During the last decade the Guildhall School of Music & Drama has emerged as a leading institute for research into conservatoire education and staff development in Europe. By 2004, it had over thirty research projects, run by staff members whose research topics issue directly from their work as artists and teachers. *The Reflective Conservatoire – Studies in Music Education* presents reports of research performed in recent years.

Although the subtitle – *Studies in Music Education* – suggests an overall focus, the diversity of topics and approaches within this volume is enormous. The editors have clustered the contributions around four themes: conservatoires as institutions, performing and creating, teaching and learning, and community and practice.

Part I, *Conservatoires as Institutions*, includes only one chapter, preceded by a short prelude. Sean Gregory sketches the position of contemporary conservatoires and the challenges they face. These challenges include extending artistic boundaries, deepening creative processes, and educating more ‘rounded’ musicians, who possess a diversity of skills and can function within a variety of social contexts.

Part II, *Reflecting on Performing and Creating*, starts with Helena Gaunt’s research on breathing in oboe playing. Her study combines a literature review, discussion with professional players and teachers, laboratory testing of breathing processes and oboe playing as well as practical work with students. Chapters 3, 5 and 6 are reports of innovative artistic projects.

Kenneth Rea describes the development of a comedy project combining Japanese ‘kyogen’ and ‘commedia dell’arte’; the violinist Anthony Marwood, the choreographer Mayuri Boonham, and the film-maker Sean Garland report on the making and filming of a production combining dance and violin performance; the librettist Michael Irwin and the composers Matthew King and Nye Parry describe their collaboration in creating the as yet unfinished opera on Isambard Kingdom Brunel, a famous nineteenth-century engineer. In Chapter 4, David Dolan develops a theoretical and practical framework for improvisation in classical music performance. This is followed by a short discussion of the author’s improvisation work with students.

Part III, *Reflecting on Teaching and Learning*, contains four chapters. Paul Roberts reflects in Chapter 7 on several aspects of piano studies in the conservatoire, including artistry, teaching artistic communication, and the relationship between a creative performance and the intentions of the artist. Hereafter, Robin Bowman explores various ways in which performance teaching can be understood as a form of research. In Chapter 9, Simon Purcell presents action research into jazz improvisation classes taught by himself. He discusses both how this research changed him as a teacher and the difficulties inhering in action-based research as such. Helena Gaunt concludes this part with an intriguing report of her interviews with twenty staff members of Guildhall, recording their perceptions of instrumental/vocal teaching and learning at conservatoires.

In Part IV, *Reflecting on Community and Practice*, collaborative music making, identity questions, and intercultural action are as prominent as community issues proper. Sean Gregory traces the origin of the creative music workshop (Chapter 11). He summarizes the headlines of this practice under the headings of making connections and decision making, each of which contain a wide variety of activities. After having described various concepts of leadership, Jackie Walduck discusses the action research and the observation research she did in collaborative arts practice (Chapter 12). While she identifies a number of leadership roles like defining and articulating artistic ground, exploring and
encouraging the ensemble to explore this, and embodying the music that is created, she has a special interest in how the leader can promote the development of identities. Chapter 13 is a study of Ghanese drumming and xylophone music by Richard Benjafield. Although he emphasizes the social character of Ghanese music, his ethnomusicological contribution has few connections with the other contributions in the book. In Chapter 14, the flutist Katy Gainham describes a project she did with ‘Cape coloured’ and black school children in South Africa. While she demonstrates a keen understanding of her delicate position as a white teacher working in a postcolonial country, her interpretation focuses on the role of music making in expressing and reviving community identity. Finally, Jan Hendrickse and Nathan Thomas present three ‘transcultural’ projects in which teachers and students collaborated with African musicians. These projects aimed at, respectively, examining models and processes in collaborative music making, artistic bases for such practices, and the impact on students of a collaborative project situated in Gambia and led by Gambian musicians.

