

**Exploring the lived experiences of vocal
collaborative pianists during the 35th
Belvedere International Singing
Competition: An Interpretative
Phenomenological Analysis**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study is to understand how five vocal collaborative pianists made sense of their lived experiences during the 35th International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition held on 6 July 2016 in the Opera House at the Artscape Theatre Centre in Cape Town.

In order to make sense of the lived experiences of the participants, this research addressed the following main research question: How did five collaborative pianists make sense of their lived experiences while accompanying singers during the 35th International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition? During this qualitative research I conducted individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with the five South African collaborative pianists who were chosen to accompany the singers during the Competition. The open-ended questions elicited a “rich, thick description” of their experiences (Creswell, 2014:185). This interpretivist research offered an understanding and interpretation of the meanings that emerged during the interviews with each of the participants (Maree, 2007:60).

The four superordinate themes that emerged from studying the five accompanists' experiences were: 1. Experiencing anxiety and stress; 2. Skills requirements for collaborative pianists; 3. Challenges of the competition; 4. Appreciation and validation. The two corresponding themes that emerged were: 1. Empathy with the singers; and 2. Collegiality.

The study showed that stress, before and during the competition, was a common experience for all the participants. The stress experienced was compounded by the challenges that the participants faced during the competition. The interview responses indicated that by employing the skills acquired during their careers as accompanists, they were able to mitigate their stress and overcome their challenges. Empathy with singers and collegiality among the participants also proved to be associated with the necessary skills used to mitigate their stress. The participants experienced validation as artists/performers when they received positive feedback/appreciation from singers and audience members.

Key Words: Accompanists, collaborative pianists, lived experiences, interpretivephenomenological analysis

OPSOMMING

Hierdie interpretatiewe fenomenologiese analise (VFA) poog om die geleefde ervarings van vyf vokale begeleidingspianiste tydens die 35th International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition, te verstaan.

Om die geleefde ervarings van die deelnemers te verstaan, stel hierdie navorsing die volgende hoofnavorsingsvraag: Hoe het vyf vokale begeleierspianiste die 35ste Internasionale Hans Gabor Belvedere Sangkompetisie as begeleiers ervaar? Deur van die kwalitatiewe navorsingsmodel gebruik te maak, is individuele, persoonlike semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude uitgevoer met die vyf Suid-Afrikaanse begeleidingspianiste wat gekies is om die sangers in die Hans Gabor Belvedere Internasionale Sangkompetisie te begelei. Die oop vrae het 'n "diep, ryke beskrywing" van hulle ervarings ontlok (Creswell, 2014:185).

Die vertolkende navorsing het gehelp met die begrip en interpretasie van die deelnemers se ervarings wat tydens die onderskeie onderhoude gedeel is (Maree, 2007:60). Die data is geanaliseer deur van vertolkende fenomenologiese analise (VFA) gebruik te maak, wat insig gebied het in die geleefde ervarings van die vyf begeleiers tydens die kompetisie.

Die vier hooftemas wat vanuit die bestudering van die begeleiers se ervarings voortgespruit het, is: 1. Die beleving van angs en stres; 2. Die begeleidingspianis se vaardigheidsvereistes; 3. Uitdagings van die kompetisie; 4. Waardering en erkenning. Die twee aanvullende temas is: 1. Empatie vir die sangers; 2. Kollegialiteit.

Die studie het aangetoon dat stres voor en gedurende die kompetisie 'n algemene belewenis by alle deelnemers was. Die stres wat deelnemers ervaar het, is deur die uitdagings wat die kompetisie bied, vererger. Die reaksies in die onderhoude het aangetoon dat die deelnemers stres en uitdagings van die kompetisie met die vaardighede wat hulle in hul loopbane ontwikkel het, doeltreffend kon bestuur. Daar is verder bevind dat empatie teenoor sangers en kollegialiteit onder die deelnemers ook verband hou met die nodige vaardighede om hulle stres te kan bestuur. Die deelnemers het erkenning ervaar wanneer hulle positiewe terugvoer/waardering by die sangers en gehoorlede ontvang het.

Sleutelwoorde: Begeleiers, begeleidingspianis, geleefde ervarings, vertolkende fenomenologiese analise

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the 35th International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition

The Hungarian conductor, Hans Gabor (1924-1994) was the long-term manager of the *Wiener Kammeroper* and founder of the Belvedere Singing Competition. He did outstanding work to promote the careers of young and talented singers. To acknowledge Gabor's contribution to advance young singers, his name was added in 1995 to the original name 'Belvedere Competition'. His name has since been inseparably linked to the contest (Belvedere Singing Competition n.d.). Even though Hans Gabor is synonymous with the competition, for the purposes of this dissertation I will refer to the competition as the Belvedere competition which it is more commonly called.

The Belvedere Singing Competition later began to be held outside of Vienna (where the finals were held for 31 years after 1982) in the renowned opera houses of Amsterdam (2013), Düsseldorf (2014) and then back in Amsterdam in 2015 (Belvedere Singing Competition n.d.). In 2016 the competition was held in Africa for the first time. South Africa was honoured to host this prestigious international competition in 2016, when the finals took place on 2 July 2016 in the Opera House at the Artscape Theatre Centre in Cape Town. The significance of this competition is that it acts as a "singers' stock exchange" to provide professional services for young singers, casting directors, agencies and opera houses (Belvedere Singing Competition n.d.). The main requirement for this competition is for the selected singers to present arias from the operatic repertoire. Four South Africans reached the final rounds in the 34th Competition in 2016, with Levy Sekgapane the 1st prize winner. Soprano Pretty Yende won the 2009 competition; Hlengiwe Mkhwanazi took the 2nd prize in 2013 and Siyabulela Ntlale came 2nd in 2014. After the success of these South African singers, it became evident to the organisers that there is a wealth of vocal talent in South Africa and that there was a need to host this competition in South Africa for the first time (Belvedere Singing Competition n.d.).

In order to compete in this competition singers had to prepare arias from a wide range in the operatic canon. With a variety of 50 to 60 arias per voice type (soprano, mezzo, tenor and baritone), the Belvedere required the singer to prepare five arias in total: two compulsory arias (to be selected from a prescribed list) and three other arias of the singer's own choice (which could also be selected from the prescribed list). This huge number of arias left not only the orchestra librarian with approximately 300 arias to prepare, but the five piano accompanists

were also required to know and perform all of these arias Full Newsletter: 35th International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competitions Finals Tomorrow (Christina McEwan 2016:1-4).

1.2 Aspects of the competition

The five South African accompanists for the Belvedere Competition held in 2016 were Mathilda Hornsveld, Laetitia Orlandi, Albie van Schalkwyk, José Diaz and Elna van der Merwe. They have vast past experience in playing for many competitions in South Africa. These accompanists reside mainly in Pretoria and Cape Town. In Chapter three where I present my findings, I will also offer more information about each of the pianists (who were the participants in this study).

The accompanists were contracted for approximately five days during the competition and were challenged with the daunting task of having to learn a vast variety of opera arias, since the singers could choose any single aria from a multitude of options. The competition repertoire included opera arias by a range of composers from the Baroque to the 20th century. Each singer selected five arias from a list of prescribed repertoire when registering for the competition. All singers participated in the first round. Participants were assigned an accompanist, and rehearsal time was limited. Many singers were eliminated as the competition progressed and each pianist subsequently rehearsed each new aria with the singer who progressed to the next round. As a result of the uncertainty the pianists faced while having to prepare this huge selection of repertoire, they faced many challenges (van Schalkwyk, 2016).

The vast repertoire of opera arias comes as a big challenge when the accompanist and singer have to walk on stage without having had sufficient time to rehearse before their performance. For that reason, sight-reading is regarded as the most important skill to possess as an accompanist (Jim Sellers, 2003:15,17). The accompanist and singer may have different opinions regarding the interpretation of music. During an interview between Mansell *et al.* (1996:19) and John Greer, he firmly advises the accompanists not to impose their views, especially not while the singer is feeling exposed and vulnerable. Performance anxiety is another challenge that is not limited only to musicians but is universal as it is a reality in all cultures and careers, including athletes, public speakers and dancers, to name just a few (Kenny, 2011:26,47). This is when the anxiety prevents an individual from performing at their best and affects the performer so that it becomes a problem.

Competitions like the ATKV *Musiqanto* Competition, the SAMRO and UNISA vocal competitions usually require that the singer perform several rounds of music including an art song,

contemporary African compositions and arias from the opera repertoire. What makes playing for the Belvedere competition different from other local competitions is that the repertoire consists exclusively of operatic arias. During a singing competition like the Belvedere, the pianists need to have a comprehensive knowledge of the various aspects of performance practice and interpretation in the light of the various stylistic periods within the operatic genre. In opera houses in Europe répétiteurs mostly accompany singers in these types of competitions (Hornsveld, 2016). These répétiteurs have specialised training in the operatic literature and are exposed to an abundance of repertoire on a daily basis. One could therefore ask how accompanying singers performing operatic repertoire could differ from accompanying singers singing art song repertoire. Furthermore, how do the demands placed on the collaborative pianist and the skills required to play both types of genres differ (if at all) when accompanying singers in a competition setting.

When performing an art song, the piano part is idiomatically written for the instrument; however, when a pianist has to perform reductions of the orchestral part when playing opera arias, the music poses unique challenges that the pianist has to overcome (Katz 2009:154-155). While the pianist may or may not have the opportunity to study the scores beforehand, practice and collaboration with the singer (to facilitate musical cohesion) is often limited to one hour (van Schalkwyk, 2016). Furthermore, while the pianist is certainly instrumental in the successful performance of the singer in the competition as well as the preliminary rounds, the focus of the competition is to serve as a vehicle to boost the careers of aspiring young singers.

1.3 Répétiteurs

In order to accompany a competition of this calibre, and have it prepared in a short amount of time, the pianist needs to be extremely familiar with the operatic repertoire in its entirety. In Europe this problem does not arise, since répétiteurs who are employed by opera houses and are familiar with the repertoire, are engaged to play for the competition. In South Africa, Cape Town Opera (CTO) is the only surviving full-time opera company and it operates with a small subsidy from the Western Cape local government and virtually no subsidy from the South African government. Elise Brunelle,¹ Managing Director of Cape Town Opera, stated that Cape Town Opera does not have the financial resources to employ a full-time répétiteur at the moment. Furthermore, she states that tertiary music institutions in South Africa are not producing pianists who specialise in this field. As a result CTO has to rely on grants to import

¹ Telephonic interview with Elise Brunelle (08/04/2019).

experienced répétiteurs for short amounts of time to work on specific productions (Brunelle, 2019).

A problem therefore arises when South African pianists who are not répétiteurs and are not engaged on a full-time basis by an opera company are contracted to play for the Belvedere competition. How would these pianists cope with the limited time constraints to accompany the singer with the type of support they would need in the operatic repertoire? Based on the success of the performances by the pianists and vocalists in the earlier rounds of the competition held at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town, it was evident that although these pianists may not have been familiar with all the music repertoire beforehand, they used their expertise skills to facilitate those successful performances. The accompanists had to draw on their experience as proficient collaborative pianists in order to best support the singers.

1.4 Collaborative pianists

According to Roldan (2005:102), to collaborate, “derived from the Latin collaborare, literally means to ‘labor with,’ to work together”. During an interview with Pamela Viktoria Pyle (a former student of well renowned collaborative pianist, Samuel Sanders) she states that “the best performances are truly collaborative in nature, where both people contribute and have a real dialogue about the music as they’re working” (Estrin, 2010:57). This is especially true in art song and other vocal genres, where the piano acts as an equal instrument to convey the message of the composer.

During the last several years collaborative pianists have distinguished themselves from older notions of the mundane accompanist who is only there to assist the singer or instrumentalist (Estrin 2010:56). In recent times the term ‘collaborative pianists’ has been used to highlight the necessary skills set required by a pianist who accompanies singers and instrumentalists. This term suggests that the performance is more of collaboration and that both parties involved are equally important (Estrin, 2010:56). While the participants in this study also work with instrumentalists, for the purposes of this investigation I will focus on the lived experiences of these five vocal collaborative pianists accompanying the singers/competitors during the 35th Belvedere International Singing Competition as suggested by Smith *et al.* (2009:16), “to focus upon people’s experiences and/or understandings of particular phenomena” (Smith *et al.*, 2009:46).

The stress experienced by a collaborative pianist during a competition may differ from those in other situations such as a regular concert or in day-to-day interactions with singers during a

daily lesson. This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that these pianists must play only from the operatic repertoire for this competition, unlike other local competitions where they may also play from the art song repertoire. Kenny (2011:92-93) mentions that the pressure musicians place on themselves is the number one trigger of music performance anxiety (MPA). A high-profile, international opera competition like the Belvedere could cause collaborative pianists to place immense pressure on themselves, since they would be playing in front of an international fraternity of musicians and the fate of the singer they are accompanying is also directly related to their own performance. In order to mitigate this self-induced pressure, I would like to posit that these pianists would require a musical skill set and temperament that would best suit such a stressful occasion. During a singing competition a collaborative pianist may also experience challenges when working with singers as opposed to collaborating with instrumentalists. In my own experience, collaboration requires a specific skill to accomplish perfect ensemble playing, a good balance and rhythmic synchronisation. However, to accompany a singer involves an indispensable knowledge of the operatic or art song literature in order to interpret the song/aria correctly and to anticipate the timing of the soloist.

The contributions of pioneers like Martin Katz (2009:3), Samuel Sanders (Estrin 2010:57), Warren Jones (Epperson 2010:18) and other pianists allow the collaborative pianist to be recognised as a highly specialised artist who not only requires complex technical skills, but also artistic and interactive skills in order to be a well-rounded musician. The collaborative pianist must facilitate a dialogue between the pianist and the singer through expressing a shared musical interpretation. Katz (2009:3) mentions that in order to do this, collaborative pianists clearly need to familiarise themselves with the textures, style, tempo, dynamics, articulation, phrasing and the text of the arias that they are performing. Katz (2009) has written in detail about the art of accompanying, outlining the requisite skills and competencies to be a successful collaborative pianist.

Katz (2009:39) advises the pianist to take some time to study the text by reading it out aloud. This will allow the accompanist to discover the composer's initial intention and inspiration. He emphasises the importance for a pianist to transform orchestral timbres into a pianistic representation, which will support the singer. It is essential that the pianist imitates and replicates the different instrumental timbres of the orchestra (Katz, 2009:162-188). In Katz's words "we must make sure we never sound like a pianist. The only instrument we might imitate that sounds like a piano is ... a piano" (Katz 2009:155).

It is required of professional collaborative pianists to show excellence in sight-reading; to have an understanding of several languages and diction; to transpose; to play orchestral reductions

as well as to possess exemplary pianistic skills. It is essential to have a vast knowledge of repertoire in all style periods and to understand the role of the conductor in the opera world (Wenger, 2008:32).

Since this was the first time that this prestigious singing competition was held in South Africa, no South African collaborative pianists have ever had the opportunity to accompany singers for this specific competition before. As a result, there is no research on the lived experiences of South African pianists accompanying singers during the Belvedere Singing Competition. In fact, to my knowledge, research on the lived experiences of professional accompanists during a high-profile singing competition is limited in general and this research project therefore helps to fill this gap in the literature.

