IADMS 28th Annual Conference Abstracts

**Investigating the phenomenon of dance and music performance through the experience of the performer**

Gemma Harman, PhD 1,2, Emma Redding, PhD 2 , Patricia Holmes, PhD 2

 1 *University of Chichester, Chichester, United Kingdom*

 *2 Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, London, United Kingdom*

**Introduction:** Previous research studies in dance and music have generally been directed towards examining specific facets of performance, with a lack of understanding concerning the performer’s experiences of them. Although these studies have often focused on gaining insight into what constitutes a performance, their attention to isolated aspects of performance has precluded understanding of how these elements form the experience of the performer. As a result, there remains a paucity of research concerned with seeking the subjective thoughts and perceptions of the performer in relation to what it means to be a performer and on the phenomenon of performance more generally.

**Purpose:** This presentation shares key findings from research that examined the phenomenon of performance in dance and music as experienced by the performer.

**Methods:** Three research studies (two qualitative interview studies and one questionnaire) were carried out to investigate performers’ experiences of performance. Participants recruited were professional performers, who were currently employed with a professional dance company or professional orchestra/ ensemble. Approval for the study was granted by the institution’s Research Ethics Committee and all participants gave written informed consent.

**Results:** Findings from the research revealed that performers place high importance on the concept of the ‘self’, which they experience and perceive differently as an ‘individual’, a ‘person’ and a ‘performer’. Performers were also shown to view themselves as embodied entities, evincing a strong sense of individuality and a subjective awareness of being a performer, alongside conveying technical and expressive abilities.

**Conclusions:** This research offers new insights into how professional dancers and musicians experience and understand performance and performing. Through offering performers the opportunity to speak openly about what is of importance to them, this research highlights the need for researchers and educators to address the components that exist within the experience of the performer – and for performers to better acknowledge their roles as an ‘individuals’ alongside that of a ‘performer’. The investigation of subjective experience as a valid and illuminating mode of research in this context is amply justified; the benefits of undertaking cross-discipline research when investigating the world of the performing dancer and musician are also shown.