As a whole, The Reflective Conservatoire features a wide range of research approaches: action research, interviews, questionnaires, literature studies, musical analyses, anthropological and sociological reflections, and examinations of key concepts like research, creativity, leadership, world music, and identity. Many of the contributions combine several of these strategies, rendering the overall picture even more variegated. Although it is difficult to identify common denominators in such a heterogeneous collection of papers, several interrelated tendencies may be noted. First, breadth is generally of more concern to the teachers/researchers than depth. They have a keen eye for the complexity and many layers of the issues they are dealing with. This results in a variety of questions, all of which the researcher wants to take into consideration. As a result, many topics are taken up, but only few are subjected to more thorough analysis. Typically, the paper ends with conclusions like: the exploratory research has only scratched the surface, many new questions have arisen, and much further research needs to be done. These are truisms, but they obscure the fact that more focus within the research design might have yielded more substantial results.

Second, the research process often appears to be more important than the research product. Rather than being systematic presentations of research questions, research methods, research data, and interpretations, many reports reflect the chronology of the research efforts. The various moves in thinking and investigating made by the researchers can clearly be traced in the structure of the papers. New questions coming up under way frequently lead to ad hoc reflections and sometimes to changed research formats. Empirical data, conceptual inferences, insights derived from literature, and the author’s interpretations freely intermingle. The research papers are not so much academic accounts of the acquisition of new knowledge as reports on the actions and reflections by artists/researchers: what they have done and what they have learned.

This leads to the third point: the aim of the research projects appears to be personal development rather than the acquisition of ‘objective knowledge’. The introduction – ‘prelude’ – of the last three chapters refers to these as descriptions of ‘personal journeys’ (p. 334), but this applies to many of the earlier chapters as well. The processes the researchers have gone through are very much individual ones, and they themselves are the primary beneficiaries. One wonders, however, to what extent this book serves a wider audience. Colleagues working in the same field as the author may find their questions and concerns reflected in the issues addressed, and may benefit from some of the insights gained by the researcher. But, in general, little substantial knowledge is transmitted to readers who are not complete insiders. One is intrigued by the ‘personal journeys’ undertaken by the researchers and one appreciates the value these have for the individual, but in the end one is not sure which concrete insights one has gained.

What one misses in this volume is a rationale for conducting research in the multiple ways presented. What is the nature and purpose of research at Guildhall? How is the concept of re-
search defined? (From the book it sometimes appears that the use of the term is so broad that it can mean almost any activity involving some kind of inquisitiveness.) Which methodologies are particularly suited to doing research within the context of the conservatoire? How does the interest in personal development of staff relate to the acquisition of knowledge relevant to a wider research community?

Another topic that is less developed than one might expect given the subtitle, is creating new perspectives of educational processes. Only two chapters (No. 9 by Purcell and No. 12 by Walduck) focus on testing specific approaches to teaching and learning. Three more contributions, while not focusing especially on processes of teaching and learning (Nos. 2, 14, 15), include a discussion of a specific educational arrangement. In Chapter 10, Helena Gaunt discusses the views on teaching of staff members at Guildhall. But in most of the contributions questions of teaching or learning are evaded rather than targeted. Authors appear to be more at home with theorizing about music and artistic creation than with reflecting on education. In fact, several authors manifest a certain resistance against discussing their musicianship in educational terms. For instance, Sean Gregory stresses that workshop leading does not involve imposing a ‘schooling’ or ‘methodology’ (p. 293). He also holds that participants and professional practitioners learn from each other (p. 297). Such viewpoints easily lead to the neglect of major issues of teaching and learning. The concepts of ‘education’ and ‘teaching’ are evaded because of their association with schooling, but alternative perspectives of how learning takes place are not explored. One reason for this may be the conviction that teaching in the artistic context is largely elusive. Thus, Bowman (p. 213) asserts that all conservatoire teachers have unique insights, that cannot be neatly be contained in the conventional printed word. Their task is to build a worthwhile body of material that conveys their knowledge and that can be disseminated to others.

*The Reflective Conservatoire* contains plenty of such interesting ideas as well as a lot of other reflections and investigations. Despite shortcomings regarding delimitation, methodology, and structure, the book testifies an explosion of creative energy. These authors demonstrate their full commitment to being excellent teachers and artists, and their willingness to engage in elaborate investigations and reflections in order to achieve this. Although few readers may manage to study the book from the beginning to the end, reading a selection of chapters that fit one’s particular interests is certainly recommendable. The DVD is a rich resource of illustrative materials, and in one case – the collaboration of Marwood, Boonham and Garland – it contains the final product of an artistic project.