1.5 Purpose statement

The aim of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study is to understand how five vocal collaborative pianists make sense of their lived experiences during the 35th International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition.

1.6 Research question

The main research question guiding this study is: How did five collaborative pianists make sense of their lived experiences while accompanying singers during the 35th International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition?

1.7 Methodology

1.7.1 Research design

According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016:15) qualitative research is:

An umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.

The current study is qualitative in nature. According to Creswell, (2014:185) and Tracy (2013:28-29), qualitative researchers collect data directly from the participants through individual face-to-face, semi-structured interviews utilising open-ended questions so that

they may elicit a “rich, thick description” of their experiences. This study was grounded on those principles. This design, as suggested by Creswell (2014:186), Maree (2007:297) and Smith *et al.* (2009:45), will furthermore explore the meaning that the five collaborative pianists assigned to their lived experiences during their specific participation in the 35th Belvedere Singing Competition. I will interpret these experiences, as recommended by Maree (2012:226) and Tracy (2013:41) through an interpretivist paradigm that will include the interpretation and understanding of the meanings that emerged during the interviews with each of the five participants. Maree (2007:60) states that:

The ultimate aim of interpretivist research is to offer a perspective on a situation and to analyse the situation under study to provide insight into the way in which a particular group of people make sense of their situation or the phenomena they encounter.

1.7.2 Research approach

The research approach chosen for my study is an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). The three theoretical perspectives central to IPA are: “phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography” (Smith *et al.*, 2009:4). IPA is phenomenological in the sense that “it is concerned with exploring experience in its own terms” (Smith *et al.*, 2009:1). Phenomenology is defined by Guest *et al.* (2013:10) as:

A philosophical approach to the study of experience [...] that shares a particular interest in thinking about what the experience of being human is like, in all of its various aspects, but especially in terms of the things that matter to us, and which constitute our lived world.

In the context of the current study the lived world is the environment in which the participants find themselves while accompanying singers during this prestigious competition. IPA is also idiographic in nature as it is characterized “by a focus on the individual and on understanding individual behaviour, with little (if any) emphasis on formulating general laws” (Maree, 2007:33) and I therefore explore the individual experiences of the participants during the competition in detail before analysing any differences or commonalities (Smith *et al.*, 2009:3).

IPA research is rooted in hermeneutics, a holistic understanding (Tracy, 2013:42) and representative of a specific perspective on data analysis. The main aim will be to interpret and to make sense of the contents of the data (Maree, 2007:100). To hermeneutically investigate the experiences of the participants, the researcher needs “to empathically

imagine the experiences, motivations and context of the speaker/author” and then engage “in a circular analysis that alternates between the data text and the situated scene” (Tracy, 2013:62). I will therefore go back and forth between the data and my understanding of the experiences until I can make sense of these experiences.

1.7.3 Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

The aim of the study was to explore the processes through which the five participants made sense of their own experiences and IPA was chosen as the appropriate analytical tool. “The inductive and iterative procedures of IPA are intended to help the researcher to develop an initial ‘insider’s perspective’ on the topic” (Reid *et al.*, 2005:22). During this study I was able to draw conclusions from the data I collected and observed, and in some cases the same experience occurred among more than one participant, which made this study both inductive and iterative in nature. The analysis of lived experiences should be interpretative, translucent and conceivable in order to demonstrate the similarities amongst participants, but also to capture the distinctiveness of each of the participants’ individual experiences (Smith 2010:24). During this study, as the researcher I intended to interpret how the participants made sense of their own lived experiences. IPA data-collection and data-analysis strategies will now be discussed.

a) Data collection

For this interpretative research, data were collected from five participants who have experienced the phenomenon. My chosen method was to conduct semi-structured, person-to-person interviews to allow me to engage with the participant. These interviews were recorded on a sound recorder with the permission of the interviewees. Examples of questions I posed the participants included:

- How did you experience playing for the Belvedere Singing Competition?
- Can you describe any possible challenges you might have experienced and how you overcame them?
- How did your experience as a collaborative pianist play a role in how you experienced the competition?

Based on the answers I received from these questions and similar questions I then followed up with questions pertaining to the responses. One-on-one interviews gave me

the advantage to gain and develop rapport, to pay close attention to tone, content and body language, as well as to acquire rich and informative data. This strategy is suggested by (Guest *et al.*, 2013:113-114; Smith & Osborn, 2008:58,59; Smith *et al.*, 2009:57).

The individuality of each participant makes each qualitative interview unique (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004:53). In-depth interviews allowed the participants to think and talk, while I, the interviewer, listened judiciously to record the information accurately (Smith *et al.*, 2009:65). To provide good data, well-chosen open-ended questions [that formed part of a conversation] encouraged the interviewees to share their views, understandings, points of view and beliefs regarding the phenomenon (Maree, 2012:89).

I conducted an inductive probe by asking questions based on the interviewee's responses. These questions were linked simultaneously to the research objectives to provide the richness of qualitative data and flexibility of coverage. Rubin & Rubin (2005) offer a responsive interview model that suggests that I as the researcher have the responsibility of building a reciprocal relationship with the interviewees, to honour them and to reflect on their own biases (Tracy, 2013:142).

b) Data analysis

In order to understand the meaning that these participants ascribed to their lived experiences, I used a step-by-step guideline by Smith *et al.* (2009:81-103) to undertake a successful data analysis that shows both convergence and divergence among the participants as well as uniqueness of their individual experience (Smith, 2010:24). According to Smith *et al.* (2009:82-103) the six steps were:

- i. "Reading and re-reading
- ii. Initial coding
- iii. Developing emergent themes
- iv. Searching for connections across the emergent themes of each separate case
- v. Moving to the next case
- vi. Looking for patterns across cases"

The data analysis of the interviews conducted for this study ensured a coherent design to match the research paradigm and data to finally answer the research question (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006:52). Interviews (including the interviewer's questions) were transcribed by means of inductive and iterative procedures, which enabled me to develop

an 'insider's perspective' on the topic (Reid *et al.*, 2005:22; Tracy, 2013:184; Smith & Osborn, (2008:64,65). The responses of the participants were transcribed at verbatim, followed by the coding process, the organising, integrating and interpreting of the data (Reid *et al.*, 2005:22; Guest *et al.*, 2013:285).

Tracy (2013:189) suggests that coded data captured the essence of the particular phenomenon of each participant by marking the data segments with symbols, descriptive words, phrases and unique identifying names. In this study I searched for pertinent statements that captured an essence of each lived experience and subsequently coded it (or gave it a label). Each interview was analysed in detail before moving on to the next as suggested by (Smith & Osborn, 2008:67; Maree, 2007:297). Smith & Osborn (2008:67) stated that an idiographic approach focuses not only on each individual participant, but should also understand their unique experiences. During this study I endeavoured to first examine each individual case before searching for similarities and differences across the cases. According to Creswell (2014:199-200) a cross case analysis entails the interpretative work of the researcher into drawing the emergent themes together in order to emphasise the most interesting and important aspects of the participant's experience.

After I identified various codes I looked for similarities in the codes per case and grouped them into categories as suggested by Reid *et al.* (2005:23). Categories which then related to each other were then grouped into themes. The main themes that emerged from the transcriptions were identified from the in-depth interviews. I integrated the themes into the text of my report by using verbatim responses as suggested by Kumar (2014:317-318) to keep the original 'feel' of the participants' responses.

To ensure consistency and trustworthiness, the data collection and analysis was undertaken under the supervision of Dr Conroy Cupido. According to Kumar (2014:219) there are four indicators that is closely related to validity and reliability namely a) credibility, b) transferability, c) dependability, and d) confirmability. Terre Blanche *et al.* (2006:90-91) regard interpretative validity as a strategy for IPA in order to produce a rich and credible account while research is being undertaken. During the process of this study I allowed the participants to view the transcripts of my interviews in order confirm whether they were happy with the way in which I interpreted their responses and experiences.

c) Participants

Five participants were chosen for this IPA because of their unique expertise in the field. The researcher assumed "the role of learner in that the participant is the one who has had

the experience, is considered the expert on his or her experience, and can share it with the researcher” (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004:54). These participants “were recruited on the basis that they could understand the principles of their involvement in the research process, give their consent, engage with the interviewer and show a willingness to express their experiences and opinions” (Reid *et al.*, 2005:21,22). The participants were selected because they had experiential expertise in their fields and were the sole focus of my attention (Smith *et al.*, 2009:64). The participants are Mathilda Hornsveld, Laetitia Orlandi, Albie van Schalkwyk, José Diaz and Elna van der Merwe. These accompanists all reside in South Africa, mainly Pretoria and Cape Town. This study gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their respective experiences during the competition and this allowed me the opportunity to understand how the participants made sense of these experiences. I will provide more detail before each case in Chapter Three about the expertise of the participants.

d) Role of the researcher

As recommended by Maree (2007:87) the researcher will be the ‘research instrument’ in the process of gathering the data. According to Smith & Osborn (2008:63) the researcher will act as the facilitator and guide rather than the dictator. The events/experiences were described from the perspective of the research participant (Maree, 2012:83). The continuous recognition of the participants’ biases, values and personal interests, as suggested by Maree (2007:304), was an important priority.

1.8 Validity

An interpretative validity will ensure that the researcher will provide a quality observation by following several strategies. According to Creswell (2014:202) a prolonged engagement and persistent observation will guarantee the building of trust with the participants since the researcher (an accompanist who works closely with fellow accompanists) has knowledge of the field. I was in regular contact with the participants throughout the interview process and consulted with them constantly throughout the process.

The triangulation of different data sources, methods, investigators and theories as recommended by Creswell (2014:201), will be followed to build a rational validation for themes. I conducted member checking and took the final report of themes back to the participants and the research supervisor to determine the accuracy of the data, analysis and hypothesis. I was able to stay honest; to ask questions about the methods; meanings and interpretations, and provided

an opportunity to sympathetically listen to the participants' feelings. The participants' agreement with the findings confirmed the validity of the study. Thick descriptions of emerging data were presented in the findings that extensively and thoroughly provided a detailed record of the process. (Creswell, 2014:201-202).

1.9 Ethics

I followed the procedural rules and ethical guidelines set out by Kumar (2014:284-285) by informing the potential participants of the purpose of my study. Each participant was given a letter of informed consent as well as information that outlines the study². After submitting an application including letters of informed consent from the participants, I received permission from the North-West University ethics committee to proceed with my study. The participants allowed their names to be used for the purposes of this study. Since these are highly qualified pianists and experts in their fields, associating their names with the data added validity to the study. I will however respect their privacy by not publishing information they deem private (Tracy, 2013:243). Another ethical issue that I respected that was suggested by Hofstee (2006:211), was to not deliberately coerce the participants into participating in the research. I therefore provided those five participants access to my research at all times and gave them the choice to withdraw at any time, for any reason. As a researcher I undertook to ensure correct and unbiased reporting of the findings and took special care to ensure that no participant was harmed at any stage during the research and avoided deception of all participants in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017:55-58).

1.10 Chapter division

This dissertation is divided as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 3: Findings

Chapter 4: Discussion and Conclusion

1.11 Significance of the study

While there are many opinions on the role of piano accompanists in collaborative settings, little research has explored the lived experiences of accompanists during an international opera

² Annexure A – Informed Consent

competition setting specifically held in South Africa. Given the fact that accompanying has been an art form, it would seem significant to better understand the lived experiences of these five South African pianists. Data gained from this research can perhaps provide insights for future accompanists who show interest in becoming professional collaborative pianists, especially within the context of a competition. The participants' experiences will certainly assist aspiring collaborative pianists to enter this rich and fascinating field.

1.12 Conclusion

My intention with this research was to understand how five collaborative pianists ascribe meaning to their lived experiences during this highly prestigious opera competition. In the following chapter (the literature review) I will explore the literature on the evolution of 'accompanist' to 'collaborative pianist' and examine the necessary skills a pianist would require to function optimally in a competition setting. My research findings appear in Chapter 3, while Chapter 4 presents the findings and conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Since a hundred years ago (Katz 2009:277), there has been a development in how musicians understand and differentiate between the terms 'accompanist' and 'collaborative pianist'. In this chapter I will include examples from the literature to address the misperception of the 'accompanist' being an inferior and lesser pianist than solo pianists. In recent years the term 'collaborative pianist' has been used to emphasise accompanists' equal and important role in music making with the musicians whom they accompany and also to counter any notions that their skills as pianists are inferior to those of solo pianists (Estrin 2010:57, Class 2009:60, Epperson 2010:18-20). In the previous chapter, I stated that these pianists might face the daunting task of accompanying singers in an international opera competition when only full-time répétiteurs based at opera houses have traditionally done so in the past. These répétiteurs were not only familiar with the repertoire, but also have a solid understanding of the performance practices of the various aspects of the operatic genre. During the 35th Belvedere competition in Cape Town the five accompanists needed to display skills which have recently been described in the literature as skills that discern a collaborative pianist from earlier notions of an accompanist as they need to deliver stellar performances alongside the singers. In this chapter I will scrutinise the development of the designation 'accompanist' changed to 'collaborative pianist' as described in the literature. I will furthermore examine the necessary skills required of a collaborative pianist (given that they are not répétiteurs) in the daunting task of having to accompany singers in this competition setting and I will review the literature to see what has been written about the experiences of pianists in a competition setting such as the Belvedere competition.

In order to better understand what might prepare a collaborative pianist for an international competition, I have divided the literature into the following three areas:

- a) The differentiation between collaborative pianists and accompanists;
- b) The fundamental skills required of a proficient vocal collaborative pianist;
- c) The role of collaborative pianists in a singing competition.

2.2 The differentiation between collaborative pianists and accompanists

Martin Katz (2009:277), a Professor of Collaborative Piano at the University of Michigan, states that the word 'accompanist' was used over one hundred years ago. That implies that these pianists were to be heard only in the background and was not to interfere with the adoration of the main musician. Mansell *et al.* (1996:18) states the following:

An accompanist is someone who can both support and augment a performance, a collaborator rather than an accompanist, to technically make two people or more perform as one

One of the earliest mentioning of the word 'accompanist' appeared in the 'Amusements' of the *New York Times* of February 1860, with a few other advertised events and it read as follows "Grand Concert' given by Mrs. Jason H. Barclay; this concert was to feature a solo pianist, a virtuoso cornet player, a tenor, a baritone, and last, 'Mr. H.C. Timm, Accompanist'" (Masters, 2011:16).

According to Katz (2009:277), accompanists' names were never mentioned in programmes and that especially women were not allowed to have the opportunity to pursue accompaniment as a career. Katz (2009:277) mentions that piano introductions were reduced with a bar or two and that even the postludes were not audible because of the instantaneous applause of the audience to show their appreciation for the soloist who has just ended a performance. The world-renowned musician Itzhak Perlman, affirms that "the word 'accompanist' is a total mistake". He mentions the fact that the technical proficiency needed by the accompanist is no less than that of a soloist. His statement is a comment on an incident which occurred after a piano competition when a young pianist did not pass the preliminaries. The pianist then wrote a letter to one of the judges, Akira Eguchi (an accompanist), and accused her of being a lower-class musician since she was not a soloist. The pianist added that she should not judge a competition that was for soloists (Estrin 2010:56).

