Commuting is not always boring and time-wasting. On our monthly three-hour train trips to the Orpheus Institute in Ghent, we talk about many interesting topics. Recurrent themes are our small children, the latest results of the football clubs Feyenoord and Ajax, and recent developments in artistic research (in no particular sequence). We shall confine ourselves here to the latter.

In Henk Borgdorff’s theory seminars in the docARTES programme at Ghent,1 much time is spent discussing books and articles on practice-based research in the arts. A perceived deficiency is that the writings deal mostly with visual arts and dance. Music is virtually absent. Hence, during one of our journeys, the idea was born to fill this gap with an international publication on practice-based research in music. Almost two years after devising this plan, we are now proud to present a special issue of the Dutch Journal of Music Theory containing 13 fine, diverse essays on research in and through music. The issue is divided into two sections and is augmented by three book reviews on the topic.

The first section, consisting of seven articles, is an in-depth introduction to the field of practice-based research in music. It charts the most relevant and recent debates on artistic research in general and discusses their implications and effects in the world of music. Several terminological matters are explored. Particular focuses are on the ontology, the epistemology and the methodology of research in the arts, and some comparisons are made with more mainstream academic research. The section also includes discussions on institutional settings, education politics and strategies, and implications for possible MA and PhD programmes in professional art schools.

This all provides a frame, as it were, for the second section, which reports on a number of practice-based research studies now in progress. This is the crux of this issue of DJMT. Although institutional and theoretical frameworks are essential to enabling artistic research (if only by giving it a name and thus bringing it into existence), and although theoretical discussions may also operate independently of concrete artistic endeavour, such frameworks should be in service of the actual transdisciplinary research in which art and science interconnect. We have compiled a sampling of heterogeneous subjects and approaches, ranging from Gregorian chant to interactive compositions for mobile phones, and from well-founded historical research to methodological and epistemological innovations. This section suggests the impossibility of heaping all artistic research together. It thereby counterbalances the first section, where attempts are made to identify common characteristics of such research.2

The three book reviews, which together form the third part of the issue, may offer a framework for the first section. They show that current discussions on practice-based research in music do not take place in a void but are, implicitly or explicitly, shaped and informed by a growing corpus of books and articles that create a rationale for this form of research. This special issue of DJMT – unique though it is in its emphasis on musical research – inscribes itself into a dynamic field that already has its own history, its own concepts and its own controversies.

Philosophy of science has taught us that a research tradition, to establish itself, must not

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1 DocARTES – developed by the Orpheus Institute in Ghent (Belgium), the Faculty of Creative and Performing Arts of Leiden University, the Royal Conservatoire of The Hague and the Conservatorium of Amsterdam (all in the Netherlands) – teaches a two-year course as part of a practice-based PhD programme for musician-researchers to help them broaden and deepen their artistic and academic qualities.

2 The second section is intentionally limited to European artistic research. Although the United States, in particular, has a longer-standing tradition of practice-based research, the European approach (if we may label it so) deserves full attention here because of its relative youth and its different contexts and organisational arrangements.
only justify its claims, but must also institutionalise its practices. The value of the knowledge production it pursues is further enhanced by the impact of that knowledge within its context of application. This makes research in and through musical practice a highly promising endeavour. Not only is such research more keenly aware of its meaning and contribution to the world of music and to current musical practice (in contrast with some of today’s mainstream musicological research), it is also increasingly embedded and anchored in the established realm of higher education and research.

The founding of the Musical Institutions with Doctoral Arts Studies (MIDAS) network in 2004 has contributed significantly to this accomplishment. This ever-growing network unites leading European music schools that offer doctoral programmes in musical composition and performance. Practice-based research in music and its associated degree programmes, are conducted in divergent institutional forms in different countries and educational institutions. This may be seen as reflecting the diversity of ideas now prevailing in the debate on fundamental principles that takes place within and outside this research forum. The essays and research reports in this issue of the DJMT inform the reader about those diverse views.

The intellectual and artistic forum has recently gained more concrete form with the convening of graduate conferences, where musicians from all over Europe present their doctoral research to one another. The next MIDAS student workshop will be held at the Royal College of Music in London on 27 April 2007. A call for proposals is printed elsewhere in this journal.

Although this issue of DJMT is the first to focus substantial attention on practice-based research in music, our initiative does not stand alone. The Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo, in cooperation with MIDAS, has recently announced a new refereed yearbook in English entitled Music Practice as Research, which will publish articles, research notes and reports about important international events. A call for submissions is also included in this DJMT.

Research in which music is both part of the research process and an outcome of the research has now found a home base in the third cycle of higher professional music education, with degrees mostly called PhD, DMus or DMA. The European Association of Conservatoires (AEC) has launched a Working Group for Third Cycle Studies in Music as part of the Polifonia Thematic Network Project (2004-2007), within the Erasmus programme. One aim is ‘to develop learning outcomes for third cycle studies in music in European institutions for professional music training.’ On 29-30 March 2007, Polifonia will hold a seminar on third cycle music studies in Europe at Karlsruhe University of Music. An announcement for that seminar also appears in this issue of DJMT.

As with other newborns, it remains to be seen whether artistic research will be blessed with a long life. Is it just a fleeting fashion, or is it a structural enrichment and transformation of existing research? Although we cannot read tea leaves, the developments and initiatives we have observed at theoretical and institutional levels, as well as the diversity and quality of the artistic research reported here, give us immense confidence in the future of practice-based research in music.

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