

**ARTISTIC RESEARCH
IN MUSIC AS
DOCTORAL STUDY:
CHALLENGES AND
OPPORTUNITIES FOR
UNIVERSITIES IN
SOUTH AFRICA**

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What are the opportunities and challenges of doctoral studies in South Africa, in music, through artistic research? What are the definitions of research—specifically artistic research—in the existing educational policies, and how can research and creative practice become one in a doctoral thesis?

This paper presents a second look at doctoral studies in music in South Africa. It deals with opportunities and challenges of doctoral studies through artistic research, and proceeds from Mareli Stolp's article 'Practice-Based Research in Music: International Perspectives, South African Challenges,' taking into consideration the opportunities arising from the framework for doctoral qualifications set by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) in the 'Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework' (2013). Tangentially, it considers ideas about creative-work-as-research proposed in Christine Lucia's article on composition and performance as research,¹ and in the 'Policy on the Evaluation of Creative Outputs' (2017) presented by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET).

The question posed, but not necessarily answered, is: how might research and creative practice become one in a doctoral thesis submitted to a South African university? The angles considered here are from policy and university handbooks as well as from supervisors' and doctoral candidates' perspectives. In addition, this paper looks at examples of doctoral studies that include creative aspects and includes the author's own experience as a supervisor and Head of Department.

SAQA and DoHET policies

Requirements for doctoral degrees in the 'Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework' allow for creative work:

It requires a candidate to undertake research at the most advanced academic levels culminating in the submission, assessment and acceptance of a thesis. However, candidates may also present peer-reviewed academic articles and papers, and, in certain fields, creative work such as artefacts, compositions, public performances and public exhibitions in partial fulfilment of the research requirements.²

Further down in the paragraph, the policy states that the degree is earned through "pure discipline-based or multidisciplinary research or applied research."³ Nowhere does the policy mention artistic research, as such, but it is quite open. The only limitation it places on PhDs is that any coursework may not contribute to credits, as coursework belongs to the professional doctorate. Professional doctorates combine coursework and research. Here, the definition of the research component is also open and described as follows:

Candidates are required to undertake a combination of coursework and advanced research leading to the submission, assessment and acceptance of a research component comprising an original thesis or another form of research that is commensurate with the nature of the discipline or field and the specific area of enquiry.⁴

The phrase "commensurate with the nature of the discipline or field" could be interpreted as referring to creative work and/or artistic research.

To investigate the relation between creative work and research, it might be helpful to consider the 'Policy on the Evaluation of Creative Outputs' (2017), which determines the requirements for creative output from South African universities to be recognised as research for subsidy purposes. In the policy, the criteria for the evaluation of creative outputs are given as originality, relevance, and newness.⁵ The research quality is embodied in the creative work. Performances qualifying for subsidy are described as follows:

Because the composer's musical score is but an incomplete guide to the musical work, for the truly outstanding performer this is also the domain of re-composition, originality of thought, exceptional creative insights, and research-informed performance practice, although the degree of re-composition or improvisation exhibited should be aligned with accepted performance practice in the genre performed.⁶

The implementation guide, however, is not as radical. The annotations, which are to be submitted with each creative output, ask for a "conceptual and scholarly framework," and a "contribution to new knowledge."⁷ The allocation of units requires the performer or composer to be involved in "lecture recitals, colloquia or other public engagements of a scholarly nature."⁸ This does not reflect the stance of the policy, however—that the research is embodied in the creative output—nor does it refer to artistic research. The implementation guide is much more limiting than either of these.

The universities

Universities in South Africa interpret the policy on doctoral degrees by SAQA in a variety of ways. Most university descriptions of doctoral study describe the possibility of the integration or incorporation of written and creative work. Some universities, such as Stellenbosch University (SU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT), prioritise the thesis by naming it first, others the creative work such as the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), or the University of the Free State (UFS).

- ▶ SU—"the theoretical component is integrated with a creative component."⁹
- ▶ UCT—"a thesis incorporating the candidate's original creative work."¹⁰
- ▶ UFS—"an integrated study of creative and research work that culminates in a thesis."¹¹
- ▶ Wits—"creative work with a research component."¹²

Some universities specify what the creative work should be. For example, a number of recitals or a composition portfolio. Some do not specify at all (SU), and others (UCT) waver in between, stating that the creative component "may comprise" certain elements.