For many years, pianists who were classified as accompanists were often seen as inferior. Gerald Moore (1899 – 1987) confirms this by mentioning that in America accompanists did not always get the recognition that they should have received (Demarest, 1964:2,28). Moore has spoken about this lack of credit for accompanists in America for the last 53 years. He mentions that this lack of acknowledgement could be a discouragement for pianists who would want to collaborate with other performers, as they are deemed to be inferior (Demarest, 1964:29). Since 1970 accompanists have received more recognition for their role as collaborators alongside singers and instrumentalists (Cranmer, 1970:8). This is because the greater musical community

has realised that musical accompaniment requires the same technical skill, proficiency and demands as solo work. The use of the term collaborative pianist made a paradigm shift in the way musicians thought of pianists in the classical world, equating pianists as partners, rather than subordinates.

Scrutinizing the significance of the accompanists' profession in terms of the importance of their job as a musician, Margo Garrett (professional accompanist) asserts: "I am a professional accompanist. What I do is not less important, it's just different" (Jepson 1986:1). She furthermore emphasises that an accompanist needs to be an expert in what he/she is doing, as much as is required of a soloist. During an interview with Dixie Ross Neill she confirms Garrett's remarks when she states that there is a misconception that accompanists are second-rate pianists who could not make it as soloists (Mansell *et al.*, 1996:19).

To identify the differences and similarities between an accompanist and a collaborator, Katz (2009:3) points out that although he grew up with the 'old' title of 'accompanist', the term 'collaborative pianist' refers to this specialised art. Beckman and Graves (1997:20) highlight the importance of the 'old' term 'soloist/accompanist', where the pianist was known as the 'follower' and the instrumentalist or vocalist considered themselves as leaders. Today, however, the term 'collaborator' suggests the effective communication between musical partners. Roldan (2005:102) concurs and states that the term is relatively new, although collaborative performances in the arts are not new. Hence, I would like to suggest that the terms 'accompanist' and 'collaborative pianist' be used interchangeably provided that the term 'accompanist' is not seen as signifying the lesser of the two.

As a result of the work of Gerald Moore (Demarest 1964:29, Estrin 2010:56-57), Samuel Sanders (Estrin 2010:57, Wenger 2008:32), Martin Katz (2009:3,277) and others, the status of the accompanist has been significantly improved. The role of the accompanist therefore is becoming increasingly prestigious, as well as gaining the recognition as something that is worthwhile, even as an independent career.

Anne Epperson mentioned during an interview the name of the late pianist Samuel Sanders, who was one of the most important influences in collaborative education. Sanders first used the term 'collaborative pianist' in an interview to describe the equal partnership between the singer/instrumentalist and the pianist (Wenger, 2008:32). In order to be proficient as a collaborative pianist, skills relating to musicianship and technique needs to be mastered.

2.3 Fundamental skill requirements of a proficient vocal collaborative pianist

High expectations and responsibilities are demanded of the pianist in order to collaborate with other musicians/singers especially during competitions and concerts. Garrott & Reynolds (2017:557) mentioned the following:

Singers are dependent in auditions on the excellence and preparedness of collaborative pianists. These pianists, one hopes, have keen sight-reading skills, vast knowledge of the operatic and song repertoires, and lots of experience at partnering auditions without rehearsal, while still providing a performance that not only supports the singers, but also allows them to sing at their very best.

Echoing the sentiments mentioned above, a number of pianists, including Kurt Adler, Martin Katz, Gerald Moore and others have written widely about the art of accompanying. They emphasise the required musical skills, competencies and challenges.

Katz provides valuable insight into the skills required of a proficient collaborative pianist. When collaborating with a singer, he suggests that the pianist must serve as the designer as well as the director (Katz, 2009:39). This entails being equally responsible for the musical choices made alongside the singer when focusing on the delivery and expressivity of the text, word painting, tempi, dynamic variation and other interpretative nuances. In doing so, this will enable the pianist to have a better understanding and appreciation of the text and for him [the pianist] to strengthen the text information (Katz, 2009:39).

Pianists are advised by Katz (2009:39) to incorporate the following actions in order to better facilitate a successful collaboration with the singer: study the text by reading it out aloud; mark the vocal line of the score according to the specific sentence structure; notice and take care of any special features, such as a surprise, or where there is a question or answer that is exchanged in the text, and lastly, take note of the author's choice of words. He asserts that the role of the accompanist must encompass performing according to the composer's requirements; reading and responding according to the partners' emotional and physical needs; protecting the poet's intentions and lastly meeting the accompanist's own needs (Katz, 2009:3).

Warren Jones was a vocal collaborative pianist of note who possessed the necessary skill set including all the aspects of musicianship. Jones highlights the fact that the singer on stage performs with his body, whereas the accompanist plays a machine – this collaboration generates a wonderful, extremely physical relationship (Epperson, 2010:18-19). It appears that

Jones clearly has the ability to distinguish and find the right balance between being the dominant force or the secondary player in the artistic conversation.

To be an accompanist also requires the skills and personality of a solo pianist, with the ability to collaborate with another person. Margo Garrett, a professional accompanist who is praised for her sensitive accompaniment and fluent technique, asserts from her own experience that she normally prepares for 15 recital programmes per year in comparison with a soloist's two or three in one year (Jepson, 1986:1). Garrett clarifies the situation that a collaborative pianist not only needs the technique of an outstanding pianist, but also has the advantage of acquiring a broad knowledge of repertoire. The vocal accompanist may also be required to perform the same piece of music with different singers and therefore must be flexible in his interpretation of tempi, dynamics, touches and phrasing.

A pianist who is an expert in sight-reading will have the advantage to accept professional opportunities with little or no advance warning. They therefore will be able to adapt without hesitation in performances that require a quick reflexive response. They will lastly be able to scan the score far ahead with greater ease.

2.3.1 Sight-Reading

Sight-reading is described by Kopiez & Lee, 2006:97:

The unrehearsed performance of music, so-called sight reading (SR), is a skill required by all musicians. It is characterized by great demands on the performer's capacity to process highly complex visual input (the score) under the constraints of real-time and without the opportunity of error correction.

Several important reviews of sight-reading are worth mentioning here. The ability to sight-read is an asset for any pianist and especially an accompanist. A number of pianists, including Margo Garrett (2018:577), Marie Asner (1988:20), James Sellers (2003:15,17) and Philip Cranmer (1970:35), have written widely about the profession of accompanying, outlining the necessary musical skills and competencies. They agree that accompanists must prove their excellence in various areas but highlight the importance of sight-reading.

Robert Spillman maintains that the ability to sight-read is a vital characteristic for a vocal accompanist. Therefore the accompaniment of singers demands excellent and expert

sight-reading skills (Nix, 1997:32).³ A similar statement was made by Elizabeth Buccheri (orchestral pianist, teacher, vocal coach and accompanist), when she states that she often has to accompany 15 to 20 vocalists over the course of several hours without knowing what music she has to play until she walks on stage. She not only emphasises the significance of sight-reading, but also stresses the importance of recognizing the appropriate musical style. Because the opera repertoire is vast and it is impossible to know all the works, the challenge is always to sight-read accurately (Sellers, 2003:15,17).

The literature consulted above, showed that a vocal accompanist will simply not be successful without having excellent sight-reading abilities that would enable them to learn new repertoire quickly and to adapt without hesitation during rehearsals and performances.

2.3.2 Foreign language and understanding the ‘spoken word’

Given the fact that vocal repertoire comes in many languages, experts emphasise that it is a requisite for accompanists to be familiar with the sounds and the technicalities of a range of languages (Hoekman 2004:72). Many of the prescribed arias of the Belvedere competition were in English, Italian, German, French, Russian and Czech, and vocal coaches or répétiteurs usually become familiar with these languages through years of study. If collaborative pianists are not fluent in these languages, they will need to familiarise themselves with the meaning of the arias that they will accompany. In doing so, they will be able to bring nuances to their playing that reflect the meaning of the text (Zeger 1997:30).

Martin Katz emphasises the fact that collaborating with a singer goes hand in hand with studying languages. The composer is first inspired by the text, which enables the singer to express those specific feelings and meanings in the words. Katz (2009:21) stresses that although fluency in languages is not a prerequisite for a vocal collaborative pianist, the ensemble task will be much easier when the pianist is conversant with the sounds and mechanics of the language of the song or aria. That is especially true of languages such as Russian and Czech, which are not often heard or spoken in Western contexts, making the meaning of the text and words in the repertoire very difficult to grasp.

³ Older sources were outer bearers of seminal sources

A factor stressed by Garrett (2018:576) is the essential requirement for an opera coach/répétiteur to be in love with opera, to develop a passion for languages and lyric diction, and to gain as much experience as possible. When Rebecca Franks (2012:50) writes about the essential skills of a répétiteur, she emphasises the need to master languages along with having a very good knowledge of operatic repertoire.

Little has been written on the stage behaviour of piano accompanists, yet Moore (1944:52) states that an accompanist “must so comport himself that, should the eyes of the audience stray towards him, he looks in the picture of the song”. Katz (2009:21) tells of a compliment that will always stay with him when someone said to him after one of his performances: “Oh, Mr. Katz, I just loved your performance. You really played the words!”). Although Moore and Katz lived years apart, they both address and have expressed the significant skill for the vocal accompanist to execute the ‘spoken word’.

In a situation where the pianist might have to coach the singers, they would also need to have an understanding of the rules of lyric diction. Timothy Hoekman (2004:72) and Anne Epperson (Wenger, 2008:32) emphasise this fact. This will be to the benefit of the vocal coach or the pianist in order to help the singer with the interpretation of the text. During the competition, rehearsal time would be limited and the pianist would not necessarily have time to coach the singer (nor is it their duty to do so). However, the singer will certainly benefit from the pianist’s knowledge of the meaning of the aria in order to produce a more thoughtful performance and to enhance the level of musicianship.

2.3.3 Listening

Bliss Johnston states that “the most important thing in accompanying is that you have to listen, listen and listen” (Mansell *et al.*, 1996:18). Listening skills in the art of accompaniment are stated to be of the utmost importance within a collaborative performance. A number of experts including Beckman and Graves (1997:20), Wenger (2008:32) and Asner (1988:20) have written extensively about the necessity to possess a keen listening ability that will allow the pianist to assist the singer by critically hearing sound and colour, and to pay special attention specifically where phrasing is of particular importance. Hoekman (2004:72) asserts that intense listening is the most important characteristic of a vocal coach, seeing that he needs to provide feedback in terms of what he hears and for the singer to improve on that.

It is not enough for accompanists to only listen carefully to the singer. Marcia Swanston refers to Dixie Ross Neill's professional influence as a vocal coach, when she stated that great patience will support the singer in terms of consolidating their technical abilities, bringing out the best in the singer (Heppner, 2007:12).

2.3.4 The pianist should like an orchestra

Katz (2009:153) highlights the importance for a pianist to resemble the instruments of an orchestra. He advises the pianist to listen sensibly to the orchestral model in order to apply the different orchestral colours inventively and creatively (Katz 2009:154). During an interview between Sellers (2003:15) and pianist Elizabeth Buccheri, she points out that she always aims to sound as close as possible to what is expected to hear from the orchestra. An accompanist who demonstrates the necessary pianistic skills and has the ability to project a sound like a full orchestra will certainly be an advantage for an opera singer (Zeger, 1997:29-30).

Big operatic scores are usually not suitable to play on the piano and Garrett (2018:577) therefore advises the pianist to create their own 'reductions'. This will likely entail an alteration of the score to make it more pianistic and more likely to have an orchestral quality.

2.3.5 Piano transcriptions/reductions

One of the most difficult skills the piano accompanist must master is to play reductions of orchestral accompaniments to concerti and operatic arias. A répétiteur needs to play orchestral reductions, written originally for 20 to 100 musicians, with two hands. Therefore, listening to recordings will certainly help in understanding the original scoring. Cranmer (1970:45) said that "piano reductions of orchestral scores seek to place the orchestral sounds under the span of the pianist's hands.

Cranmer (1970:46,47,50) advises that a pianist should be able to reduce an orchestral score to suit the shape of his hand which he can technically manage as well. If this is not possible then a pianist should be able to omit (on the basis of an informed knowledge of the orchestration) parts in the reduction. Elizabeth Buccheri's views support Cranmer's statements when she advocates that if all the orchestral notes cannot be made to fit the two hands of a pianist, then the pianist should strive to remain as faithful as possible to the orchestral score when deciding what to leave out. Her advice is to first study the orchestral scores very intensely before working on the reduction and then decide what to

leave out and what to play. Since singers perform so much opera and oratorio repertoire, reductions will always play a big role in the life of an accompanist, who should therefore at all times strive to create a sound as close as possible to an orchestra (Sellers, 2003:16). Margo Garrett's view is that the pianists sometimes need to create their own 'reductions' from a big operatic score that is written very un-pianistically. To play it more pianistically and to create a better orchestral sound than is written-down, she refers to the process of making 'alterations' rather than 'reductions' in order to leave the pianist with no physical injury (Garrett, 2018:577).

Arrigo (1998:2) stresses that the accompanist needs to be acquainted with the traditional performance practices of the specific musical period of an opera aria or art song. He mentions that a pianist additionally needs to understand the sentiment of the work, must get hold of the text and translation in order to interpret the piece accurately. The pianist that is playing a reduction from the Baroque era (1600-1750), needs to be inventive and use his creative skills as he will not be able to duplicate precisely what the orchestra plays. He recommends to firstly refer to the orchestral score before the pianist performs a differentiation between the orchestral and *continuo* parts (Cranmer, 1970:48-49).

Due to the fact that neither the text nor the translation is present in a transcription Arrigo (1998:5) emphasises a few priorities for the accompanist while doing transcriptions. Knowledge of the text is required to produce a musical interpretation of the vocal literature with the benefit that both the instrumentalist and accompanist can breathe, think and play like a singer. The transcriber needs to add additional phrase markings, dynamics, and articulations and breathe marks in order to exemplify his awareness of the text and to enhance the soloist's interpretive efforts (Arrigo, 1998:5).

2.3.6 Repertoire

Garrett (2018:575) is very specific when she states that "you can become a successful coach while you grow the skill set and repertoire knowledge required of all coaches". Professional vocal coaches/répétiteurs have an encyclopaedic knowledge of vocal repertoire, which will be to their advantage in offering advice to singers. Asner (1988:20) affirms that the accompanist must be familiar with all types of vocal repertoire and should also be able to transpose when necessary.

During the competition the pianists might see many of the arias for the first time and will have limited time to practise. This is why Asner (1988:20) asserts that it is important for

accompanists to familiarise themselves with a range of arias from different style periods and composers to be able to expand their skills abilities and knowledge of the repertoire.

2.3.7 Flexibility

Epperson (2010:61) states that both partners need to share their individual knowledge and expertise, but the pianist needs to apply the skills of flexibility, attentiveness and awareness during a performance to adjust according to the singer's needs, if necessary. During an interview with Bliss Johnston, he expresses his respect for the singers' vulnerability standing on a stage to sing and highlights the importance of an accompanist supporting the singer's confidence in as many ways as possible. A singer will certainly respond to this and will in turn be able to give his best (Mansell *et al.*, 1996:1).

Garrett commented during one of her classes on a student's accompaniment by saying: "You can't follow the singer. You have to walk down the street together. Bring out the bass more. Think of yourself as a conductor with a soloist" (Jepson, 1986:1).

