



**Research-Creation in Music and the Arts: Towards a Collaborative Interdiscipline.** By Sophie Stévançe and Serge Lacasse. London and New York: Routledge, 2018. 178 pp. ISBN 9781472486073.

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**Reviewed by: Allyson Rogers, McGill University**

Combining interdisciplinary research and a wide range of artistic practices, “research-creation” is a relatively recent concept in the arts and humanities. As pioneering experts, Sophie Stévançe and Serge Lacasse have written a compact treatise that aims to clarify the objectives, outcomes, and benefits of research-creation in the university context. Both Stévançe and Lacasse are professors of musicology

at l’Université Laval in Quebec City, where Stévançe holds the Canadian Research Chair in Research-Creation in Music and where each directs a research-creation lab. *Research-Creation in Music and the Arts* is largely an English translation of their 2013 book, *Les enjeux de la recherche-création en musique*; however, the examples have been updated and the structure reorganized.<sup>1</sup> This book is especially welcome given that “research-creation” is easily confused with similar-sounding terms such as “arts-based research,” “research-led practice,” or “practice-based research.” Here, Stévançe and Lacasse explain precisely what distinguishes research-creation, what constitutes a research-creation project, and how to involve students in the process. The book is divided into three large chapters. In chapter 1, the authors discuss the role of fine arts within North American and European universities from the mid-twentieth century onwards, with a particular focus on the Quebec system. Chapter 2 describes some of the specific challenges that are encountered in developing research-creation projects in university music faculties and training students in this area. In chapter 3, the authors offer a precise definition of research-creation, delimit its scope, and provide recommendations concerning best practices and methodological approaches.

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1. Sophie Stévançe and Serge Lacasse, *Les enjeux de la recherche-création en musique* (Presses de l’Université de Laval, 2013).



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Stévanche and Lacasse begin by outlining the history and challenges of integrating artistic disciplines into research institutions where the role of artists and their relationship to research faculty and programs have not always been clear. In doing so, they make four key observations about research-creation. Their first claim is that “musical creation is not synonymous with theoretical research” (p. 24). They immediately wade into debates about the epistemological distinctions between artistic and academic training, processes, and production, which underpinned countless discussions within fine and performing arts departments since the middle of the twentieth century. At issue are questions about how art contributes to knowledge; whether standardized artistic training hinders the unpredictability, diversity, and freedom characteristic of artistic creation; and whether, for the purpose of obtaining tenure and promotion, artistic works should be considered equivalent to academic publications. Stévanche and Lacasse are adamant that music performances (concerts and recordings) are not equivalent to academic publications because art and research are entirely distinct ways of knowing—with different objectives, methods, and outcomes. This leads to their second assertion, namely that “a music concert is not an academic publication” (p. 40). They underpin this position with the proposition that academic research is intended to produce generalized knowledge via a systematic understanding and awareness of a field of study, typically resulting in some form of written peer-reviewed publication, whereas art objects are the unique expression of an artist’s worldview; therefore, they are neither propositional in nature nor are they typically expected to generate knowledge in and of themselves, although different forms of knowledge may be embodied within them (p. 31). Throughout the book, while Stévanche and Lacasse spend considerable time showing how broadly the term “research” is used in different contexts and specifying what constitutes academic research, they spend little time theorizing art. There is an implicit assumption that the confusion around research-creation primarily revolves around a misunderstanding about academic research and not artistic creation. Their conception of art as the individual expression of human interiority is a particularly Western notion and one that could be considered rather narrow in contemporary art discourses.

Stévanche and Lacasse make no claims about these epistemological debates being resolved or resolvable. Their purpose is to show how research-creation mobilizes the strengths of two discrete ways of knowing and generates productive collaborations between artists and researchers, therefore making a unique form of scholarly and artistic contribution. “Research-creation is not research on one side and creation on the other,” they write, “rather, it is an interepistemology in which the two sides are interdependent” (p. 29). Along these lines, they insist that a primary tenet of research-creation is that it must produce both research output that meets rigorous scholarly standards and a work of art. This is related to their third claim: “research-creation is not self-contemplation” (p. 45). Studying and documenting the creative process (especially self-analysis) does not satisfy the research component of research-creation based on their definition. Similarly, the kinds of research artists undertake for a particular project seldom meets the scholarly rigor or intent that Stévanche and Lacasse require.

Their fourth observation—and one upon which they insist repeatedly—is the notion that research-creation should be determined by the substance of the collaborative *project* and not by the profile or methodology of any one individual (p. 50). Although individual-centered projects are possible, a project-centered approach is more realistic for most faculty members who are typically specialized in either academic research or artistic practice. Furthermore, collaborative projects create a dialogue that helps bridge the gap between artistic and academic cultures at the university. At its best, Stévanec and Lacasse purport, “a research-creation project guarantees non-hierarchical, egalitarian and democratically collaborative connections insofar as the expertise of the various agents (researchers, research-creators, and creators) are recognized and placed at the service of a common project” (p. 83). Finally, the most comprehensive positive definition of research-creation is found in chapter 3: “Research-creation is understood as an *approach* applied to an individual or multiple-agent *project* combining research *methods* and creative *practices* within a dynamic frame of causal *interaction* (that is, each having a direct influence on the other), and leading to both scholarly and artefactual *productions* (be they artistic or otherwise)” (p. 123).

Given these strong arguments for acknowledging the differences between artistic and academic processes and outcomes, how the two should come together in a single project remains somewhat unclear. This is the most significant weakness in the monograph; more case studies and examples would have helped illustrate the key issues that the authors are trying to clarify. It is only toward the end of chapter 3s that the authors briefly describe a project involving Inuk artist Tanya Tagaq, which, at the time of writing, was still in-progress. This project appears to be their most ambitious undertaking to date, one that fuses art, research, technical innovation, and even engages Tagaq’s audiences in the process. They use it as a way of illustrating some of the challenges that research-creation poses and difficulties that can arise in collaborative relationships. Although this is an interesting and helpful example, it is unfortunately the only one they provide. Understandably, they want to present their most recent work; however, in the earlier French-language version, they provide several examples of successful research-creation projects, including one that produced Tagaq’s award-winning album *Animism* (2014), which helps the reader understand how their concepts work in practice. It would have been helpful to have included these in the English version.

It is impossible to summarize in a short review the many timely and important topics that Stévanec and Lacasse address in this book. The translation of this critically important text is a valuable contribution that brings this conversation to an English-speaking readership. It is especially relevant for those working in fine and performing arts departments; however, larger discussions about the changing role of the university under neoliberalism and ongoing epistemological debates between disciplines will be of interest to a wide range of scholars. While their examples and analyses are drawn from the Quebec context, their contribution to these epistemological debates has much broader relevance. This is likely to remain one of the most comprehensive and crucial texts on research-creation.