what's missing?

The integrity of a BMus degree relies on measures that ensure students are of a certain calibre upon entering and graduating from the institution. Continual benchmarking for the duration of the degree ensures that the merit which the degree holds communicates the quality of musicianship (of the degree holder) to a potential employer. Various facets of a typical BMus curriculum provide the core skillset required of collaborative pianists in musical theatre, but do not seem to fully equip or prepare collaborative pianists with industry-specific skills. Whilst several institutions in North America have made provision for collaborative pianism in the form of full-time courses and summer school programmes dedicated to teaching the additional required skills needed to be a successful collaborator, they too do not offer specific

training for collaborative pianists in musical theatre.¹⁷ In the South African context, specialization in accompaniment or chamber music comes closest to the collaborative piano training on offer internationally. But even then it is not guaranteed that graduates would have acquired the necessary skillset to succeed as a collaborative pianist, since conducting, to name one example, is rarely part of these specializations. For singers, actors, and dancers, there are specific courses designed to prepare them for the musical and live theatre industries (Lombard 2018). The same is not true for musicians, and from this stems various problems encountered by first-time collaborative pianists in musical theatre (and in turn, by those who hire these pianists).

Through the process of internal benchmarking, the practical musicianship of the pianist is improved in terms of technique through the mediums of repertoire and technical exercises. This enhanced agility and comfort, partnered with increased performance experience on the instrument, is a necessity for aspiring collaborative pianists (Simpson 2018; Vendafreddo 2013a). Technical ability is indispensable for any collaborative pianist seriously wanting to pursue a career in musical theatre. Often, collaborative pianists will be confronted with difficult passages that were not originally written for the piano and are as a result uncomfortable to play. Technical efficiency will go a long way to mitigate these problems. Paired with technical prowess, collaborative pianists should be equally proficient in their aural and sight-reading skill. Aural training remains an indispensable part of any BMus curriculum, and concentrates on the development of listening skills in order to identify patterns of pitch and rhythm, and notating these from aural memory. A bi-product of an aural training course is the improvement of sight-singing and sight-reading skills (Jacobs 2016; Bozone in Herbst 1993, 27).

A consensus amongst the interviewees is that there is a great need for the improvement of sight-reading skills amongst graduates as this is a skill that all collaborative pianists will heavily rely on throughout their careers (Lombard 2018; Kraak 2018; Simpson 2018). Zurnamer (2018) adds his voice to this: “good sight-reading is underrated generally in our country ... even in the classical world. I think if you are a good sight-reader it ... can change

¹⁷ One such summer school programme is headed by Professor Martin Katz at the Shattuck St. Mary’s school in Minnesota, USA. See <http://www.collaborativepianoinstitute.org> [Accessed 1 September 2018]

your life. Honestly, I think good sight-reading is a must, and obviously a good technique as well". Perhaps it might be time to consider sight-reading courses dedicated to the optimal development of reading skills. Highly developed sight-reading skills are invaluable when having to learn large repertoires and especially when navigating orchestral reductions as most collaborative pianists invariably do (Vendafreddo 2013b). In addition, a dedicated sight-reading class would facilitate a space for pianists to learn to read various forms of notation, including standard notation, chord charts, piano reductions, and conductor's scores. Whilst collaborative pianists might not be confronted with chord chart notation on a daily basis, it is a useful tool to possess, especially since this kind of notation crops up in musical theatre rehearsal scores and audition materials (Vendafreddo 2013c). A sight-reading class of this nature could also function as a space in which to develop the stylistic vocabulary required for the performance of popular music styles.

Zurnamer (2018) testifies to the benefits and necessity of being a good sight-reader, but adds that an equally large oversight in the training of collaborative pianists is a broad knowledge of musical theatre repertoire:

Shortcomings definitely exist in, not only sight-reading ability, [... but also] exposure to the repertoire of musical theatre. Unfortunately, [...]especially [with] contemporary American musical theatre, [...] people walk in with weird stuff like Sondheim's or Jason Robert Brown's or William Finn's [at an audition, and pianists] just freak out in front of the piano ... and I do understand that it's tough, that it's just so difficult, and so unknown to us here, as opposed to [...] pianists who work permanently playing for auditions in places like Broadway who would just have an exposure to that sort of repertoire.

There are two ways of remedying this problem; first, by including the musical theatre genre as a legitimate subject that deserves critical study and research, and, second, by broadening students' horizons through the study of standard musical theatre repertoire. BMus programs offered by conservatories and music departments furnish students with a broad-based general knowledge of the history and theory of Western Art music. Confining students to a general knowledge only relating to Western Art music means that more is excluded than included, musical theatre being just one of the casualties. The inclusion of ethnomusicology and world music has opened other avenues of research and study, but modules dedicated to musical theatre as a genre is often neglected as it conflicts with a conservatoire's mandate to school its students in the Western Art music tradition. Throughout the duration of the author's BMus

program (2006-2009) at the University of Stellenbosch, there was not a single discussion about musical theatre—not the genre, not the music, not the career opportunities that exist in the field. Because of this lack of insight and education, it appears there are no employment opportunities in this sector, and, as a result, this occupation is rarely sought out as an alternative career path.