In accompanying different singers during the rounds of the competition, the accompanists need to be flexible and adapt to different interpretations of the arias, as there would be limited time to negotiate their personal views about the music.

2.3.8 Emotional intelligence

In research done by John Mayer *et.al.* (2001:131) they examined the relation between emotional giftedness and emotional intelligence with adolescents. The researchers endeavoured to "relate a person's level of emotional intelligence to the actual ways they cope with challenging social situations". The term emotional intelligence, is therefore a synonym for an actual ability-based intelligence, rather than referring to a character or personality (Mayer *et al.*, 2001:132). According to their research, individuals who are highly emotional intelligent will be able to perceive, understand and manage their emotions, as well as to allow emotions to facilitate their thought (Mayer *et al.*, 2001:132). The emotional intelligent person will have the following abilities: a) to be aware of feelings, b) to differentiate among feelings, c) to create better and deeper relationships, and lastly to have greater respect for one another (Mayer *et al.*, 2001:136,137).

2.4 The role of collaborative pianists in a singing competition

After performing an extensive search on various databases and platforms, I was able to identify little to no research that has been specifically conducted on the role of collaborative pianists in a singing competition. Similarly, not much research has been done on the experiences of répétiteurs specifically while playing in this type of competition. An account of the lived experiences of pianists accompanying singers in this context is therefore a lacuna in the literature and this research aims to help fill this gap. What little research does exist (that I could find) is summarised in this section.

Spillman stated during his interview that there are times when people put the blame on the accompanist for ruining their audition, but he claims that it is more likely to be the opposite. More often than not, the singer comes to the rehearsal with repertoire that the pianist has never seen or played before. The singer then complains by saying the pianist is either too slow, or too fast, or does not stop for breaths (Nix, 1997:40). He consequently recommends that the singer should rather focus on what the people (judges) are looking for in a singer as opposed to blaming the pianist for not playing perfectly (Nix, 1997:41).

While Spillman's experiences describe the audition process for opera singers, as previously mentioned the Belvedere is in fact one huge audition considering that the panel comprises of many artistic administrators who can employ several of the successful singers. During these time singers will work with pianists whom they do not know and the pianists may play repertoire with which they are not familiar. In an interview between John Greer and Mansell *et al.* (1996:19), he describes his own experiences when he says that he plays for many unknown singers and has to cope with unknown repertoire during auditions. He adds that he works with accomplished and motivated singers, which has the advantage that they can resolve any differences of opinion very quickly.

2.4.1 Challenges pianists may face while accompanying singers during a singing competition

Many factors are involved in a music competition such as the Belvedere. McCormick (2009:7-8) emphasises the evaluation and recognition of the technical skills of musicians (in this scenario – singers) as most significant characteristics. According to McCormick, a competition provides a forum for musical performances to be evaluated according to certain criteria of performance. The performers will be challenged and evaluated according to their technical skills and musicality. Audiences, which include the judges,

critics, peers and the musical public, are engaged in different ways to interpret competitors' performances.

Besides the singer, the accompanist is also under constant scrutiny from a diverse group of audience members ranging from the jury, music students, teachers, coaches to important figures in the music fraternity. During the 35th Belvedere Competition, many such people were also in attendance. Cupido (2016:123) mentions that:

In between the singing rounds of this year's competition several well-known South African opera singers, pedagogues and teachers were to be seen in the foyer of the Baxter Theatre Centre in Rondebosch, where the preliminary rounds were held. They were joined by various agents and intendants from all over the world.

The accompanists are therefore under a significant amount of pressure to make sure that their playing is of the highest calibre in this performance setting. In a study on music performance anxiety (MPA) Nicholson *et al.* (2015:445) mention that "performance settings should be conceptualized as a prominent factor in MPA" and that "the performer is often under extreme performance pressure". During this competition both the singer and accompanist face stress due to evaluation and the high stakes of the competition and as a result their overall wellbeing may be affected. The research conducted by Nicholson *et al.* (2015:446) found that "a fear of negative evaluation in general carries over into music performance, contributing to experienced anxiety on stage". According to Cox and Kenardy (cited by Nicholson *et al.*, 2015:441), musicians experience the highest form of MPA during a solo performance, as they are the exclusive focus of negative social evaluation.

Geringer and Sasanfar (2013), Kushniruk (2016) and Sasanfar (2012) state that MPA as induced by negative evaluation, may hinder one's performance. I would like to posit that since these pianists would be playing under extremely stressful situations, it might be possible that they could experience MPA during performance. Michiko Yoshie *et al.* (2008:120,121) assert that MPA is a serious and frequent problem for many musicians and sometimes lead to impaired performances and even to dropouts. However, professional and experienced musicians who are frequently exposed to performance situations experience a decrease in anxiety.

Lisa McCormick (2009:14) scrutinised the fact that, while participating during a competition, sensitive players experience severe pressure, which consequently does more harm than good. While participants strive to obtain the first prize, this can at the

same time develop into an obsession. According to McCormick (2009:14), not only do the non-winners suffer from psychological setbacks, but also do they experience their whole career as being over by saying: “The music competition was not fostering young talent but destroying it, and while it might claim otherwise, it was decidedly not in the service of music”.

The study of Dianna T Kenny (2011:8) shows that the phenomenology of performance anxiety is as similar for early-career musicians as for very highly proficient performers, regardless of repeated success, critical acclaim or being assessed objectively during a successful performance. According to Kenny’s study (2011:12), MPA has an emotional impact on musicians regardless of their age, gender, years of experience, the technical level at which they are performing or musical genre.

Critics question the impartiality of competitions — whether they are always objective and fair according to the judgment of the jury. McCormick (2009:13) refers to the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, where the jury, in spite of endeavouring to be democratic with their results, never really manage to agree on the matter of what it takes for a pianist to demonstrate artistic excellence. She consequently states that the results will always be subjective and that different juries will produce different verdicts. The results, therefore, will not necessarily reward the most commendable artist and the winners in the end are simply those who generated the fewest objections.

2.5 Conclusion

Since this was the first time that this prestigious singing competition was held in South Africa, no group of South African collaborative pianists have ever had the opportunity to accompany singers for this specific competition before. As a result, there is no research on the lived experiences of South African accompanists during the Belvedere Singing Competition. In fact, to my knowledge, research on the lived experiences of professional accompanists during a high-profile singing competition is limited and this research fills this gap in the literature. During this chapter I reviewed literature concerning a) the differentiation between collaborative pianists and accompanists, b) the fundamental skills required of a proficient vocal collaborative pianist and lastly c) the role of collaborative pianists in a singing competition. In the following chapter I will present my findings based on data collected from interviews with the participants.

CHAPTER THREE: FINDINGS

3.1 Introduction

The results from analysing the five interviews will be presented in this chapter to understand how the five participants made sense of their lived experiences. An IPA relies upon an idiographic approach and refers to the meaning that experiences, events and actions hold for the participants. IPA furthermore recognises that the researcher's own conceptions are required at the same time in order to make sense of the personal world being studied through a process of interpretative activity. I shall therefore first give a vignette for each participant, followed by the emerging themes from their interviews, reflecting the phenomenological essence of the participants' perspectives in concise verbatim phrases.

The interviews of each participant were transcribed according to Kumar (2014:319-318), where after the findings were generated. The findings were then submitted to the participants for confirmation and approval. A cross-case analysis suggested by Creswell (2013:251) enabled me to identify similar emerging themes from each case. Corresponding themes that appeared only for two or more participants will not be classified as overall themes but will still be mentioned in order to create a realistic understanding of the phenomenon. I created new labels for four subordinate themes and two corresponding themes. My aim was to look for patterns in the cases to identify the main themes that emerged from each transcription of the in-depth interviews. This procedure will be the same to establish unique emerging themes for each case.

3.2 Mathilda Hornsveld⁴

Mathilda graduated with a BMus (Performers) degree from the University of Pretoria and subsequently joined the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT) in 1980. She worked as répétiteur, coach, backstage conductor and chorus master on all major opera productions for the State Theatre until 1993. During her tenure as Chorus Master from 1997 on an ad hoc basis until the closure of the theatre in 2000, she also appeared as assistant conductor for various musicals, conducting some of the performances every week. During her time at the State Theatre she did two workshop operas, and while in Windhoek she conducted two productions.

She worked with famous conductors like Leo Quayle, Edgar Cree, David Tidboald, Giovanni Bartoli and Alain Lombard, to name a few. These experiences certainly make her an expert in

⁴ Info regarding biographical details via communication with participant

her field as an accompanist and répétiteur. From 1993 to 2018 she worked as a permanent accompanist at Pretoria Boys High School, where she also conducted their biennial musical productions. She retired at the end of 2018. She furthermore worked nationally as a freelance coach, chorus master and adjudicator of choral competitions.

3.2.1 Emerging themes for Mathilda Hornsveld

Mathilda’s interview revealed six emerging themes and 15 related categories regarding her lived experiences. Table 3-1 shows the emergent themes and categories identified in Mathilda’s interview, together with raw data supporting each theme and category.

Table 3-1: Emerging themes for Mathilda Hornsveld

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
I had to know everything	Stress of unknown repertoire	<p><i>It was neither the audience nor the judges that scared me off, but it was all about the repertoire and to give the singer the best that I can.</i></p> <p><i>I eventually had six singers in every round. I was very glad for it. It still meant that I had to know the whole repertoire – which was impossible.</i></p> <p><i>The singers just put the music in front of you and you had to play it. I busked through it the first time and then practised it afterwards and I then had to have more rehearsals with them.</i></p>
	Singers’ impatience at her not knowing all the arias/repertoire	<p><i>I think he was expecting somebody to know the repertoire and I could feel a little bit of impatience that I did not know the aria. By the 2nd and 3^d time we did it, it was fine.</i></p>
Must have insight into the musical needs of a singer	Creating an orchestral sound	<p><i>I really try and sound like an orchestra and think differently about the accompaniment.</i></p> <p><i>You cannot go and play a tremolo like a pianist. It has got to sound like a string tremolo. If there is a horn entry, it has to sound like a horn and not like a pianist playing a note.</i></p> <p><i>Accompanists have to learn to fake the tone.</i></p> <p><i>- because the piano is a percussion instrument and one cannot play the piano normally. You have to use all kinds of things like weight.</i></p>
		<p><i>When you are an experienced répétiteur, you know what a singer needs. He needs to feel secure and it</i></p>

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
		<i>must be like there is an orchestra accompanying them.</i>
	Support the singer emotionally and musically	<p><i>It is all about the singer and to make the singer sound as fantastic as you can. And to really support them as well as you can and not only musically, also talking to them and getting to know them.</i></p> <p><i>You have to know when a singer is going to do what ... but singers cannot count ... Singers need more time, less time, longer notes, shorter notes, rush here.</i></p> <p><i>Singers are so unique, they breathe different places. Even when you know the aria very well, they perform it completely differently even on stage even differently. You have to be very awake and alert. You have got to know them. That is what I always I find with singers, they are so unpredictable.</i></p>
	Being a good sight-reader	<p><i>So a lot of it we only faced the first time we see it. For a répétiteur, that is nothing. An experienced rep can read anything. When I was at the top of my game, I could read anything. That is part of who you are. That is your job.</i></p> <p><i>If you are not a good sight-reader, you can forget about accompaniment.</i></p>
	Knowledge of the operatic repertoire	<i>As an accompanist for singers you have to know the role, know the repertoire. Know how it has been orchestrated.</i>
	Knowledge of languages	<i>Learn the languages: German, French, and Italian. You have got to speak it.</i>
Aspects of the competition were challenging	Singers did not necessarily stay with their pianists through the rounds	<i>Every round you get new singers. It was fairly nerve-racking.</i>
	Limited rehearsal time	<i>Biggest challenge was that we were limited and only allowed to work for 20 minutes per session with each competitor.</i>

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
	Collaborative pianists are not necessarily répétiteurs.	<i>If you work in an international opera house and you are the répétiteur; sure then you would know all these arias which are how they work it. They go to the opera houses and those répétiteurs would play for this international competition. This was a totally different set up than what they are used to.</i>
	Lack of preparation due to personal jobs and not all music was available	<i>We started getting the lists months before the time. But I mean you have a life. I teach here. Plus, not all the music was available.</i>
Empathy for the singers	Not getting through to the next round can upset the singer a lot	<i>I am always sorry for them as their careers depend very much on just getting positive reinforcement and not going through to the next round can be devastating sometimes to a singer.</i>
Received good feedback	Accompaniment sounds like an orchestra	<i>I received feedback from a few people saying that I really sounded like an orchestra and that I am a real répétiteur. To play all the right notes means nothing – you need to sound like an orchestra.</i>
	Real répétiteur	<i>We all live with these insecurities and it was so nice to hear: you are a real répétiteur.</i>
Miscommunications and expectations	Overseas répétiteurs are employed full-time with salaries	<i>Initially the organiser overseas did not want to pay the accompanists-... The overseas organiser is used to having a répétiteur that is employed by the opera houses and it is part of their duties.</i>

During Mathilda’s interview, she explicitly emphasised the stress she experienced before and during the competition: *it was neither the audience nor the judges that scared me off, but it was all about the repertoire and to give the singer the best that I can.* She confirmed that it is imperative for an accompanist to be properly equipped when she highlighted an important collaborative pianistic skill: *if you are not a good sight-reader, you can forget about accompaniment.*

She highlighted two challenges during the competition that she had to deal with, namely the limited rehearsal time: *the biggest challenge was that we were limited and only allowed to work for 20 minutes per session with each competitor, together with the fact that the accompanists did not necessarily accompany the same singer for every round: “every round you get new singers. It was fairly nerve-wracking.*

During this competition some miscommunication and misplaced expectations from the organiser's side were unfortunate. This became clear when she said: *initially the organiser overseas did not want to pay the accompanists. The overseas organiser is used to having a répétiteur that is employed by the opera houses and it is part of their duties.* It was evident that Mathilda recognised that accompanying these singers would have been easier for répétiteurs and therefore collaborative pianists would have to possess the necessary skill set to compensate for the fact that they were not répétiteurs. In spite of everything, people afterwards expressed their appreciation and validation, which was important to her: *I received feedback from a few people saying that I really sounded like an orchestra and that I am a real répétiteur. To play all the right notes means nothing – you need to sound like an orchestra.*

3.3 Laetitia Orlandi⁵

Laetitia passed her BMus and MMus Hons (*cum laude*) degrees through the University of Pretoria. She also played the Performer's Licentiate in Chamber Music; Performer's Licentiate in Vocal Accompaniment and the Performer's Licentiate in Music (*cum laude*) through the University of South Africa. The MMus (Performing Arts) (*cum laude*) followed through the University of Pretoria. She is currently studying towards her PhD degree at the North-West University in Potchefstroom.

She is a professional pianist, accompanist, répétiteur and has been a rehearsal pianist for various opera productions since 1998 in South Africa. As pianist, she played for the Opera Concert with Italian singers Sabrina Enrichi and Maurizio Marchini from St. Mark's Opera Florence and did a concert tour as collaborative pianist with American-based, South African-born singer Dr Christian Bester. She twice appeared as Chairperson of the Shadow Jury for the 5th UNISA National Piano Competition, as well as the 13th UNISA International Piano Competition. She performed as a soloist with the Gauteng Philharmonic Orchestra's production and DVD recording of Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals* for broadcast on kykNET TV in 2016. She was an official piano accompanist for the 1st UNISA National Singing Competition as well as the 5th and the 6th UNISA International Voice Competition.

