

Creative Collaborations: A Composer's Perspective

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Abstract

Stereotypes of the master composer as an independent and isolated creative agent are supported by our knowledge of the working habits and personalities of some important composers of Western art music. Whereas many composers have collaborated with artists from other fields (choreographers, authors, film directors, etc.), examples of composers who have written music with other composers are relatively rare outside the worlds of Broadway, Tin Pan Alley, and some other kinds of popular music. The most notable composer-collaborators of American music were Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. An examination of their professional relationship yields insights into the nature of successful artistic collaboration. Effective composer collaborations and composer/performer collaborations may result in artistic products that are different and richer than what individual musical artists can achieve. Successful collaborations in the arts occur when collaborators provide different ingredients to the creative mix but share goals and know when and how to lead and follow. Perhaps musicians and other artists can demonstrate to the rest of the world how collaboration, rather than isolation, egoistical competition, and confrontation, might lead to solutions to social problems.