Modules concerned with repertoire studies seek to improve the general knowledge of art music repertoire amongst undergraduates. Typically, the course content focuses largely on canonical repertoire by composers like Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart, Schumann, Schubert, Rachmaninov, and a handful of twentieth-century composers. With the rise of the internet and a host of websites and databases of online music resources, one must ponder the validity of such a module and the content of its coursework. The ubiquity of the internet has meant that certain “facts” are always at hand. If one could look up on the internet in a split second the total number of string quartets that Beethoven wrote, why expect of students to memorize and recite this fact? By using the “banking” method of study, where facts must be memorised and reproduced, often uncritically, what has the student really learned, and what is really being tested: engagement with course material or merely the ability to memorise so-called facts and dates? Additionally, is there any value in continuing exclusively to teach Western art music (1600-1940), or should more time be devoted to “new” music (1940 to present), alongside a selection of popular musics?¹⁸ The possibilities for expanding a student’s general knowledge with more relevant, modern, relatable examples are limitless. Repertoire studies could become a platform both to introduce musical theatre scores and a means of educating students in the various stylistic vocabularies inherent in these scores. With repertoire in hand, the collaborative pianist seeking promotion to the conductor’s podium might initially underestimate the necessity of good conducting skills. If one is to succeed in this endeavour, or at least attempt to work as an assistant conductor, a most basic conducting skill will not suffice. A mandatory conducting class would not only teach students the rudiments of conducting, but will in turn provide young collaborative pianists with the opportunity to practice *following* a conductor (a skill usually only developed in orchestral

¹⁸ I acknowledge that tertiary institutions are trying to include increasingly varied examples of music into their courses, though it is difficult to determine to what extent—if at all—these changes filter through to repertoire study modules. By and large, it seems reasonable to assume that most of the works being studied belong to the Western Art music canon.

players). To conduct and be conducted are two very different experiences, but each of them will enrich students and ensure their preparedness for the musical theatre workplace.

Additionally, good knowledge of the voice, vocal techniques, warm-up exercises, and didactic principles will serve the collaborative pianist well. Whether it be in the realm of musical theatre or when accompanying a school choir, this kind of foundational knowledge will make the collaborative pianist indispensable to any rehearsal and performance process. This background knowledge will also indicate to employers a collaborative pianist's potential to lead and serve as a future assistant/fully-fledged musical director. The importance of basic voice training, no matter the quality of the collaborative pianist's voice, is not to be overlooked. A collaborative pianist working in musical theatre cannot avoid using his/ her voice as a method of instruction and demonstration during a rehearsal process. Church elaborates on this point:

... as a rule in rehearsal, the voice is a better demonstrator of a vocal line than a piano... A piano can be useful in the learning process ... but your voice is a powerful rehearsal implement. Use it whenever you can, and always sing when it's the best way to communicate a musical idea, such as a vocal technique or an exact interpretive phrasing ... Don't be vocally shy; even an unattractive voice ... is very useful for demonstration and education. (2015, 209)

If a collaborative pianist is tasked with the responsibility of teaching and maintaining children's voices, he/she will need to know how to navigate these typically untrained voices as opposed to those of the adult cast members. In addition, where children are involved in a production, the collaborative pianist must be sensitive to the specific difficulties experienced by young boys who enter puberty and subsequently feel their voices "breaking". Of course, there is a limitation to the longevity of a young boy's role in a production, but it will be up to the collaborative pianist and musical director to help the voice transition and keep it optimally maintained until the boy can be replaced by an understudy. The cumulative knowledge of both singing and conducting techniques will better guarantee the success of rehearsal procedures when placed in the hands of the collaborative pianist. This artistic knowledge will inform the way in which collaborative pianists choose to utilize their (usually limited) rehearsal time and will allow for the maximum strategizing of coaching sessions as mentioned by Adler (1965). The rehearsal plan devised by collaborative pianists and musical

directors must always serve to facilitate the rehearsal processes of other departments involved, i.e. the choreographer or director cannot disseminate their insights into specific scenes if the music for those scenes is not securely in place as a basic framework on which to build. The music must always come first, and so the rehearsal process is dependent on the music department's ability to "stay ahead of the curve". The musical director and collaborative pianist(s) ensure that the performers have their respective parts committed to memory by the time they are confronted with acting or dancing rehearsals. Depending on the style and complexity of the production, these rehearsals might take place in isolation. Heavily choreographed productions demand more dance rehearsal time, i.e. Nacio Herb Brown's *Singing in the Rain* (1952) which includes a lot of tap dance. Productions containing fewer choreographed scenes, such as Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Evita* (1978), may rehearse all the constituent parts simultaneously in one rehearsal room

Church urges that there is a distinction to be made between coaching and teaching music:

Teaching is a technical process... Coaching may entail teaching, but goes deeper, dealing with meaning, emotion, history, style, and other aspects of music and text ... coaching a singer is to encourage those values that make the singer most convincing in performance, most effective in the production, and most musical. (2015, 187)

In the absence of the musical director in the rehearsal room, the collaborative pianist might be required to fulfil both a teaching and coaching function as and when questions about the score are raised by cast members. The collaborative pianist's ability to facilitate the learning and understanding of the score will also strengthen the case for promotion to assistant musical director and eventually musical director.