⁵ Info regarding biographical details via communication with participant

3.3.1 Emerging themes for Laetitia Orlandi

Laetitia’s interview revealed seven emergent themes and 16 categories regarding her experiences during the competition. Table 3-2 shows the emergent themes and related categories identified in Laetitia’s interview, together with raw data supporting each theme.

Table 3-2: Emerging themes for Laetitia Orlandi

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
Very difficult, challenging situations	Limited rehearsal time	<i>No differences of opinion in this situation as there was no time to deal with differences.</i>
	Unknown repertoire	<i>The challenges were with the unknown repertoire.</i>
	Lost in translation	<i>There were one or two singers that had problems speaking and understanding English. Their English was very bad, which made it difficult to communicate.</i>
It was stressful but I try not to get freaked out	Fear of the unknown	<i>The stress was all about the unknown. The ‘unknown’ in all aspects, because I did not know the competition as I have never attended that before.</i>
		<i>One does not know the singers, or the repertoire that you will play.</i> <i>The only way to release stress is when you are assured of what you are doing. In this specific scenario we did not know what we were going to do.</i>
	Most intense experience of stress in career	<i>My biggest challenge here for me was the stress I experienced and not to get freaked out while I am playing and just sit and do my thing.</i> <i>My level of stress was tremendously high. This was my highest level of stress so far in my whole career.</i>
	Overcoming stress leads to gratification and satisfaction	<i>The stress was incredible. If it was not so incredible, the experience of the competition would have not been so intense and it would not have been so gratifying.</i>

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
		<i>The stress was actually the biggest issue during the Belvedere competition, but it gives you a lot of satisfaction.</i>
Good communication	Non-South African singers communicated their needs better.	<i>The thing that stood out the most was that the foreigners knew exactly what they were going to do, what they wanted and how they wanted it to be done.</i>
	Singers need to communicate their musical needs	<i>As long as a singer can tell me exactly what he wants to do, I can be there for him. I have no problem to follow. I also assured them that no matter what happens, I will be there for them and they don't have to worry about it.</i>
Skills required to adapt to the singer	Flexibility and adaptability of the pianist	<i>It is very easy for me to adjust. I am someone who follows and I don't force my ideas onto a singer. You have to be prepared to adapt to the singer. You cannot force your own ideas onto the singer because it is not really that much of a collaborative scenario.</i>
	Being a good sight-reader	<i>I think it must be extremely difficult to accompany if you are not a good sight-reader. Then you are not able to cope in a situation like this at all. But it is impossible to work, especially with singers, if you cannot sight-read very well.</i>
	Being alert and ready to react	<i>You need to try and feel calm and alert and not to be tired in order to be able to read the music and to react in the moment.</i>
Overcoming the impossible	I did not think it was possible	<i>I accomplished things during the Belvedere that I did not think I was capable of. If you would ask me if I can do what I was asked to do during the Belvedere, I would not think that it was all possible. That is how the Belvedere competition felt to me: humanly impossible.</i>
Collegiality	Support from fellow collaborative pianists	<i>I had so much support from all the other four accompanists. This helped me a great deal.</i>

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
	Formation of professional relationships	<i>There was no competition amongst the accompanists and we all formed a very close bond after the competition. That was an amazing experience.</i>
Appreciation of my accompaniment	Expression of gratitude	<p><i>I experienced that they all appreciated my accompaniment and made a point to have a good disposition as they knew that my accompaniment will have a big impact on their performances during the competition.</i></p> <p><i>I think that most of them experienced my accompaniment as being very supportive. Most of them thanked me afterwards.</i></p>
	Acknowledgment of skill	<p><i>One girl especially thanked me for playing the difficult Tchaikovsky as she knew how bad this is and that this is a big challenge, but she needs to sing this to show the judges and agents.</i></p> <p><i>You always would like to feel that you have made a difference. At least you know that you have not ruined their future careers.</i></p>

During my analysis of Laetitia's interview, I found that she experienced a few challenges during the competition when she said: *the challenges were with the unknown repertoire.* She emphasised the anxiety and stress which she experienced when saying: *my level of stress was tremendously high ... this was my highest level of stress so far in my whole career.* She stated that collaborative pianist skills were important in order to deal with this type of competition by saying: *you have to be prepared to adapt to the singer ... you cannot force your ideas onto the singer because it is not really that much of a collaborative scenario.*

She highlighted the importance of good communication between the singer and herself and said: *as long as a singer can tell me exactly what he wants to do, I can be there for him. I have no problem following. I also assured them that no matter what happens, I will be there for them and they don't have to worry about it.*

Laetitia experienced the collegiality between the five accompanists during the course of the competition as very exceptional: *I had so much support from all the other four*

accompanists. This helped me a great deal. She clearly appreciated the feedback from the participants afterwards: I think that most of them experienced my accompaniment as being very supportive. Most of them thanked me afterwards.

3.4 Elna van der Merwe⁶

Elna studied piano and organ at the University of Stellenbosch and passed her BMus Honours degree (*cum laude*). She won several awards and competitions and performed as soloist with the University of Stellenbosch symphony orchestra (USSO) as well as the Cape Town Philharmonic (CPO) orchestra. She has been a full-time accompanist and part-time piano lecturer at the Conservatory of the University of Stellenbosch since 1989 - 2001. She then performed as an ad hoc piano performer and is a sought-after collaborative artist for local and international artists such as Michelle Breedt (mezzo soprano), Douglas Masek (saxophonist), Maria Kliegel (cellist) and Susan Milan (flautist). She resigned from her full-time post as accompanist and part-time piano lecturer at the Conservatory of the University of Stellenbosch in 2001. She thereafter is one of the accompanists for the University of Unisa's International Competitions for singing, and strings (since 1990) and recently also for the flute and clarinet competitions. She has been awarded SAMRO (South African Music Rights Organisation) in gratitude and recognition for excellent service for her accompaniment in the Overseas Scholarship Competitions.

Local instrumentalists and singers whom she regularly accompanies are Zanta Hofmeyr (violinist). They are doing concerts in South Africa and performed once in Malta. She is also an accompanist for South African singers, Zanne Stapelberg (soprano), Niël Rademan (baritone), Maria du Toit and Liesl Stolz (both flautists). She accompanied the Libertas choir on their tours to Belgium and the USA. She has recorded many CD's and DVD's with different artists and has served as adjudicator on several music competition panels.

3.4.1 Emerging themes for Elna van der Merwe

Elna's interview revealed seven emergent themes and 20 categories regarding her competition experience. Table 3-3 shows the unique emergent themes identified in Elna's interview, together with raw data supporting each theme.

⁶ Info regarding biographical details was collected via communication with participant

Table 3-3: Emerging themes for Elna van der Merwe

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
Competition induces stress	Build-up of stress before a competition	<i>Every competition will surely give me some stress. I will lie if I say I am not stressed at all. For the competition like the Belvedere or the International Unisa competition where I played before for winds and singers, I certainly experience a stress factor.</i>
	Did not experience stress because of repertoire	<i>I saw long lists of repertoire that the singers will sing and you don't know who you will accompany. I was excited to know with whom I will work and I was not stressed about what repertoire I had to play.</i>
	Coping with stress	<i>You need to be strong within yourself, because it is a very stressful event and the uncertain factor could add to the other accompanists' stress.</i>
Talented singers	Talent of South African singers and voice teachers	<i>To mention quality and voices [of the singers], I think we have outstanding voice teachers and they don't fall short.</i>
	Foreign singers have more performing opportunities	<i>I think advantages of the Europeans are that they have many more opportunities.</i>
Quantity of repertoire	Repertoire requirements	<i>To have five opera arias ready on a good standard for this competition and you don't know what they will choose cannot be that difficult for this competition. I think what is difficult is the SA National and International singing competitions, where both Albie and I will play. Because there are four rounds of repertoire that they need to know very well prepared and that is an enormous programme.</i>
As an accompanist I must be the perfect 'safety-net' for the vocalist	Tempi requirements	<i>I have a very good tempo memory and I don't have to write the specific tempi down for each one. I do remember things like that.</i>

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
	Be flexible to adjust to singer's needs to provide support	<i>I think as an accompanist, it is actually a given to adjust to the musical needs of the singer. As an accompanist I must be the perfect 'safety-net' for the vocalist with whom I am walking on stage.</i>
		<i>So I am in that person's hands and I want the soloist to accomplish his full potential. Not to force my personal opinion on the soloist. I will never get involved with these kind of arguments.</i>
	Good sight-reading is essential	<i>I don't think you can be an accompanist if you cannot sight-read. If you are an accompanist, you need to in a short time be able to master the music. I think that makes you feel at ease in yourself and that it will have an effect on the singer as well.</i>
	Breathe with the singer	<i>But for me, singing is the ultimate of any musical appearance. Because the singer produces the sound through his body and I therefore (which I also do with instrumentalists) breathe with this person. I try to 'sing' on my instrument, the piano. What makes it different to accompany a singer is that I do breathe more.</i>
	Pianists must learn as much repertoire in different styles as possible	<i>Learn as much repertoire as possible. You need to understand different styles. You need to have a feeling for this and it all comes with experience.</i>
	Secure technique	<i>You need to be able to play everything. Your technique should be infallible. To be ready at all times when you accompany is a skill to have.</i>
Positive feedback, satisfaction, recognition	Singers were grateful and satisfied	<i>The vocalists are very used to répétiteurs and international competitions and they were all very grateful and satisfied. We did a few notes and they were very happy.</i>
	Recognition	<i>You do receive feedback of 'well done and played'. I saw myself as very fortunate to be a part of this competition. The feedback was very positive.</i>

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
	Selection of accompanists for the competition	<i>I think everyone realised that we had to have a lot of guts and to be experienced to be asked to be a part of this big competition, which made this a bit different to other competitions.</i>
	Connotations of the word 'accompanist'	<i>I do have a small problem with the word 'accompanist'. When you say you are an accompanist, immediately points to being a bit inferior and not that important but you are going to perform with this person.</i> <i>While I feel in fact that you make or break the whole performance. I refer to myself not as an accompanist, but as an 'ad hoc pianist'.</i>
Fluency in foreign languages	Coping with not knowing the meaning of arias	<i>I always ask, because I cannot speak French or Italian, the singer when we start (and the time was too short) to tell me exactly what is happening in the aria so that I could help creating that atmosphere.</i>
Challenges of the competition	Uncertainty about repertoire	<i>Although there were arias I did not know, I still managed and controlled all the arias in the short time available.</i> <i>There is no time before the competition to study all the repertoire and I don't know how much the others prepared before and I don't even know what they did.</i>
	Limited rehearsal times	<i>Rehearsal times were very short and could not cover everything.</i>
	Do not get emotionally invested in the singer's success	<i>I have played for so many competitions. I therefore do not imply that this person has not done well or not, that is life and how competitions work. It is always a pity. I do not have any feelings about one person going through and the other not.</i>

By analysing Elna's interview transcripts, I found that although she experienced stress during the competition, she was the only participant who did not experience stress as a result of the unknown repertoire. Also, she indicated that she was able to cope with stress

during the competition: *you need to be strong within yourself, because it is a very stressful event and the uncertain factor could add to the other accompanists' stress.*

She specifically compared the opportunities to prepare for the Belvedere Competition between the foreign singers and the South African singers when she observed: *I think advantages of the Europeans are that they have many more opportunities.* Elna differentiated between the Belvedere Competition and local national competitions by stating: *to have five opera arias ready on a good standard for this competition and you don't know what they will choose cannot be that difficult for this competition. I think what is difficult is the South African national and international singing competitions, where both Albie and I will play. At these competitions there are four rounds of repertoire that need to be very well prepared and that is an enormous program.*

While many different skill areas are regarded as important, she emphasised that collaborative pianists cannot perform without good pianistic skills: *you need to be able to play everything. Your technique should be infallible. To be ready at all times when you accompany is a skill to have.* Another skill that Elna highlighted was the ability to be fluent in foreign languages: *I always ask, because I cannot speak French or Italian, the singer when we start (and the time was too short) to tell me exactly what is happening in the aria so that I could help creating that atmosphere.*

She revealed the most difficult challenges she experienced during the competition: *rehearsal times were very short and could not cover everything.* During the limited rehearsal times they could only cover sections of the arias, while she also had to take note of the different tempi for each singer. She also had limited time to study the repertoire: *Although there were arias I did not know, I still managed and controlled all the arias in the short time available.*

During the interview Elna said that she was satisfied and content to receive recognition and validation from the singers and certainly felt privileged to be asked to be a part of the competition, but she also raised a unique concern [for her] regarding the word 'accompanist': *I do have a small problem with the word 'accompanist'. When you say you are an accompanist, it immediately points to being a bit inferior and not that important, but you are going to perform with this person. While I feel in fact that you make or break the whole performance. I refer to myself not as an accompanist, but as an 'ad hoc pianist'.*

3.5 José Dias⁷

José Dias was born in Fafe (Portugal) and started piano lessons at the age of 12. He travelled to South Africa in 2001 to pursue his musical studies at the University of Stellenbosch, obtaining his BMus Honours (*cum laude*) and specialising in solo piano performance. He continued his studies at the *Hochschule für Musik und Theater* in Zürich (Switzerland). He then took up a permanent position as répétiteur at Cape Town Opera until 2011. His freelancing performing career started in 2011 and he regularly performs in all major concert halls in South Africa, as well as major arts festivals. He is involved as répétiteur, vocal coach and musical director in opera productions, and is still a regular collaborator and artist with the CTO African Angels production, which has been touring internationally since 2013 to popular and critical acclaim.

International performances have taken him to Portugal, Israel, Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland and Germany. Besides appearing as soloist with the major South African orchestras, he is also in demand as accompanist and chamber musician locally and abroad. In 2014 he was one of the official accompanists at the first UNISA International Flute and Clarinet Competition, accompanying the winning candidate, Russian flautist Matvei Demin. He is currently working towards a PhD (Music) in Solo Performance at the University of Cape Town under the supervision of Prof Francois du Toit and Prof Hendrik Hofmeyr. He is currently a part-time lecturer at the UCT College of Music.

3.5.1 Emerging themes for José Dias

Jose's interview revealed five emergent themes and 15 related categories regarding his competition experience. Table 3-4 shows the emergent themes and categories identified in Jose's interview, together with raw data supporting each theme and category.

