

Book prize – 2018 IASPMCA Regina, Canada

***Research Creation in Music and the Arts* by Sophie Stevance and Serge Lacasse**

Sophie Stevance and Serge Lacasse's new book *Research Creation in Music and the Arts* struck the adjudicators as a very unusual submission and a very valuable one. It is unusual because it is not a case study or a genre study, it does not make popular music practices or texts its main concern. The book focuses instead on institutionalized aspects of the academic study of popular music. It is a book about disciplinary and pedagogical concerns that are pivotal and indeed urgent in some particular contexts—like music departments and other departments where research and creation coexist—but that are also of fundamental importance across a much wider range of contexts. And this is where we find its extraordinary value.

The book tackles a very current development in arts-based disciplines, thinking very carefully through the categories of research and creative work, and what they mean in their respective academic contexts. This current development is this: various sets of accumulating forces inside and outside of the north American academy are pressing students, faculty, administrators, and funding bodies to engage in, sell, and support “research-creation” projects. As anyone who has had anything to do with such projects and programs knows, they are a mare's nest of problems. I and my colleagues deal with these problems continually.

Perhaps even more consequentially, federal and provincial funding bodies offer support for “research-creation” projects, and for the same kind of “black-box” problems, their adjudication and criteria are obscure, irrational, and unpredictable. This may seem like “inside baseball”—arcana that could only possibly be of interest to a tiny handful of people who are already aware of and invested in these issues. And perhaps in the hands of other scholars, that's exactly what this book would be. But this is definitely NOT the case here. In fact, I've already had cause to talk this book up to people not in music or the arts because of its extraordinary practical usefulness.

The book offers a comparative analysis of “research” and “creation” as two distinct epistemologies; it offers a fascinating contextual account of the integration of non-PhD bearing artists into universities in the 1970s, and a careful explanation of the many perverse outcomes of largely well-intentioned move; and it lays out a framework for enabling the productive interrelation of research and creation epistemologies and addressing the various perversities encountered by people working in affected areas.

This first chapter is a standout because, in identifying and explaining the basic differences between “research” and “creation,” the book offers a model of research that would benefit any incoming graduate student or any creative person interested in turning their attention to doing research. As someone who has struggled to find texts that help students understand what exactly they're signing up for when they begin their program, I am very excited to assign this chapter. Not because I teach artists, but because the book's characterization of creation's

solipsism will be an extraordinary help in making students aware of their of the status of their undisciplined knowledge and opinion.

Stevance and Lacasse write that

the ideas contained within the artistic practice, as well as the results of that practice, need to be extracted, interpreted, and compared to other interpretations in order to become knowledge. Knowledge can only be born of comparison, a challenging of ideas. It cannot simply emanate from one subjectivity and address other subjectivities.

To me, this aspect of the book will be useful in teaching because it helps define research and knowledge-generation not only by talking about what it is, but what it isn't.

I don't want to take all day here so I'll just say that the rest of the book is equally rigorous, provocative, and useful. One more quotation should help sum it up:

Creative projects...are neither research nor research-creation because the objective remains focused on producing artistic work. ... A research-creation project does not study the creation alone: on the contrary, research and creation are interdependent, and the goal is to observe and study their interactions when both processes are in operation. The difference between these two approaches lies in the impact that research-creation has on artistic creation; in this situation, the creative process is dependent on and influenced by research, and research needs this artistic practice in order to produce results (86).

At times the book's approach is strident and shows exasperation, at other times it is deeply optimistic and generous. The book has the potential to significantly influence research-creation projects, and how they are taught, and also may affect how granting agencies understand research-creation projects (and how they define both objectives and outcomes). We adjudicators have seen projects confusingly/murkily calling themselves "research-creation" in our own disciplinary backyards, and the book does a lot to clear up what such projects really entail. We expect to refer to this text again in the future, both for the benefit of our own work, and as we serve on SSHRC committees where such projects surface.

Honourable Mention: *American Folk Music as Tactical Media* by Henry Svec

In the form of an honorable mention, the committee would like to recognize Henry Svec's book *American Folk Music as Tactical Media*. We found it engaging and thought-provoking, and found the book's central conceit – that the folk revival was always "plugged in," and that it anticipates various developments in cybernetics, computing and social networking – to be an original take on an old topic. The book's contributions to our knowledge of Alan Lomax and Pete Seeger as boundary-crossing media users and theorists, we predict, will be of lasting value.