A challenge that all collaborative pianists in musical theatre will have to face, is performing on electronic keyboards and using other technical equipment such as personal mixing desks. A lack of exposure to and confidence in using these sorts of technology makes it that much harder for a classically-trained pianist to make the adjustment to being a pit musician, even though BMus students are generally introduced to technology (hardware, software, and recording techniques). Students pursuing a performance specialization are less likely to encounter keyboard-specific technology, resulting in a technical lack that will thwart the ability to perform on these instruments optimally. Church aptly describes electronic keyboards as "... cold and impersonal, programmed by an individual in a studio in front of a

keyboard, some sound modules, and a computer” (2015, 104). Whilst these instruments may initially feel cold and impersonal to performers accustomed to playing acoustic instruments, the electronic keyboard and its programmed patches *do* offer composers a greater variety of tonal colours, timbres, and sound effects that can be realized by the instrument. Similarly, they offer performers greater scope to experiment with finding the appropriate attack or articulation for various instrument patches. At least in my own experience, the electronic keyboard demands a greater imagination on the part of the performer in order to fully realize and bring to life the constituent parts of the score. For example, keyboard technology has evolved so much that every conceivable type of violin technique can be programmed and performed in a string patch, provided the performer knows how to elicit these different tactile responses from the instrument. Understanding the scope and possibilities of the instrument will ensure a smoother transition into the pit, whereas giving students the opportunity to gain experience on these instruments in a classroom setting will prove most invaluable, putting them at an advantage in the field of musical theatre performance.

Training in accompaniment is integral to the education of collaborative pianists. The importance of this skill has already been established by authors like Adler (1965), Fisher (2014) and Vendafreddo (2013), and is echoed by Lombard:

. . . a certain element of accompaniment comes in as well—so it’s partly *colla voce* but it’s also partly having the ability to realize when you are following a singer or when you are actually playing an ensemble number which is driven. (2018)

Church expands on this further by adding that “the singers in most stage productions follow the accompaniment as much as the accompanist follows the singers; most stage accompaniments are autonomous... There is ‘following’ that is planned for, and that which is not” (2015, 199). Accompaniment courses also serve to educate collaborative pianists in the various ways in which piano reductions can be interpreted and performed. The importance of doing this tastefully, in a manner which stylistically suits the music and orchestration best, is confirmed by Church (2015, 201), Lombard (2018), and Kraak (2018). A collaboration skill that is not always addressed is the type of collaborative pianism required in a dance/

movement rehearsal. The choreography for every production is as varied as the music itself, but the core principals and methods of rehearsal remain the same:

A good dance rehearsal pianist is sensitive to the format and pace of movement rehearsals and the rehearsal styles of each choreographer ... He or she can sense when accompaniment is needed or wanted and when it is not, when to play softly and when to play out, when to relax the tempo and when to bring it up to speed. Some musicians are more fluent in the silent language of choreography than others, sometimes through a relationship that develops with a dancer or choreographer over time or a particular shared stylistic sensibility. (Church 2015, 227)

What emerges through the processes of interviewing, researching, and observing collaborative pianists in the field, is a need to provide students with opportunities to garner experience—ideally by means of internships (see section 3.3). The traditional pedagogies and methods of some aspects of collaborative pianism are better learnt through practice than through theory. This is a sentiment echoed by Idolor who notes that “[t]heoretical knowledge of a subject matter must [...] be complemented with skills for practical work” (2005, 110).

Currently, no postgraduate course of specialization for répétiteurs exists in either the opera or musical theatre styles in South Africa. Numerous diploma courses at a variety of tertiary institutions around the country cater for the training of actors, singers, and dancers. A comprehensive musical theatre course for performers (singers, dancers, and actors) exists at Tshwane University of Technology. Here, students are exposed to the artistic as well as the technical demands of live theatre, with some modules specifically focusing on musical theatre.¹⁹ The University of the Witwatersrand include a musical theatre specialization for their BMus students pursuing a performance major in voice.²⁰ Stellenbosch University’s Drama Department currently offers a musical theatre specialization for both the artistic and technical aspects of the job.²¹ Smaller private colleges like Oakfields (with several satellite campuses dotted around the country), Cape Academy of Performing Arts (Cape Town), The

¹⁹ For a more detailed course outline, see https://www.tut.ac.za/ProspectusDocuments//2018/5.NDip_Musical_Theatre_2018.pdf [accessed 1 September 2018]

²⁰ Wits BMus undergraduate program: <https://www.wits.ac.za/media/wits-university/faculties-and-schools/humanities/wits-school-of-arts/music/documents/MUSIC%20Prospectus%202017.pdf> [accessed 1 September 2018]

²¹ A more detailed course outline is available at <https://www.sun.ac.za/english/maties/Documents/BA%20Drama%20and%20Theatre%20Studies%20NAM%20Form.pdf> [accessed 1 September 2018]

Waterfront Theatre School (Cape Town), and Luitingh Alexander Musical Theatre Academy (Cape Town, opening January 2019) offer some musical theatre training, though they generally have a stronger foundation in one of the three core disciplines (acting, singing, or dance).²²

Internationally, institutions like Boston Conservatoire at Berklee offer both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in musical theatre. The undergraduate course is designed for performers who want training in ballet, jazz, and tap dance. In addition, they receive training in movement, voice, speech, musical theatre repertoire, ear training, and piano. In the postgraduate course there is “a strong theoretical and practical focus on theatre fundamentals and standard industry practices” (Boston Conservatory at Berklee, n.d. a). The course includes script and score analysis as a means of preparing the singer-actor to interpret material across a variety of styles within the genre, performance opportunities, an overview of musical theatre genres and styles, a history of the genre, and weekly dance and vocal coaching.