⁷ Info regarding biographical details was collected via online sources

Table 3-4: Emerging themes for José Dias

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
I found it quite stressful	Stress about unknown repertoire	<p><i>I think the most stressful thing about the Belvedere is that you only know what you have to play on the day before the first round when you get to meet your candidates, because it is all about lottery.</i></p> <p><i>And then the 2nd round, I found quite stressful, you actually have each candidate that you play for, the repertoire ready, as they can ask anything.</i></p>
	Consistent stress about uncertainty	<p><i>It is just having that weight on your shoulders that you don't know what is coming.</i></p> <p><i>That was always that element of the uncertain part to come.</i></p>
Difficult situations	Limited rehearsal and preparation time	<p><i>I would say if there is a challenge in the whole process, it will be the short time.</i></p> <p><i>All I had was that hour of rehearsal and whatever energy I still had, I just read through the most difficult music.</i></p> <p><i>You really want to play the aria as it should be played. If you have not had a chance even to listen to it, it is not nice feeling to go on stage with.</i></p> <p><i>At some point I had to say to myself: 'some things will go wrong and have to go wrong because no one can prepare 20 hours of repertoire and have them all in recording standard.'</i></p>
	Quantity of arias	<p><i>There was some Benjamin Britten that I never played before, for instance, and Strauss that is always difficult to play, especially when you have never looked at it. It is difficult to read, it is difficult to know the tempi changes and even some bel canto like Rossini things that are not standard.</i></p> <p><i>But there was plenty of music that I have never heard or have played before.</i></p>

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
		<p><i>Now five arias for one person are fine, but if you have six people to play in one hour and each of them has five arias, then it is 30 or 40 arias. I think that was quite special for this competition, as I don't think there are many others that work like that.</i></p>
	<p>Singers did not necessarily stay with the same accompanists</p>	<p><i>The thing about the Belvedere is that they swapped everybody around the whole time and I played for her in the 1st round and did not get to play for her in the 2nd round again and I did not know how it went.</i></p>
Skills required to do my job	<p>Fluency in languages</p>	<p><i>There were no communication issues. I speak a lot of languages and I could all of the time speak in their language which made it very easier and pleasant for everybody. I spoke Italian, Spanish, French, German and English. That helps making the rehearsals more pleasant for everyone as they feel that they could communicate with me.</i></p> <p><i>I actually understand what they say. That allows me to find the reason behind how the music sound easier and quicker.</i></p>
	<p>Being a good sight-reader</p>	<p><i>I don't think you can be an accompanist in the broad sense of the word, if you can't read music like that.</i></p> <p><i>You have never seen the music before. Not just be able to play the notes, but be able to make music with notes that you just seen.</i></p>
	<p>Be flexible and quick to react to the singer's needs</p>	<p><i>I react quite quickly to people and I don't think I easily make someone completely uncomfortable in terms of tempi or giving them space to breath.</i></p>

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
	Experience	<p><i>If it is specifically a vocal competition, you have to have experience. Singers function with the breaths. So you cannot ever think that things are going the way it was planned. You learn how to make music with what is happening in the moment. If I can feel that this person is going to need me to push through this phrase, because I can hear this in the vibrato and sound, as it is not something that I consciously think while we are playing, but it comes from having it done for a while.</i></p>
	Knowledge of repertoire	<p><i>Know the repertoire, know the repertoire.</i></p>
	Creating an orchestral sound	<p><i>But I always try to play as orchestrally as I can so that they feel like the sound is carrying them, because I think they can then surf on the sound and not to feel exposed.</i></p> <p><i>As I say it is creating the sound of an orchestra with what you see in front of you and with the specific voice you have in front of you.</i></p> <p><i>Also to play with colour in music. That is for a vocal accompanist absolutely essential. If you don't have that as a skill, you have to do a lot of homework.</i></p>
Appreciation, gratitude and recognition	Singers expressed their appreciation	<p><i>They were all happy. They were all friendly with me before and after the performances.</i></p>
	Recognition of accompanist's skills	<p><i>If I go off stage and people say that it sounded like they were rehearsing for ever, then I feel proud and know that I did what my job was, to create a polished performance out of 20 minutes' rehearsal. That is the biggest compliment I can hope for as an accompanist.</i></p>
	Gratitude to be a part of the competition	<p><i>I just feel very privileged to have been a part of something like this.</i></p>

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
Empathy and support	Support for singer's disappointment	<p><i>I remembered just talking to them by saying the usual thing 'you did great' and 'it is more about people listening and not about you'.</i></p> <p><i>The three singers that I played for ended up in the three places and they were all phenomenally great singers. So I do feel disappointed.</i></p>

José, a sought-after accompanist for international and national competitions in South-Africa, expressed his stress during the competition as he said: *I think the most stressful thing about the Belvedere is that you only know what you have to play on the day before the first round when you get to meet your candidates, because it is all about lottery.*

Vital abilities to be able to function in such a high-calibre competition certainly include collaborative skills: *There were no communication issues. I speak a lot of languages and I could all of the time speak in their language which made it very easier and pleasant for everybody. I spoke Italian, Spanish, French, German and English. That helps making the rehearsals more pleasant for everyone as they feel that they could communicate with me.*

He disclosed that he always feels comfortable and secure when he is well prepared before any concert/competition and he therefore experienced the limited rehearsal and preparation time as a big challenge and concern: *you really want to play the aria as it should be played. If you have not had a chance even to listen to it, it is not a nice feeling to go on stage with.* The other challenge that concerned him was not only the number of arias, but also the difficulty of arias, for instance, Benjamin Britten and Strauss that he never played before. Although he could sight-read easily, he felt uncomfortable because he was not familiar with the tempo changes nor did he have sufficient knowledge about the arias.

When speaking about recognition and validation, he said: *If I go off stage and people say that it sounded like they were rehearsing for ever, then I feel proud and know that I did what my job was, to create a polished performance out of 20 minutes' rehearsal. That is the biggest compliment I can hope for as an accompanist.*

His ability to show empathy and support towards the singers – especially those who did not make it to the finals – stood out when he said: *I remembered just talking to them by saying the usual thing ‘you did great’ and ‘it is more about people listening and not about you’.*

3.6 Albie van Schalkwyk⁸

Albie van Schalkwyk completed his BMus degree at the University of Cape Town under the tutelage of Lamar Crowson. After that he spent five years in London studying with Geoffrey Parsons, Gwenneth Pryor and Martino Tirimo. During this period, he won the UNISA Overseas Scholarship as well as first prize in the SABC Music Prize Piano Competition. Then he returned to South Africa and took up a position as the official accompanist and producer at the SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) in Cape Town. He was appointed Associate Professor in Piano and Chamber Music at the College of Music, UCT in 2009.

He performs as soloist with South African orchestras, solo recitals and is involved in studio recordings and often collaborates with national and international singers as well as instrumentalists in concerts. Albie was on the staff of the summer school of the International *Neuberg Kulturtag* in Austria from 1988-2011 and has taught chamber music at the Franschhoek Chamber Music Workshops and at the Stellenbosch International Chamber Music Festivals. He is a presenter of master classes for singers and accompanists at several South African Universities.

His interest in vocal music and the art song in particular has led to many fulfilling concert partnerships with singers, culminating in the formation of the Songmakers’ Guild in 1994 – a Cape Town society which provides a regular platform for performers in the field of the art song. He worked as répétiteur for the Vocal Department of the Mozarteum University in Salzburg, Austria (2002/3). He has been a regular panel member of several South African competitions, including the Chamber Music Singing Competition in Stellenbosch, the UNISA National Piano Competition and the SAMRO National Singing Competition. He was the winner of the 2009 Hubert Rupert Prize, awarded by the South African Academy of Arts and Sciences, for his contribution to ensemble playing and teaching over the past 30 years. He completed his PhD in music at the University of the Free State in 2012.

⁸ Info regarding biographical details was collected via online sources

3.6.1 Emerging themes for Albie van Schalkwyk

Albie's interview revealed five emergent themes and 13 related categories regarding his competition experiences. Table 3-5 shows the emergent themes and categories identified in Albie's interview, together with raw data supporting each theme and category.

Table 3-5: Emerging themes for Albie van Schalkwyk

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
We all just wanted to run away	Uncertainty about repertoire	<p><i>...[Y]ou realise that nobody has to commit to a final programme until the day of registration. This means we had no idea! They can sing anything from any opera.</i></p> <p><i>They can literally choose the Russian repertoire that we don't really know, or the Italian and Mozart opera.</i></p> <p><i>The terrifying situation with the first round you probably play something you have not seen before, ever, until two days before and then rehearse it with somebody who maybe also does not know that work.</i></p>
	Insecurities about the unknown	<p><i>That insecurity that we all felt with what is going to happen and what are they going to ask makes you very hysterical in the end.</i></p> <p><i>You cannot do anything about that insecurity. You can just go and get through it. So it was horrible.</i></p>
	Extensive repertoire list	<p><i>It was impossible because where do you start with 200 arias per voice. We all just wanted to run away.</i></p>
	Responsibility for others	<p><i>I have talked these four colleagues into doing this, so I felt terrible and felt responsible for their stress.</i></p>

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
None of the pianists is a full-time répétiteur	Insufficient rehearsal time	<p><i>When you say yes to do something like this, you assume that the way the repertoire is organised will be such, it will be manageable and there will be rehearsal time and that you can work on it, because that is the way we were used to.</i></p> <p><i>You have 10 min to rehearse the first round and 10 minutes to rehearse the two arias of the second round.</i></p> <p><i>Worst was the second round when you actually had to go through all the other four arias within 10 minutes.</i></p>
	Miscommunication and expectations of the accompanists	<p><i>That was the other thing what we wanted to make clear to the organisers is that we are not five opera répétiteurs but we have other jobs and none of us has worked in an opera house in that sense.</i></p>
Pianists must have enough experience and must play well	Knowledge of the operatic genres and various styles	<p><i>If you want to work with singers, learn as much of the operatic repertoire that you can. Play for singing teachers, because the kind of insight that you have when you play 20 arias, it's not the same as when you play 200 arias.</i></p> <p><i>When you have enough experience accompanying singers and developed a certain amount of insight into different styles, you learn what the variables are in a specific style or with a specific composer.</i></p>
	Being flexible and understanding the needs of a singer	<p><i>If you are a flexible musician and know enough about singer's technical requirements, you can adjust quickly to what a singer wants.</i></p> <p><i>If you have to play the same aria with three different singers, on which you might end up do, on the same day or within the same hour, you have to remember which one needed what.</i></p> <p><i>It has to do with how quick I was able to understand what they needed, whether it was a sight-read or a well-known aria and that is really what it is all about.</i></p>

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
	Bringing out the hidden details of an orchestral reduction	<p><i>So you have to be able to play well technically, but you have to have an insight into what you see in front of you and the elements of it.</i></p> <p><i>You have to fish out what is important and what not. So it is a way of seeing a lot of detail and understanding how to organize it, that I think is important.</i></p>
	Being a good sight-reader	<p><i>If you can sight-read, music becomes available to you more quickly.</i></p> <p><i>So yes, the ability to sight-read is a very important skill, still it makes things more comfortable and faster. You can work better.</i></p>
	Knowledge of languages	<p><i>You must like the word and what it can say. Working with opera arias and understand dramatic situations as they happen in opera. If you don't understand them and what the music has to do with that and how to make it work, you will miss the point.</i></p> <p><i>That means knowledge of languages and different types of repertoire.</i></p> <p><i>If you are not interested in languages and their sounds – I should say the word also implies foreign languages – and to know them, for instance their colour and what they are saying.</i></p>
Collegiality	Support from colleagues	<p><i>It helps to talk with our colleagues. It is the camaraderie that came out strongly that helped a lot, because we were all in the same situation.</i></p>

Emerging Themes	Categories	Raw Data
Appreciation and Validation	Audience appreciates the contribution of the accompanists	<p><i>The singers directly in the rehearsal, the moment you can see that they are relaxed because they know what they need to do – that is validation. Validation comes from the direct colleagues afterwards because we don't hear each other playing.</i></p> <p><i>People who know us as performers will come afterwards and say 'I like that girl's aria and what you did there'. So they did not only listen to the singer but to the piece of music which I always try and aim for.</i></p> <p><i>The Musical Society of Cape Town and the people who were there afterwards, liked what we did and our contribution.</i></p>

In Albie's interview I specifically encountered a different kind of stress than for the other four accompanists. The difference in stress for him stems from the fact that he had invited the four accompanists to take part and so he felt responsible for them: *I talked these four colleagues into doing this, so I felt terrible and felt responsible for their stress.*

Another distinctive challenge/concern that he mentioned during his interview was the miscommunication to the accompanists and the expectations of the organizers: *that was the other thing what we wanted to make clear to the organizers is that we are not five opera répétiteurs but we have other jobs and none of us has worked in an opera house in that sense.*

Albie added to the fact that they are not full-time répétiteurs by saying: *if you want to work with singers, learn as much of the operatic repertoire that you can. Play for singing teachers, because the kind of insight that you have when you play 20 arias, it's not the same as when you play 200 arias.*

He speaks with great appreciation when he points out: *it helps to talk with our colleagues. It is the camaraderie that came out strongly that helped a lot, because we were all in the same situation.*

He clearly appreciated validation from: *the singers directly in the rehearsal, the moment you can see that they are relaxed, because they know what they need to do – that is*

validation. Validation comes from the direct colleagues afterwards because we don't hear each other playing. People who know us as performers will come afterwards and say 'I like that girl's aria and what you did there'. So they did not only listen to the singer, but to the piece of music which I always try and aim for.

3.7 Cross-case analysis: Superordinate themes

After analysing the five individual interviews, I identified further patterns in the emergent themes and group them into superordinate themes. I spent some time examining the subordinate themes to look for correlations that would include similarities and differences between them. The first four superordinate themes were discussed by all five participants, while only two participants talked about the last two superordinate themes. The superordinate themes that emerged from the five participants' interviews are listed in Table 3-6.

