

## Sibelius Academy Research Days, March 8–9, 2022

The Sibelius Academy Research Days event was organized for the seventh time at the Black Box of the Helsinki Music Building on March 8–9, 2022. This was one of the first larger Sibelius Academy research events held after the pandemic, and was organized in hybrid form. There was an option to actually be together with people.

In the past, this annual event, organized by the two doctoral schools, DocMus and MuTri, has showcased the Sibelius Academy's doctoral research. This event has been designed as one step on the path of acquiring the skills needed to present your research in a conference on different fora. The program has mainly consisted of the doctoral students of all the Sibelius Academy study programs presenting their research and art. In addition, guest lecturers have given presentations and presented workshops with the students, as did Veli-Markus Tapio (Finnish Cultural Foundation) and Sebastian Lindberg (The Ella and Georg Ehrnrooth Foundation) this year on the topic of grant writing and research funding. Other highlights of the event have included lectures given by international guests or by professors who have recently assumed their position at the Sibelius Academy.

### **SURVIVING THE PANDEMIC AND FUNCTIONING DURING TIMES OF WAR**

In the beginning of March 2020, we had just completed the 2020 Research Days event onsite. Two days afterwards, life as we knew it was put on hold. For the best part of the next two years everybody was in lockdown. One would think that this would have been a disaster for academic life and research as we had known it. It ultimately proved, however, that academia was more resilient than some of us might have believed.

We adapted to new modes of working and communicating. We got used to (or did we really?) sitting at home at our laptops, with our cameras on or off, watching the talking head of the presenter on the screen. Teaching, supervising, meetings, and even research conferences soon migrated to online platforms, which, in addition to numerous disadvantages, also had some advantages. In the new situation, people who would never have been able to travel to Finland or Australia or Oregon for a con-

ference were able to listen to presentations and join in discussions with their peers. Organizing a quick meeting with colleagues, or a supervision session with a student living 200 (or 2000) kilometres from Helsinki, suddenly became much easier, as the time needed for commuting from one place to another was no longer a factor.

After all of this, the SibA Research Days in March 2022 finally allowed us to gather in a concert hall and to listen to live presentations and live music without the flattening effect of electronic transmission. On the one hand, this felt slightly daring, but luxurious on the other. Actually seeing a person's legs and arms and hearing their live voice and their live music, seeing them move on stage, felt like something radically new.

A stark contrast to this, however, was the feeling of frustration, fear, anger, and powerlessness in the face of what had happened just two weeks earlier, on February 24<sup>th</sup>, in Ukraine, and what has continued to happen since then. During the Research Days, one participant understandably asked: "What sense does it make to talk about music performance or theory or composition or research at times like this, in the midst of war?"

This year, the Research Days event at the Black Box Hall seemed mainly to be about what helped us go on despite what we heard and saw in the daily news. This did not mean that we were belittling the suffering in Ukraine. Rather, it meant that we tried to take care that we could function even in the middle of this harrowing worrying about our friends and colleagues in Ukraine and elsewhere, where safety, freedom, human rights, and lives are at risk, and that we could be there for the members of our community, and they could be there for us. One might say that we chose to put the oxygen masks on our own faces before helping others.

### **IMPROVISATION, MUSICAL AGENCY, CREATING, AND EMBODIED PRESENCE**

A central theme of the 2022 SibA Research Days turned out to be improvisation, which connected to the topics of overstepping the conventional boundaries set for the performing musician, that of musical agency, and more broadly, that of creating. All of this further connected to the over-arching theme of the embodied presence and knowledge of the musician-researcher.

Aspects of these themes were presented by a number of doctoral candidates: pianist Helga Karen, folk musician Emilia Lajunen, jazz musician Jaska Lukkarinen, clarinetist Lucy Abrams, researcher Markus Virtanen, and music technologist Libero Mureddu, just to mention a few.

The two keynote lectures, which were given by our new Professor of Music Technology, Jan Schacher, and by Professor of Jazz Jukkis Uotila, complemented the doctoral candidates' presentations.

Jan Schacher's keynote performance and lecture was on "research in music, on music, through music, [that] depends on a dialogue between thinking, experiencing, sounding, listening, with open expectations", and on the uncertainty in live performances shared by the listener and performer. Those who had the privilege of being present in the same space and sitting close to the stage, and to Jan and to each other, had the luxury of experiencing the performance in the lived situation, and not alone at home at our desk, through earphones.

In his keynote lecture on jazz improvisation, Jukkis Uotila shed light on the practices of artistic research in jazz in universities today, framing his discussion with a brief history of jazz and the characteristic features of jazz music and its performance. One of his messages was that jazz needs to find and develop methods and approaches of its own, and not uncritically adopt methods from other areas of research that might miss something essential.

## WHY NOT STOP?

In her opening speech, head of the DocMus Doctoral School Anu Vehviläinen encouraged the participants to embrace some qualities of being that we, in our daily drive for efficiency and results, might be forgetting: finding something unexpected and surprising and, without being prepared for it, stopping to experience it and consider it, swimming in the murky waters of not-knowing and not-knowing-how, not seeking for immediate and apparent benefit, allowing oneself to be surprised, confused, or even angry. Why not be inefficient and unproductive at times? Why not stop?

In March 2022, in the post-pandemic world, with a European country under attack from our eastern neighbour, a research event like this was thus much more than an opportunity for the doctoral students to just present their work and learn from that experience. It was about so much more than what the learning objectives stated in the curriculum. The community of researchers that had been dormant or absent during the pandemic needed to come back together, and the SibA Research Days 2022 was one of the first possibilities of doing just that. The event was, like any gathering of live human beings around a shared topic, an invaluable opportunity to hear, to listen, to join in the sharing of the substance of the work at the doctoral schools, to put one's own understanding under question, to communicate, and to learn. And, what felt even more important, it was an opportunity to stop and take a deep breath after a run that had felt so long, lonely, and exhausting.