Additionally, Berklee offers two veins of collaborative piano study at a postgraduate level. The Master of Music in Collaborative Piano covers ensemble and accompaniment aspects of piano performance, not unlike the chamber music and ensemble specializations on offer at several universities in South Africa. The Master of Music in Collaborative Piano (Opera Emphasis), however, is aimed at training répétiteurs for the opera genre specifically. The course facilitates rehearsal and performance opportunities with the Boston Conservatory’s singers and instrumentalists, including pit orchestras for opera productions. Students participate in opera studios, rehearsing and coaching voice and opera performance students for upcoming opera productions and performances (Boston Conservatory at Berklee, n.d. b). Collaborative pianists are trained to perform operatic score reductions; accompany a piano rehearsal for a soloist and conductor in the absence of a symphony orchestra; to demonstrate language proficiency in Italian, French, and German; to develop an understanding of Czech and Russian languages; to develop the art and skill of vocal coaching; and to partner with a dance production with or without the presence of a conductor. Throughout this course,

²² Oakfields College: <https://www.oakfieldscollege.co.za/> [accessed 1 September 2018]; Cape Academy of Performing Arts: <https://www.capa.co.za/> [accessed 1 September 2018]; The Waterfront Theatre School: <https://www.waterfronttheatreschool.co.za/> [accessed 1 September 2018]; Luitingh Alexander Musical Theatre Academy: <https://www.lamta.co.za/> [accessed 1 September 2018]

students are afforded opportunities of garnering experience through collaboration with the Conservatory's opera department (Boston Conservatory at Berklee, n.d. b).

Similarly, Guildhall School of Music and Drama offers a postgraduate degree simply entitled "Répétiteur Training". There is a limited intake of 24 singers and four student répétiteurs. The course offers its students "advanced vocal training and operates at a professional level, presenting a range of productions, from opera scenes to chamber opera to three full-scale operas over the two years of study" (Guildhall School of Music and Drama, n.d.). It is explicitly stated that this specialization is for "highly accomplished pianists and sight-readers". Modules included are accompaniment for opera production rehearsals, coaching of singers within the opera course, individual coaching, training in répétiteur techniques, harpsichord tuition and continuo playing, piano lessons, language coaching, and an introductory conducting course as an elective. The Royal Academy of Music offers a one-year postgraduate bridging course into either a Diploma or MA in Musical Direction and Coaching.²³ Similar courses exist at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts (London).²⁴ It is important to note that these courses cater for music *direction* and operate on the premise that students enter the institution with prior knowledge of collaborative pianism.

3.2 Proposed course outline for répétiteur training in musical theatre

Instead of performing a complete overhaul of an undergraduate degree, which might be time-consuming and expensive, adjustments could be made to a smaller postgraduate course like an Honours degree. This postgraduate course would comfortably span one academic year and would serve as a bridging course into the musical theatre industry. For the purposes of this study, the following course outline has been developed specifically with collaborative pianists in mind, though the author acknowledges that it could be adapted to include opera

²³ For a detailed course outline see <https://www.ram.ac.uk/departments/musical-theatre/musical-theatre-direction> [accessed 1 September 2018]

²⁴ Royal Conservatoire of Scotland: <https://www.rcs.ac.uk/postgraduate/ma-musical-theatre-performersmds/> [accessed 1 September 2018]
Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts: <https://www.mountview.org.uk/courses/course/ma-musical-direction/> [accessed 1 September 2018]

répétiteur studies. The nature of this course would have a stronger practical slant than an academic one, since the focus is vocational rather than theoretical. This proposed course outline is based loosely on the structure of the current BMus Hons course offered by Stellenbosch University's Konservatorium, whilst incorporating course content currently on offer at Berklee and Guildhall, albeit founded in the opera genre. By drawing from each of these models, academic prestige and vocational relevance are preserved. The continued inclusion of a research element in the course ensures that much needed research into the musical theatre genre will continue.

At the moment, Stellenbosch University's BMus Hons degree is made up of three parts: a Specialization Module (70 credits); Research Methodology (20 credits); and a research assignment/dissertation (30 credits).²⁵ In order to accommodate the inclusion of additional modules, credits will need to be redistributed between modules. The following table suggests a hypothetical outline of what a collaborative musical theatre course might look like:

Module description	Credit distribution
Specialization module: Collaborative Piano Studies (includes sight-reading, improvisation development and internship)	50 credits
Voice Coaching and Conducting	10 credits
History of Musical Theatre	10 credits
Basic arranging and orchestration	10 credits
Keyboard technology	10 credits
Research paper	30 credits
Total:	120 credits

Collaborative Piano Studies would build on prior knowledge acquired in the undergraduate modules on accompaniment and/or ensemble studies. The main activity in this module would be the study and performing of piano scores across the canon of Broadway repertoire. The

²⁵ Details of Stellenbosch University's 2018 Yearbook can be found here: https://www.sun.ac.za/english/Documents/Yearbooks/Current/2018_ArtsAndSocialSciences_eng.pdf [accessed 1 September 2018]

following list of piano/vocal scores are representative of various styles and formulas of composition within the genre. Selected scenes or entire scores can be studied and presented in a formal practical examination in the second semester.