Table 3-6: Superordinate themes

Corresponding Emergent Themes	Superordinate Themes	Raw Data
I had to know everything	Experiencing anxiety and stress	<p>Mathilda: <i>It was neither the audience nor the judges that scared me off, but it was all about the repertoire and to give the singer the best that I can.</i></p>
It was stressful but I try not to get freaked out		<p>Laetitia: <i>My level of stress was tremendously high. This was my highest level of stress so far in my whole career.</i></p>
Competition induces stress		<p>Elna: <i>Every competition surely gives me some stress. For the competition like the Belvedere or the International Unisa Competition where I played before for winds and singers, I certainly experienced a stress factor.</i></p>
I found it quite stressful		<p>José: <i>I think the most stressful thing about the Belvedere is that you only know what you have to play on the day before the first round when you get to meet your candidates, because it is all about lottery.</i></p>

Corresponding Emergent Themes	Superordinate Themes	Raw Data
We all just wanted to run away		<p>Albie: <i>That insecurity that we all felt what is going to happen and what are they going to ask makes you very hysterical in the end.</i></p>
<p>Must have insight into the musical needs of a singer</p> <p>Skills required to adapt to the singer</p>	Skill requirements of collaborative pianist	<p>Mathilda: <i>I really try and sound like an orchestra and think differently about the accompaniment.</i></p> <p>Laetitia: <i>You have to be prepared to adapt to the singer. You cannot force your own ideas onto the singer because it is not really that much of a collaborative scenario.</i></p>
<p>As an accompanist I must be the perfect 'safety-net' for the vocalist</p> <p>Skills required to do my job</p> <p>Pianists must have enough experience and must play well</p>		<p>Elna: <i>I think as an accompanist, it is actually a given to adjust to the musical needs of the singer. As an accompanist I must be the perfect 'safety-net' for the vocalist with whom I am walking on stage.</i></p> <p>José: <i>There were no communication issues. I speak a lot of languages and I could all of the time speak in their language which made it very easier and pleasant for everybody. I spoke Italian, Spanish, French, German and English. That helps making the rehearsals more pleasant for everyone as they feel that they could communicate with me.</i></p> <p>Albie: <i>So you have to be able to play well technically, but you have to have an insight into what you see in front of you and the elements of it. You have to fish out what is important and what not. So it is a way of seeing a lot of detail and understand how to organize it, that I think is important.</i></p>

Corresponding Emergent Themes	Superordinate Themes	Raw Data
<p>Aspects of the competition were challenging</p> <p>Very difficult challenging situations</p> <p>Challenges of the competition</p>	<p>Challenging aspects of the Competition</p>	<p>Mathilda: <i>If you work in an international opera house and you are the répétiteur, sure then you would know all these arias which is how they work it. They go to the opera houses and those répétiteurs would play for this international competition. This was a totally different set up than what they are used to.</i></p> <p>Laetitia: <i>The challenges were with the unknown repertoire.</i></p> <p>Elna: <i>Rehearsal times were very short and could not cover everything.</i></p>
<p>Difficult situations</p> <p>None of the pianists are full time répétiteurs</p>		<p>José: <i>Now five arias for one person are fine, but if you have six people to play in one hour and each of them has five arias, then it is 30 or 40 arias. I think that was quite special for this competition as I don't think there are many others that work like that.</i></p> <p>Albie: <i>That was the other thing we wanted to make clear to the organizers is that we are not five opera répétiteurs, but we have other jobs and none of us has worked in an opera house in that sense.</i></p>
<p>Received good feedback</p> <p>Appreciation of my accompaniment</p>	<p>Appreciation and validation</p>	<p>Mathilda: <i>I received feedback from a few people saying that I really sounded like an orchestra and that I am a real répétiteur. To play all the right notes means nothing – you need to sound like an orchestra.</i></p> <p>Laetitia: <i>I experienced that they all appreciated my accompaniment and made a point to have a good disposition as they knew that my accompaniment will have a big impact on their performances during the competition.</i></p>

Corresponding Emergent Themes	Superordinate Themes	Raw Data
Positive feedback, satisfaction, recognition		Elna: <i>You do receive feedback of 'well done and played'. I saw myself as very fortunate to be a part of this competition. The feedback was very positive.</i>
Appreciation, gratitude and recognition		José: <i>If I go off stage and people say that it sounded like they were rehearsing for ever, then I feel proud and know that I did what my job was, to create a polished performance out of 20 minutes rehearsal. That is the biggest compliment I can hope for as an accompanist.</i>
Validation		Albie: <i>The singers directly in the rehearsal, the moment you can see that they are relaxed because they know what they need to do – that is validation.</i> <i>Validation comes from the direct colleagues afterwards because we don't hear each other playing. People who know us as performers will come afterwards and say: 'I like that girl's aria and what you did there'. So they did not only listen to the singer but to the piece of music which I always try and aim for.</i>

The corresponding themes that emerged from the participants' interviews are listed in Table 3-7.

Table 3-7: Corresponding themes

Corresponding Emergent Themes	Corresponding Themes	Raw Data
Empathy for singers	Empathy for singers	Mathilda: <i>I am always sorry for them as their careers depend very much on just getting positive reinforcement and not going through to the next round can be devastating sometimes to a singer.</i>

Corresponding Emergent Themes	Corresponding Themes	Raw Data
Empathy and support		Jose: <i>I remembered just talking to them by saying the usual thing 'you did great' and 'it is more about people listening and not about you'.</i>
Collegiality	Collegiality	Laetitia: <i>I had so much support from all the other four accompanists. This helped me a great deal.</i>
Camaraderie		Albie: <i>It helps to talk with our colleagues. It is the camaraderie that came out strongly that helped a lot, because we were all in the same situation.</i>

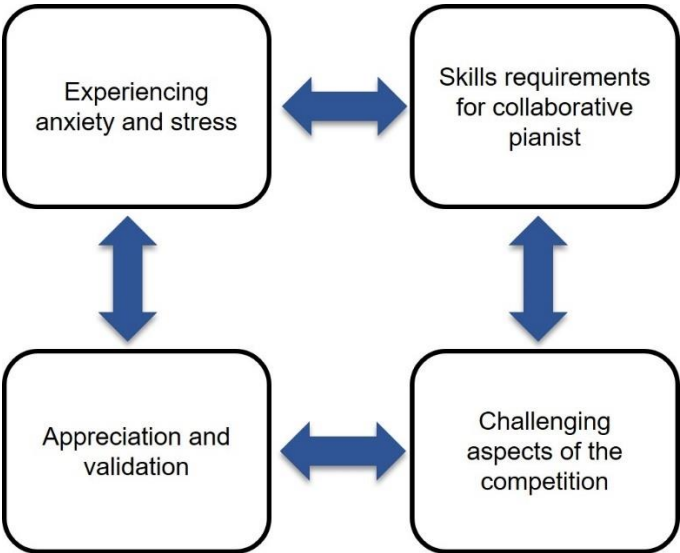


Figure 3-1: The four superordinate themes

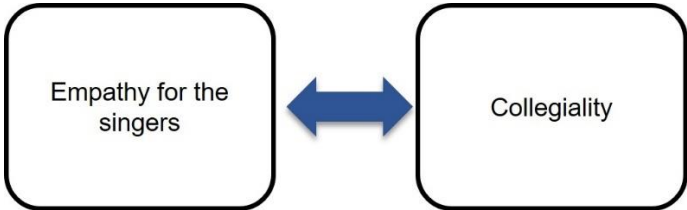


Figure 3-2: The two corresponding themes

I started with the comparisons between the cases after analysing the individual cases. Out of the corresponding emergent themes, six emerging superordinate themes developed that clearly made a definite statement to show the participants' experience during the course of the competition as shown in Figure 3-3.

Superordinate theme 1: Experiencing anxiety and stress

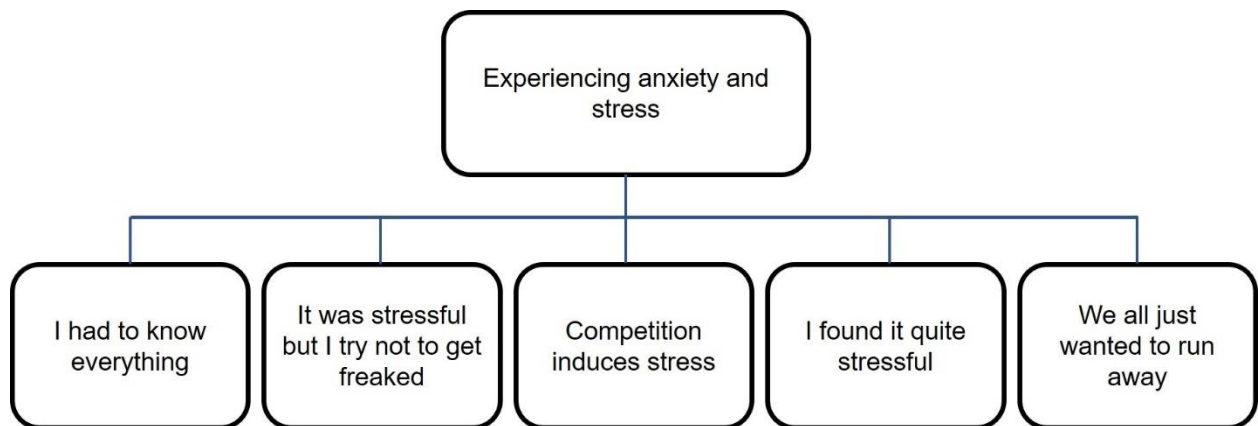


Figure 3-3: The emerging themes and categories associated with superordinate theme 1

Although stress was a common experience for all five participants, it was different for each of them. A number of accompanists emphasised the unknown repertoire and the huge number of arias they had to prepare.

Mathilda: *The singers just put the music in front of you and you had to play it.*

Laetitia: *The challenges were with the unknown repertoire.*

José: *It is just having that weight on your shoulders that you don't know what is coming.*

Albie: *It was impossible because where do you start with 200 arias per voice. We all just wanted to run away.*

The insecurities left Albie with an overwhelming feeling of stress because he felt responsible for the stress of the other four accompanists:

I talked these four colleagues into doing this, so I felt terrible and felt responsible for their stress.

The uncertainties of what to expect was a common feeling for Laetitia, José and Albie. Laetitia expressed her insecurity by saying:

One does not know the singers or the repertoire that you will play.

José said: *It was always that element of the uncertain part to come.*

Albie's feeling was that he could not do anything about that insecurity because:

You can just go and get through it. So it was horrible.

Laetitia, on the one hand, experienced incredibly high levels of stress during this competition, but also experienced positivity as she felt that she has grown as an accompanist by being a part of this competition:

If it was not so incredible, the experience of the competition would have not been so intense and it would not have been so gratifying.

Elna reported that she always experiences stress before any kind of competition, but with a different view than the other four participants' fear of unknown repertoire and singers:

I was excited to know with whom I will work and I was not stressed about what repertoire I had to play.

To be able to cope with her stress, she added: *You need to be strong within yourself.*

The cross-case analysis revealed that anxiety and stress were a common experience for all the participants, but that each one of them dealt with it in their own particular way and on different levels.

As Mathilda reflects on her stress, she highlights the vast quantity of repertoire and that she did not have enough time to practise and prepare before the competition. As an accomplished accompanist, she normally prefers to be well prepared before any concert/competition in order to give her best to the soloists. However, in the Belvedere Competition she sometimes had to sight-read through some unknown arias during the limited rehearsal time. Her strong sight-reading ability (in this scenario) stood her in good stead to play through the unknown repertoire.

Laetitia's heightened stress was linked to three main issues: a) the unknown repertoire, b) the unfamiliar Belvedere Competition in which she participated for the first time, and c) the unknown

singers and their way of collaborating. Although she declared that the Belvedere Competition was her biggest stress that she experienced, she also turned it into a positive outcome by noting how she grew as an accompanist, which left her feeling gratified.

Elna said that she always experiences stress before playing for any competition, but she experienced stress very differently in this competition particularly in comparison with the other four accompanists. The uncertainty of working with new singers and repertoire did not induce stress in her case; in fact she was excited and looked forward to seeing who she would accompany, despite the long list of repertoire. So in Elna's situation her stress was not induced by specific circumstances related to the competition, which affected the other participants, but rather it was a general sense of anxiety she experiences before playing for any competition.

José linked his stress to the fact that he did not know which arias he would play until the first and second rounds. He describes his uncertainty as a heavy weight that he carried on his shoulders through the competition.

Albie's findings firstly indicated that the extensive repertoire list and insufficient rehearsal times contributed to his stress. His insecurities were further caused by the fact that the singers had to decide on their final programme only on the registration day, which meant that the accompanists had to be prepared to play the entire repertoire list. He underlined his insecurity by saying that they all just wanted to run away. Albie stated that he was the one who talked the other four accompanists into participating and therefore felt responsible for their stress as well. The fact that the organizers expected the accompanists engaged for the competition to be full-time répétiteurs, as in opera houses in Europe, also contributed to their stress. This is because full-time répétiteurs in Europe are familiar with the repertoire in a much more engaged way than pianists not working in that environment.

Even though playing for an event such as the international competition on the scale of the Belvedere was a first experience for each of them, all participants stated that they managed stress through personal motivation and positive reinforcement.

Superordinate theme 2: Skills requirements for collaborative pianists

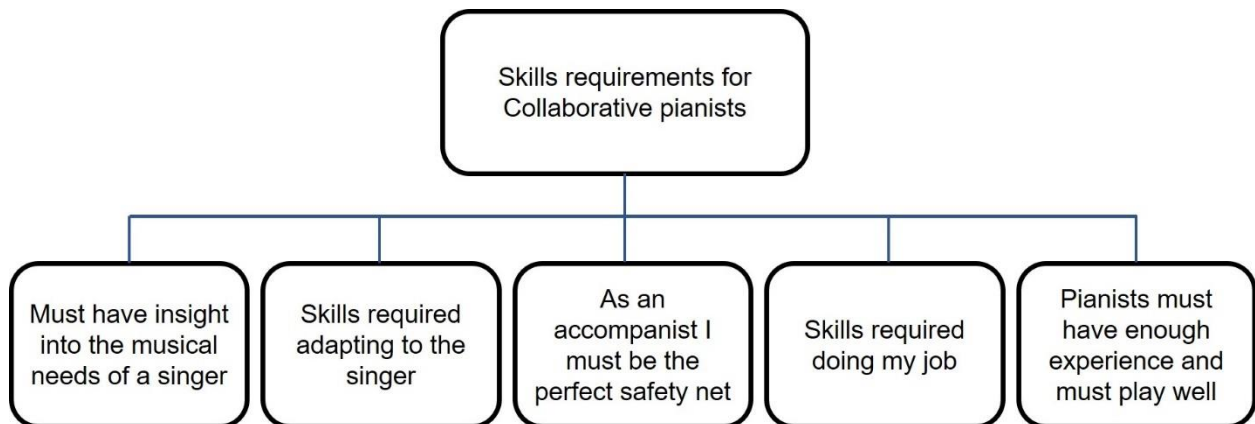


Figure 3-4: The emerging themes and categories associated with superordinate theme 2

When reflecting on collaborative skills requirements, all the participants in this study agreed about the significance of sight-reading in the life of an accompanist and a pianist.

Mathilda: *If you are not a good sight-reader, you can forget about accompaniment.*

Laetitia: *But it is impossible to work, especially with singers if you cannot sight-read very well.*

Elna: *I don't think you can be an accompanist if you cannot sight-read. If you are an accompanist, you need to, in a short time, be able to master the music. I think that makes you feel at ease in yourself and that will have an effect on the singer as well.*

José: *I don't think you can be an accompanist in the broad sense of the word, if you can't read music like that.*

Albie: *So yes, the ability to sight-read is a very important skill, still it makes things more comfortable and faster. You can work better.*

The statements from the five participants highlighted the significance of sight-reading and they were all in agreement on how much a vocal accompanist especially can benefit from being able to sight-read well.

In addition to having sight-read skills, two of the participants talked enthusiastically about the ability and importance to sound like an orchestra while accompanying a singer. Because the piano is a percussion instrument, the pianist needs to use several skills to support the singer on the assumption that it is a whole orchestra that is accompanying them.

Mathilda: *When you are an experienced répétiteur, you know what a singer needs. He needs to feel secure and it must be like there is an orchestra accompanying them.*

José: *But I always try to play as orchestrally as I can so that they feel like the sound is carrying them, because I think they can then surf on the sound and not to feel exposed”.*

It is evident that both of these participants accompany singers with the intention to play with colour and to produce an orchestral sound to fully support the singer at their best.

Four of the participants talked about the need to show flexibility and adaptability towards the singer:

Laetitia: *It is very easy for me to adjust. I am someone that follows and I don't force my ideas onto a singer.*

Elna: *So I am in that person's hands and I want the soloist to accomplish his full potential. Not to force my personal opinion on the soloist. I will never get involved with these arguments.*

José: *I react quite quickly to people and I don't think I easily make someone completely uncomfortable in terms of tempi or giving them space to breath.*

Albie: *If you are a flexible musician and know enough about the singer's technical requirements, you can adjust quickly to what a singer wants.*

Laetitia and Elna agreed that they never forced their ideas or opinions onto the singer, not only because there was limited rehearsal time during this competition, but also because they have respect for the singer's choice on how he/she wanted to interpret the arias.