Most university handbooks state that there needs to be a connection between thesis and creative work. Wits, for example, describes the relationship between creative work and thesis as follows: "There must be a coherent relationship between the creative work and the thesis. This does not necessarily mean that the thesis must be a direct commentary on the creative work. It must, however, serve to contextualise the creative work critically."¹³

UCT's handbook talks of the doctoral work as a "portfolio of original musical compositions or practical performance/s which, together with the written part, form(s) a coherent whole."¹⁴ These descriptions seem to move towards artistic research, even though the term—as in the 'Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework'—is not mentioned.

Another interpretation of the policy on doctoral degrees sees the creative output as the research. Rhodes University (RU) and the University of Pretoria (UP) are examples of this. At RU, "a thesis or a set of compositions" can be submitted for a doctoral degree.¹⁵ At the UP, the two DMUS programmes in performance and composition are described: "The programme focuses on research. The degree is also conferred for original creative work."¹⁶ In the more detailed description of the requirements, RU also asks for an "explanatory statement" of the composition portfolio.¹⁷

Opportunities

The opportunities for artistic research as doctoral studies at universities in South Africa lie in the openness of the 'Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework's' description of both doctorate and professional doctorate. Everything seems possible in a PhD: 1) creative work only, perhaps with an explanation, 2) the old DMUS model of a prescribed creative component and thesis, or 3) artistic research where written research and the creative work are truly integrated. Many universities indeed offer several of these variants, some under the single heading of PhD, some spread between PhD and DMUS.

Why then is artistic research not undertaken as doctoral study more often? A look at what has been presented in the area of PhD with a creative component so far may be useful. In closing, I will offer some ideas on the obstacles for presenting artistic research as a PhD thesis.

The theses

Up to now, quite a few PhDs with creative components have been attempted and submitted at South African universities. The following examples of doctoral theses were all produced at SU and the UCT. Only theses available in the online repositories of the two universities are used as examples. It follows that the examples are not exhaustive.

The following discussion does not evaluate the content since all of these PhDs were submitted, assessed, and accepted. Rather, the question posed is: how do these theses deal with the idea of integrating creative work and research?

At SU, four doctoral theses that incorporate creative work are in the repository. Stolp's thesis, 'Contemporary Performance Practice in South Africa' (2012), includes performances of contemporary South African compositions. However, only the written work is available in the repository, not the performances, making it impossible to discuss the integration of the creative part with the thesis. For Hans Huysen's 2015 thesis on complexity and composition in South Africa,¹⁸ both thesis and creative work can be found in the repository. However, since some of the compositions were published on a commercial Compact Disc before the submission of the PhD, only snippets of these compositions can be heard. Glancing through the thesis, it seems to be an explanatory and exploratory statement on the compositional process. Maritjie Pauw also submitted doctoral work in 2015,¹⁹ focusing on the curation of South African flute music. Here, both the creative components and the written work is available in the repository. Considering the creative work and the thesis, it is clear that both inform each other and that both forms of knowledge production are integrated into each other. Of course, the topic lends itself to such an approach as it considers the curation of music. Finally, for Peter Martens' 2016 doctoral work on the performance of Beethoven's cello sonatas,²⁰ both thesis and recitals can be found in the repository, even though some of the performances were released commercially on Compact Disc. Glancing through the thesis and considering the programmes of the recitals, the latter appear to be an illustration of the arguments presented in the written part.

At UCT, four doctoral studies in music started out as PhDs with a creative component. In two of these, Thokozani Mhlambi's thesis on early radio broadcasting in South Africa and Cara Stacey's study on Swazi bow music,²¹ questions about the integration of the creative part with the written part, and about the documentation and presentation of the creative part became so overwhelming that—even though they considered including a creative component—the candidates decided to submit their theses as written research only. Interestingly, both Mhlambi and Stacey are active in

composition and performance today, breaking down the boundaries between creative work and research. The other two doctoral studies have performances as the creative part: Becky Steltzner's thesis investigates the clarinet in South Africa,²² while Annien Shaw's study looks at Louis Spohr's fingering principles.²³ The performances cannot be found in the repository for either of these theses. Looking at the programmes of the performances included in the theses, they do not appear essential to the argument but, rather, function as an addition to or illustration thereof.

This short overview of a few phds containing creative work submitted, assessed, and accepted at South African universities so far, shows some of the challenges and considerations that need to be taken into account when producing a doctoral research project in artistic research.