- Rodgers and Hammerstein's *My Fair Lady* (1956)
- Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* (1957)
- Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music* (1959)
- Todd Matshikiza's *King Kong* (1959) - South African composition
- Michael Gibson's *Grease* (1971)
- John Kander's *Chicago* (1975)
- Charles Strouse's *Annie* (1976)
- Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1979)
- Claude-Michel Schönberg's *Les Misérables* (1980)
- Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats* (1981)
- Nacio Herb Brown's *Singing in the Rain* (1983)
- Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera* (1986)
- Stephen Schwartz's *Wicked* (2003)
- Richard M. and Robert B. Sherman's *Mary Poppins* (2004)
- Adrian Sutton's *War Horse* (2007)
- Tim Minchin's *Matilda the Musical* (2010)
- Mark Lottering's *Aunty Merle, the Musical* (2017) - South African composition
- David Kramer's *Langarm* (2018) - South African composition

Included in this module would be a period of internship at a major production company like the Fugard Theatre company or Pieter Toerien Productions (see *Opportunities for Internship*). Collaborative Piano Studies would see students receive individual and group tuition where possible. As suggested in Chapter 2, a sight-reading class will be most helpful in preparing students to cope with the demands of reading and performing an orchestral reduction. This sight-reading class will double as a repertoire studies class which will encourage students to study selected repertoire from a variety of prominent musicals that have reached commercial success. In addition, and as a means of simulating the pressures of an audition room, a performance class will act as an opportunity for students to sight-read and perform songs with singers (from either the BMus, BA (Drama and Theatre Studies) or BA (Music) streams of study). The experience gained from this class will prove most valuable in preparing students for the realities of the job market.

Voice coaching will aid collaborative pianists who are less confident in their singing ability to understand how the voice works, how it needs to be exercised (including vocal exercises and warm-up routines), how it needs to be preserved (projection, articulation, vowel placement), and how to coach singers in a meaningful way as described by Church (2015, 189 and 209). Students ought to be encouraged to sing in the musical theatre style, as this will broaden their knowledge of the musical theatre canon and in turn provide peers with opportunities to practice their accompaniment and coaching skills. It will be most helpful for all collaborative pianists to go through a rigorous conducting course that will teach them to conduct various types of scores, including large-scale orchestras (as in Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*) and bands with a large wind constituent (as in John Kander's *Chicago*). It will also be useful for students to study scores that present odd time signatures (like Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Notes" from *Phantom of the Opera*) and various styles. Students will not only conduct in these lessons but will also gain experience by acting as collaborative/rehearsal pianists for their peers to conduct. This way, students will study and experience the score fully from both the perspective of the conductor and the collaborative pianist.

A brief history of the musical theatre genre will ensure that all musicals studied in practical classes are historically contextualized as a means of informing the performance of those scores. The first semester should concentrate on the origins of musical theatre (where it deviated from its operatic predecessor) and trace its evolution to roughly the mid-20th

century. The second semester should be spent on the latter half of the 20th century and 21st-century compositions, composers, style differences, and themes addressed in various musicals. Instead of studying the compositional methods of specific composers, it is suggested that students learn the rudiments of arranging and orchestration, as this will probably be required of them in future. A good starting point would be the composition of scene change music, exit music or music for the bows. Students would be required to perform their compositions in the classroom and comparatively measure the success of these compositions through peer review.

A keyboard technology class would serve to educate students about the inner workings of the instruments they will encounter when working as pit musicians in musical theatre. The course should include programming of patch changes, performance practice on keyboards, and trouble-shooting of the technology. This module would overlap with that of arranging and orchestration, where students would be able to program, perform, and record their arrangements, and submit this cumulative project for assessment across both modules. The inclusion of a research paper will promote continued studies in the musical theatre field, a necessity when considering how little has been documented, especially in the South African context.

3.3 Opportunities for Internship

In universities, academic standards in music, be they of students or lecturers, are determined by factors such as the quality of the curriculum, human resources, musical equipment, libraries, academic interactions, infrastructure, and motivation. No doubt, music scholarship in African tertiary institutions, particularly in the universities, has found the maintenance and improvement of standards difficult, due to the economic situation and under-funding of institutions... the music industry is the market for which the music graduates are produced... (Idolor 2005, 108)

Though Idolor is writing in the Nigerian context, one can imagine that the scenario is similar in South Africa. Although not endemic, student protests have become the order of the day. The reasons for these protests are as varied as the number of countries in which they take place (i.e. United States of America, Canada, Bangladesh, England, and Australia, to name

but a few). In the South African context, the central reason for student protests is exorbitant study fees. Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh adds his voice to this cause:

. . . [for] universities to suggest that they were responding to lower subsidies alone is incorrect: they used this as a guise to transfer costs disproportionately onto students. This is evident in the fact that, in some years, the subsidy actually increased in real terms and fees *still* increased. Between 2010 and 2012, nominal fees revenue increased by 43%. (2017, 16)

In this volatile time of economic instability and political power struggles, it has become increasingly important for universities to manage their margins of expense. This may be done in several ways: by streamlining the number of courses offered, the number of staff members employed, or by minimizing the acquisition and maintenance of equipment. Whichever route universities choose to take, the implications of these decisions invariably affect teaching outcomes.

Idolor (2005) documents the ways in which Nigerian universities have tried to overcome these obstacles through the establishment of a system of internship. The Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) acts as a two-fold remedy. On the one hand it eases the strain on the part of universities; on the other it provides students with real-world experience of the industry they hope to enter (2005, 111). By doing this, "... [music] curricula in African universities have been restructured to guarantee the relevance of graduates to the labour market" (2005, 109). Whilst this scheme is not established in South Africa, there are means of circumventing the problem by initiating partnerships with private entities within the musical theatre industry. The motivation for doing this, is to ensure that "the products of the academic system serve [...] the public and private music industry, and, therefore, undergraduates should familiarize themselves with the out-of-school music environment" (2005, 110).

In the Cape Town surrounds, there are four identified partnership possibilities: The Fugard Theatre, Pieter Toerien Productions, Luitingh Alexander Musical Theatre Academy (LAMTA) opening in January 2019, and Waterfront Theatre School (WTS). LAMTA and WTS offer full-time courses for singers, actors, and dancers wanting to specialize in musical theatre. These schools have limited access to collaborative pianists, and do not necessarily have the kind of budget required to have one permanently employed. These schools would provide a platform for collaborative pianists to gain experience in playing for dance

rehearsals and ballet classes, whilst also providing them with groups of students in need of voice coaching. A natural by-product of this kind of partnership will be increased exposure to the musical theatre repertoire.

Partnerships with The Fugard Theatre and Pieter Toerien Productions would have to be arranged for specific seasons within the academic year. This is because The Fugard Theatre doesn't rehearse or run a musical throughout the course of a year, but typically for a three or four-month stint. Pieter Toerien Productions typically runs two or more musicals concurrently but in different venues throughout the country and abroad. By partnering with these two theatre giants, students will be afforded access to real-world rehearsal room pressures and methods of working. Depending on the strength of the students, they may even be asked to play for auditions if none of the professional collaborative pianists are available.

In turn, the exchange provides these future employers with the unique opportunity of testing the skills of young collaborative pianists before hiring them blindly for a professional production. Musical Directors can be instrumental in assessing students' performances and skill development throughout the internship period. The length of internship would depend on the availability of internship opportunities, and whether rehearsal periods coincide or conflict with academic schedules. Ideally, an internship period should equate to that of a "blocking" period in say an Education degree (i.e. prospective teachers must complete a predetermined number of hours for Teaching Practice). As mentioned in Chapter 1, a standard rehearsal week in musical theatre constitutes 48 hours (8 hours per day, Monday to Saturday). A "block" week like this could translate to earning roughly 5 credits for the internship stint. At the end of the internship, assessment forms could be provided to the musical director and/or choreographer under whom the student was placed. Students should turn in a reflective report on their work experience at the end of this process.

4. Cue the Bows: Some Concluding Thoughts on Collaborative Pianism

This study has identified the various characteristics integral to the success of collaborative pianists in South African musical theatre, and has outlined potential ways in which the tertiary education of these pianists could be improved in order to furnish them with industry-specific skills and knowledge. Additionally, the study discussed the importance of establishing internship opportunities with local musical theatre production companies and schools as a means of creating opportunities for students to gain real-life work experience in the field before entering the industry as professionals. This internship opportunity would act as a two-way mirror of sorts: on the one hand students will be given priceless insight into the industry, catching glimpses of how the rehearsal processes work and are conducted, then watching the production move onto a stage and watch the elements of the production come together like puzzle pieces falling into place (sound, lighting, costumes, make-up, wigs, etc.). Simultaneously, this internship would allow potential employers to conduct an extended interview period with the student(s). This way, musical directors would be able to test the mettle of young and upcoming collaborative pianists without having to take on the risk of employing them as full-time rehearsal pianists from the outset. Because the industry consists of only a handful of potential employers, it is invaluable for young graduates to be given an opportunity to meet, impress, and build good relationships with future employers.

Whilst this might not be the only avenue into musical theatre, sources agree that some form of prior artistic training would be most helpful: “The only way I got into it, was I left university and was not prepared to spend my life teaching, wasting away in a primary school, so I ended up getting to the cabaret” (Lombard 2018). One might be tempted to negate the need for this sort of training, if it is seemingly possible to end up in the musical theatre industry anyway. In the author’s own experience, it is a much tougher road into the industry and there is no way of telling how long it could take. Common factors for employment identified amongst the interviewees are (1) their familiarity with someone already working in the industry, and (2) a willingness (or reluctance in some cases) by a musical director to take the chance of hiring someone anew. “The reality is, and I’m not just saying this, is there’s more than one way to do this. Everybody’s path to doing this was different. I will say this ...

as much training as possible, get your piano playing skills up, get your conducting skills up, that's really important. Being able to be a good sight-reader as a pianist is really, really helpful" (Patten in YouTube n.d. d).