Challenges

The challenges to produce doctoral work in artistic research fall into three areas: challenges for supervisors and students, challenges for universities, and general challenges.

In South Africa, supervisors that have themselves worked in artistic research remain rare. Usually, the student is assigned two supervisors, one for the written part and one for the creative part of the research. Both need to be open to the concept of artistic research. In addition, the methodology of artistic research is difficult to implement in a doctoral thesis: artistic research does not comprise writing a thesis and then adding creative work or vice versa. Both the written and the creative work emerge at the same time and influence each other, and both need to be envisaged from the very beginning. This requires a willingness from supervisor and student to explore together. Finally, documentation needs to be kept in mind throughout the entire process. Great possibilities for documenting the artistic process and presenting the creative work are available in the digital world, as well as the repositories of the universities. However, issues of copyright and privacy need to be resolved at the same time as the research process, and experts on these may have to be consulted.

Doctoral studies in artistic research pose a number of challenges for universities. Submission systems need to move away from paper to online-only, and accept formats beyond pdf as well as large files. Repositories like ZivaHub at UCT could offer a solution for large non-text files. In addition, universities need to reassess their open-access policies for doctoral dissertations to, at least, include a creative commons license for non-commercial use, so that audio-visual material can be made accessible while being protected from misuse. Finally, the examiners for doctoral work in artistic research should be able to examine all parts of the research. As with supervisors, there continues to be a scarcity of examiners that have worked in artistic research themselves in South Africa. Therefore, the information from the Examinations Office of each university needs to give clear instructions. Certain flexibility on the part of the university to allow the appointment of examiners who are not linked to a university or do not hold a doctoral degree themselves would also ease the difficulties.

The general challenges to artistic research as doctoral studies are twofold. Though the possibilities for the presentation of the research—both in its creative and written manifestation—are abundant in the digital domain, to utilise and implement them in a professional manner requires a massive support structure in terms of equipment and human resources. Impressive examples of presentations of artistic research can be seen in the journals for artistic research such as *Ellipses* and the *Journal for Artistic Research*. Here, not only are the support structures transparent, but also

the collaborative nature of artistic research. Yet, whereas doctoral study traditionally focuses on one person producing research, the production of artistic research, as well as its documentation and presentation, requires collaboration.

In conclusion, this leaves two main questions about artistic research as doctoral study in music at South African universities: considering the requirements for equipment and human resources, is artistic research in music a mode of knowledge production only for the rich, formerly white universities in South Africa? And: How can the concept of collaboration, which is necessary in artistic research, be embedded in the one-person idea of doctoral studies?

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Notes

- 1 Lucia, 'Mapping the Field'.
- 2 SAQA, 'Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework', 76.
- 3 SAQA, 'Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework', 76.
- 4 SAQA, 'Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework', 77.
- 5 DoHET, 'Policy on the Evaluation of Creative Outputs and Innovations', 10.
- 6 DoHET, 'Policy on the Evaluation of Creative Outputs and Innovations', 14.
- 7 DoHET, 'Implementation Guidelines', 4.
- 8 DoHET, 'Implementation Guidelines', 8.
- 9 University of Stellenbosch, 'Addendum A: Draft Regulations for Doctoral Degrees in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences', 1.
- 10 University of Cape Town, 'Doctoral Degrees', 154.
- 11 University of the Free State, 'Doctor of Philosophy in Music', 71.
- 12 Music Division, Wits School of Arts, 'Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD): Information for Applicants', 1.
- 13 Music Division, Wits School of Arts, 'Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD): Information for Applicants', 3.
- 14 University of Cape Town, 'Doctoral Degrees', 154.
- 15 Rhodes University, *Calendar 2019*, 92.
- 16 University of Pretoria, 'Faculty of Humanities', 180.
- 17 Rhodes University, *Calendar 2019*, 92.
- 18 Huysen, 'Composing (in) Contemporary South Africa Theoretical and Musical Responses to Complexity'.
- 19 Pauw, 'Curating South African Flute Compositions'.
- 20 Martens, 'Contemporary Performance of the Sonatas for Cello and Piano by Ludwig van Beethoven as Informed by Carl Czerny'.
- 21 Mhlambi, 'Early Radio Broadcasting in South Africa'; Stacey, 'The Makhweyane Bow of Swaziland'.
- 22 Steltzner, 'The History of the Clarinet in South Africa'.
- 23 Shaw, 'The Spohr Fingering Principles as Manifested in His Violinschule'.

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