What this response demonstrates is a need for a dedicated tertiary course ensuring that collaborative pianists enter the workforce with the necessary skills. Musical theatre is a career path collaborative pianists should consider more seriously. The industry, though originally established in America, has gained much popularity all over the world and enjoys more commercial success in South Africa than opera does. Comparatively, there appears to be more employment opportunities in South African musical theatre than in opera. Given the rumoured difficult financial situation of companies like Cape Town Opera, who employ pit musicians purely on an ad hoc basis and for much shorter periods, chances are collaborative pianists won't be spoiled for choice in this sector. Even though musical theatre work is also contract based, the lengths of these contracts can span anything from three months to two years depending on the touring schedule of the production. Church (2015, 41) testifies to the sustainability of musical theatre: "Producers are now capitalizing on the population bubble of baby boomers and the songs and stories that this demographic and their children most easily recognize". Despite suffering economic hardship, audiences continue to support musical theatre. Church (2015, 38) also adds: "Somehow, live popular music for the stage has weathered the storms of faltering economies and encroaching technologies better than other art forms. It did so during the Great Depression, and is doing it again now ... Its formula for continued success lies in its diversity".

In many ways, musical theatre holds up a mirror to its audience and is arguably easier to relate to than opera: it reflects issues of the day (class-based discrimination in Frederick Loewe's *My Fair Lady*, for example, and ethnic prejudice in Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*), relatable characters (Tim Minchin's *Matilda*), cleverly written scripts and lyrics (Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera*, or Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*), catchy tunes (Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music*, *The King and I*, and *Carousel*), and orchestrations that reflect the popular music trends of the day (John Kander's *Chicago*). The popularity of this art form has in turn resulted in increased employment opportunities for collaborative pianists. These pianists are highly specialized individuals who possess a varied but specific skillset, making them

indispensable to the rehearsal, production and performance processes. Despite the diminution of orchestra and band sizes in a bid to maintain profitability, the advent of keyboard technology has cemented pianists' role in musical theatre. The challenge for classically-trained pianists is to cross over and adapt their skills to the demands of the musical theatre industry. As Lombard (2018) points out: "... to hone [myself] for the musical theatre profession, in terms of being able to use my classical skills, [I had to be] very brave to break away from the principles [classical music had] prescribed". The impetus to make this cross-over is something driven by personal interest rather than academic motivation:

I think it goes back to basic music education where the state [has a system] where you get trained [in] light, non-classical music from an early age if you so choose, which is the problem in South Africa. Obviously, if you look at the through-line of that, it gives you the situation we are sitting with at the moment which is not just [opera and dance companies] closing, but [also] a complete and utter lack of pianists and rehearsal pianists who don't know where they're going. The good ones are going overseas, and the intermediate ones are getting stuck in schools and ... there doesn't seem to be a mid-way to musical theatre. [Either] people are not aware of it or [aren't] being geared up to see that as a possibility (Lombard 2018).

Universities' neglect of collaborative pianism in musical theatre results in a shortage of specialized skills necessary for the sustainability of the industry in South Africa. Collaborative pianists are one of the most important cogs in the musical theatre machine. Whilst their role is not necessarily a prominent one, collaborative pianists remain an integral part of any musical theatre production. The current lack of sufficiently trained collaborative pianists is not unique to the musical theatre industry; the same is true of opera and dance companies (Lombard 2018). The opportunities of study in the field of collaborative pianism in South Africa remain relatively narrow. Most universities in South Africa offer collaborative pianism courses under the guise of accompaniment or chamber music majors. None offer a course for pianists wanting to work as répétiteurs in opera or musical theatre. The only exception this study has uncovered is Albert Horne, a UCT graduate, who entered the SACM with a clear vision and desire to become an opera répétiteur. His degree was modified in such a way that it was more closely aligned with the demands of the employment opportunity rather than that of the traditional BMus course. His training was further enhanced by an internship opportunity under the direction of Prof. Angelo Gobbato of the UCT Opera School (Du Toit, 2018). Horne additionally completed a master's degree at Guildhall School

of Music and Drama in 2007. He worked as Chorus Master for Cape Town Opera (2007-2014) and has since relocated to Germany. He now enjoys full-time employment as Chorus Master and Conductor at the Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden, Germany (Albert Horne, n.d.). Whilst Horne is an exception to the rule, what his story confirms is that this sort of training is hard to come by in South Africa and, unless you set out with a predetermined goal of becoming a *répétiteur*, chances are you won't be introduced to the career path at all.

The training of collaborative pianists for musical theatre has fallen through the cracks, though the reason for this isn't clear. Perhaps conservatories feel musical theatre is beyond their mandate or perhaps they fear such a course would cater for a too small number of students. As it stands, musical theatre doesn't enjoy prominence in jazz curricula and only features in a limited fashion in popular music studies. It has been argued that academic literature on musical theatre is lacking largely due to the "problem of a copyright culture that, to put it mildly, is not very conducive to serious academic work" (Walsh & Platt in Banfield 2004, 83). Though this might be true of academic discourse regarding aspects of composition, orchestration, or arranging, it does not justify the complete lack of attention given to the documentation of collaborative pianism in the field.

No clearly defined industry standards exist for collaborative pianists working in South African musical theatre, only standards set out in general terms for dancers, musicians, and actors.²⁶ This lack of definition only supports the notion that musical theatre is not to be considered a serious and viable employment opportunity. The onus of creating employable graduates rests squarely on the shoulders of tertiary institutions. This requires institutions to remain fully conscious and informed of workplace requirements, to revise and implement changes to curricula that are better aligned with employment demands, and to provide students with internship opportunities. In the context of New Zealand, Spronken-Smith et al (2015, 68) writes, "[the] development of workplace skills is desirable. In a user- pays system such as that in New Zealand universities, it is clear that most graduates are not studying solely for personal growth, but also to gain a credential. Thus, such students are seeking

²⁶ SAQA dance accreditation outline here: <http://allqs.saqa.org.za/showQualification.php?id=65050> [accessed 1 September 2018]; SAQA music accreditation outline here: <http://regqs.saqa.org.za/showQualification.php?id=79986> [accessed 1 September 2018]; SAQA acting accreditation outline here: <http://allqs.saqa.org.za/showQualification.php?id=97233> [accessed 1 September 2018]

opportunities to develop knowledge and skills of relevance to future work”. By equipping students with the necessary artistic skills, tertiary institutions can ease graduates’ transition into the workforce and in turn allow graduates to monetize their creativity more readily. It is my hope that this thesis and/or any research that may stem from it will be able to assist in the realisation of all three these causes.

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Addenda

Interview: Stefan Lombard (2 June 2018)

Stefan Lombard works as a freelance pianist, ensemble musician, conductor (of musicals, cabaret and symphonic concerts), accompanist, keyboardist (in musical theatre) and rehearsal pianist. His experience is vast and varied, including several career highlights such as working with Daniele Pascal (French cabaret artist) and Amanda Strydom (Afrikaans singer-songwriter). He studied BMus at UCT, majoring in piano performance under American pianist Lamar Crowson. Lombard was introduced as my colleague (fellow rehearsal pianist, assistant conductor and keyboardist) whilst working on the South African production of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Evita* (2017-2018).

Interview: Andrew Rienstra-Bakker (26 May 2018)

Andrew Rienstra-Bakker is a freelance pianist, vocal coach, music director and keyboardist from California, USA. He is a self-taught musician who attended elementary and middle schools with a focus on the Arts. After graduating high school, he studied a degree in Music Education at Colorado Community College but abandoned these studies to pursue a career in musical theatre in New York City. Rienstra-Bakker's childhood training was as a singer, tap dancer and actor, with music being a favourite past-time but not a serious pursuit. Upon moving to New York City, he started auditioning for dance and acting roles but soon realized that he was too tall to be cast in leading roles. He realized the only way into musical theatre in the Big Apple would be through music, by working as an audition pianist and pit musician (either playing keyboard or conducting). After a few years of traveling and touring with various shows, he discovered Cape Town and has since called South Africa home.

Interview: Louis Zurnamer (9 June 2018)

Louis Zurnamer is a classically-trained pianist, having graduated with a BMus (performance) degree from UCT. He holds the position of resident musical director at Pieter Toerien Productions and is responsible for overseeing all musicals produced by the company.

Zurnamer has a background in choral singing, with organ as his secondary instrument, and spent some time working as an accompanist whilst studying. Among the accompaniment opportunities afforded him, was the chance to work as répétiteur for a handful of Cape Town Opera productions. Though this post was not a permanent one, Zurnamer was given some insight into how theatre productions work and the ways in which musical and vocal rehearsals are run. He also studied conducting in his private capacity, with various teachers and other musical theatre conductors and music supervisors.

Interview: Kevin Kraak (26 May 2018)

Kevin Kraak works as a rehearsal pianist, conductor and musical director in the South African musical theatre industry. He recently directed the Pieter Toerien production of *The Sound of Music* (2017/2018 season). Kraak sang in several choirs throughout his youth and is a classically-trained organist who graduated from UCT (under Prof Shirley Gie). During his years of choral singing, he was exposed to much liturgical music and sang largely under the baton of Dr Barry Smith. He first encountered musical theatre as a stand-in pit musician, performing one of the keyboard parts in *Phantom of the Opera*.

Interview: Guy Simpson (8 June 2018)

Guy Simpson works as an international music supervisor (for touring productions like Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera* and *Evita*), and music director/conductor (recently directing *Sound of Music* in Sydney, Australia). He is a classically-trained pianist (performance major) and cellist, who studied conducting in his undergraduate years. Simpson was born and raised in England, but subsequently moved to Australia. His first exposure to musical theatre was in his teenage years, though his first work experience was in his final year of study at Sydney Conservatoire.

Interview: Marga Sander (30 June 2018)

Marga Sander works as a rehearsal pianist, audition pianist, assistant musical director and keyboardist on most large-scale productions. She is classically trained, having graduated from Pretoria University with a BMus Hons degree specializing in Baroque performance practice. Sander's first experience as collaborative pianist was in her high-school years, whilst accompanying the school choir and singing students of the music department. She was keen to specialize in collaborative pianism at a tertiary level, but at the time the University of Pretoria did not offer a course with a focus on accompaniment.