Mathilda, on the other hand, supported the singers emotionally and musically:

Mathilda: *It was all about the singer and to make the singer sound as fantastic as you can. And to really support them as well as you can and not only musically, also talking to them and getting to know them.*

The participants seemed to value and share many thoughts on collaborative skills. Four participants addressed knowledge of operatic repertoire as an important skill:

Mathilda: *As an accompanist for a singer you have to know the role, know the repertoire. Know how it has been orchestrated.*

Elna: *Learn as much repertoire as possible. You need to understand different styles. You need to have a feeling for this and it all comes with experience”.*

José: *Know the repertoire, know the repertoire.*

Albie: *If you want to work with singers, learn as much of the operatic repertoire what you can. Play for singing teachers because the kind of insight that you have when you play 20 arias is not the same as when you play 200 arias.*

To be a successful accompanist, the participants highlighted the importance of knowing the repertoire, learning as much repertoire as possible, gaining as much experience as possible, and understanding the different styles of each aria. They furthermore emphasised the importance of studying the orchestral parts of arias in order to produce an orchestral sound and to form a solid platform for the singer to perform at her/his best.

Three participants explained that smooth communication between the accompanist and vocalist makes collaboration much easier if you know the languages. They stated:

Mathilda: *Learn the languages: German, French and Italian. You have got to speak it.*

José: *I actually understand what they say. That allows me to find the reason behind how the music sound easier and quicker.*

Albie: *If you are not interested in languages and their sounds – I should say the word also implies foreign languages – and to know them, for instance their colour and what they are saying.*

An interest in, as well as fluency and knowledge of, different languages are fundamental components in the communication between the accompanist and the singer.

Albie addressed a remarkable skill when he talked about orchestral reductions and the need to bring out the hidden details.

Albie: *You have to fish out what is important and what not. So it is a way of seeing a lot of detail and understand how to organize it that I think is important.*

He added that the importance of playing well technically will enhance the ability to select the important elements in orchestral reductions.

Three unique skills were emphasised by Elna:

To have a secure technique: *You need to be able to play everything. Your technique should be infallible. To be ready at all times when you accompany, is a skill to have;*

To breathe with the singer: *But for me, singing is the ultimate of any musical appearance. Because the singer produces the sound through his body and I therefore (which I also do with instrumentalists) breathe with this person. I try to 'sing' on my instrument, the piano;*

To remember tempi requirements: *I have a very good tempo memory and I don't have to write the specific tempi down for each one. I do remember things like that.*

The cross-case analysis revealed that it is indispensable for an accompanist (especially one accompanying singers) to constantly work on different collaborative skills to enable them to create the vital support for the singer in order to give his/her best performance on stage. All of the participants mentioned valuable collaborative skills requirements that they either already integrated into their playing or know that they are important in the daily collaboration with singers.

When reflecting on the significant skills, sight-reading was the most vital skill to develop, according to the participants. Other vital skills were indicated: to sound like an orchestra, to play orchestral reductions, to show emotional support, to be flexible and to be able to adapt to the singer. An accompanist will benefit from having knowledge of operatic repertoire in different styles and to have a working knowledge in a number of other languages. José mentioned that it is especially advantageous to speak the languages to facilitate rehearsals and to make the process more pleasant in terms of communication. An indispensable pianistic technique is to breathe with the singer, while remembering tempi requirements was also identified by the participants as essential.

Superordinate theme 3: Challenging aspects of the Competition

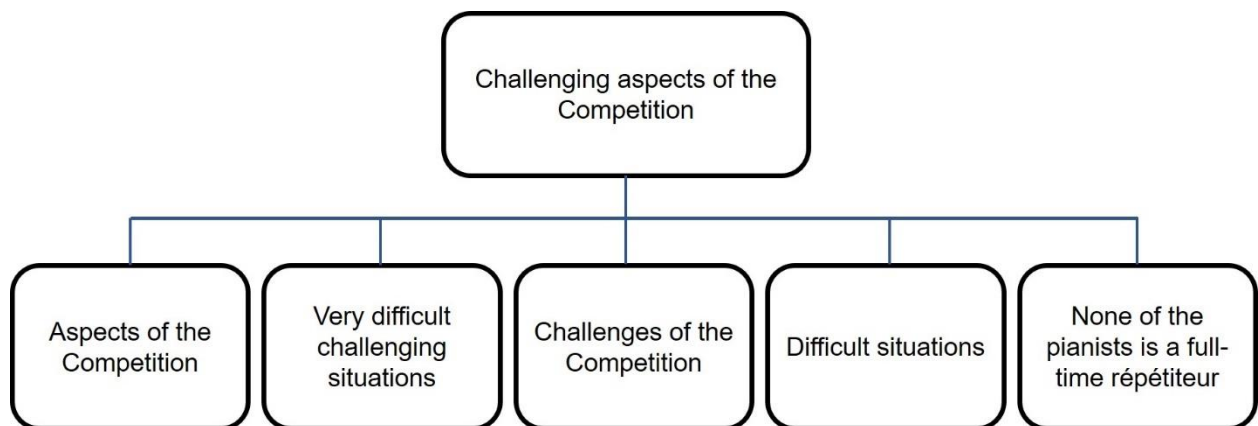


Figure 3-5: The emerging themes and categories associated with superordinate theme 3

One of the emerging themes that was most prominent and was mentioned by all five participants was the issue of limited rehearsal time.

When addressing the challenges of this competition, the participants stressed the challenges to keep rehearsals within the time limit:

Mathilda: *Biggest challenge was that we were limited and only allowed to work for 20 minutes per session with each competitor.*

Elna: *Rehearsal times were very short and could not cover everything.*

Albie: *Worst was the 2nd round when you actually had to go through all the other four arias within 10 minutes.*

Laetitia: *No differences of opinion in this situation as there was not any time to have any differences at all.*

José: *At some point I had to say to myself: 'something will go wrong and have to go wrong because no one can prepare 20 hours of repertoire and have them all at recording standard'.*

Not only was the time limit problematic, but the number of arias had a big impact on José, which he added to his list of challenges:

José: *There was some Benjamin Britten that I never played before, for instance, and Strauss that is always difficult to play, especially when you have never looked at*

it. It is difficult to read, it is difficult to know the tempi changes and even some bel canto like Rossini things that are not standard. But there was plenty of music that I have never heard or have played before.

Cross-case analysis showed that Mathilda's limited time prevented her from working in detail on basic stylistic elements and breathing and tempi. By Laetitia's saying: *there were no difference of opinion in this situation*, she meant that when she works with singers with sufficient rehearsal time, she will discuss artistic choices and interpretation, but this was not possible in this situation because of limited rehearsal time. José highlighted the importance of listening to recordings of unknown repertoire, which (in this scenario) was difficult to do, as he was left feeling very tired after a long competition day and that he only had enough energy left to play through some of the most difficult music during the evening before the next day's round. As he put it: *some things will go wrong and have to go wrong*, it is that he anticipated that something will go wrong because of the limited rehearsal and preparation time. Albie's view on the repertoire for competitions included the point that when he plays for competitions, the repertoire is generally manageable and organized with proper rehearsal and preparation time – unlike the Belvedere Competition. Elna, regardless of the unknown repertoire and limited rehearsal time, felt confident enough to manage and control all the arias in the short time available. However, she stated that the limited rehearsal time made it very difficult to work in detail on all the arias.

A different challenging situation for Laetitia was that she at times felt lost in translation:

Laetitia: *There were one or two singers that had problems speaking and understanding English. Their English was very bad which made it difficult to communicate”.*

Mathilda and José mentioned two significant challenges that hindered them from engaging in quality collaboration as they had to play for different singers during each round:

Mathilda: *Every round you get new singers. It was fairly nerve-wracking.*

José: *Now five arias for one person are fine, but if you have six people to play in one hour and each of them has five arias, then it is 30 or 40 arias. I think that was quite special for this competition, as I don't think there are many others that work like that.*

Both Mathilda's and José's reflections in these statements showed that it was not an easy task to accompany different singers each time. That highlights the fact that the Belvedere Competition was different from any other competition that they had played before.

The following participants stressed a very valid point when they refer to the unknown repertoire as well as the huge number of arias they had to accompany.

Mathilda: *If you work in an international opera house and you are the répétiteur, sure, then you would know all these arias which are how they work it. They go to the opera houses and those répétiteurs would play for this international competition. This was a totally different set up to what they are used to.*

Mathilda: *We started getting the lists months before the time. But I mean you have a life. I teach here. Plus, not all the music was available.*

Albie: *That was the other thing what we wanted to make clear to the organizers is that we are not five opera répétiteurs, but we have other jobs and none of us has worked in an opera house in that sense.*

Laetitia: *The challenges were with the unknown repertoire.*

Elna: *Although there were arias I did not know, I still managed and controlled all the arias in the short time available. There was no time before the competition to study all the repertoire and I don't know how much the others prepared before or what they did.*

The cross-case analysis showed that both Mathilda and Albie identified the importance of the role that a full-time répétiteur plays in an opera house and opera competitions abroad. The répétiteurs mostly know all of the operatic repertoire and skills to play on a daily basis for singers' rehearsals and competitions.

The data reflected that the five accompanists experienced the same challenges, namely that they are collaborative pianists and teachers in their everyday life. They are not full-time répétiteurs in an opera house, who know the whole prescribed repertoire list, and they do not work solely with singers on a daily basis.

Superordinate theme 4: Appreciation and validation

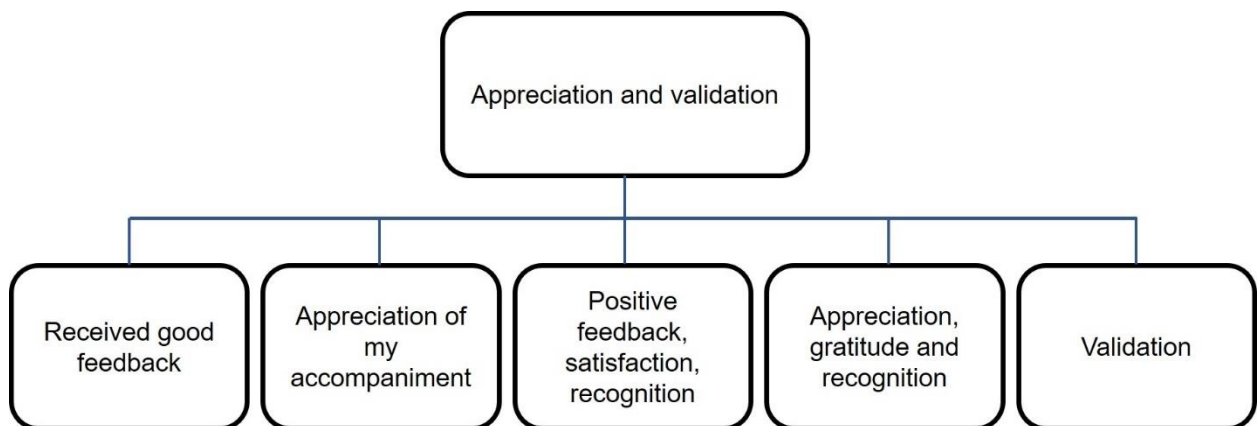


Figure 3-6: The emerging themes and categories associated with superordinate theme 4

The cross-case analysis for this superordinate theme demonstrates that all the participants received positive feedback, appreciation, recognition and validation. They were all grateful to be a part of this Belvedere Competition, especially since international opera competitions of this nature are not often (if ever) presented in South Africa. Three participants were commended by the singers they accompanied:

Laetitia: *I experienced that they all appreciated my accompaniment and made a point of having a good disposition as they knew that my accompaniment will have a big impact on their performances during the competition.*

I think that most of them experienced my accompaniment as being very supportive. Most of them thanked me afterwards.

Elna: *The vocalists are very used to répétiteurs and international competitions and they were all very grateful and satisfied. We did a few notes and they were all happy. I saw myself as very fortunate to be a part of this competition. The feedback was very positive.*

José: *They were all happy. They were all friendly with me before and after the performances.*

Recognition is an important aspect in an accompanist's career to strengthen and encourage them. Two of the participants spoke very positively about the praise that they received.

Elna: *You do receive feedback of ‘well done and played’.*

José: *If I go off stage and people say that it sounded like they were rehearsing for ever, then I feel proud and know that I did what my job was, to create a polished performance out of 20 minutes’ rehearsal. That is the biggest compliment I can hope for as an accompanist.*

Even though all of the accompanists mentioned that they felt honoured to have been a part of the Belvedere competition, the following participants said:

Elna: *I think everyone realised that we had to have a lot of guts and to be experienced to be asked to be a part of this big competition, which made this a bit different to other competitions.*

José: *I just feel very privileged to have been a part of something like this.*

Positive feedback clearly rewarded the accompanists and left them with a satisfying feeling. Despite the limited time to practise the repertoire, limited rehearsal time as well as not being full-time répétiteurs, Mathilda nevertheless received affirmative feedback, as shown by the following comments:

Mathilda: *I received feedback from a few people saying that I really sounded like an orchestra and that I am a real répétiteur. To play all the right notes means nothing – you need to sound like an orchestra.
We all live with these insecurities and it was so nice to hear: you are a real répétiteur.*

The present study included an investigation of collaborative skills requirements. Every participant stated during the interviews what their views of the important collaborative pianistic skills are. Laetitia received acknowledgment for her technique:

One girl especially thanked me for playing the difficult Tchaikovsky as she knew how bad this is and that this is a big challenge, but she needs to sing this to show the judges and agents.

You always would like to feel that you have made a difference. At least you know that you have not ruined their future careers.

Albie highlights the appreciation and validation he received:

The singers directly in the rehearsal, the moment you can see that they are relaxed because they know what they need to do – that is validation. Validation comes from the direct colleagues afterwards because we don't hear each other playing. People who know us as performers will come afterwards and say 'I like that girl's aria and what you did there'. So they did not only listen to the singer but to the piece of music which I always try and aim for.

The Musical Society of Cape Town and the people who were there afterwards, liked what we did and our contribution.

Cross-case analysis revealed that the participants experienced a general feeling of appreciation and validation, which positively influenced their overall sense of their experiences during the Belvedere Competition.

Corresponding theme 1: Empathy for Singers

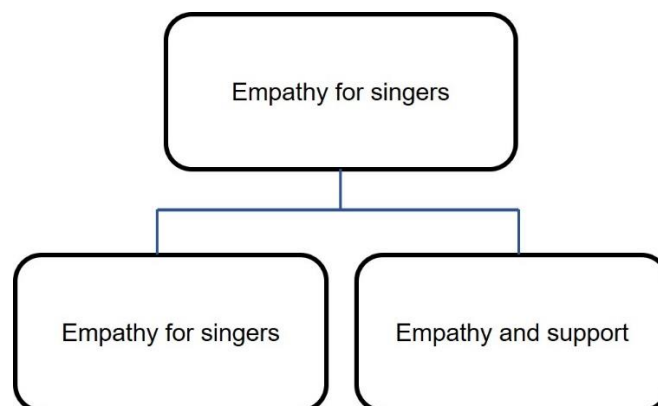


Figure 3-7: The emerging themes and categories associated with corresponding theme 1

Two participants' responses for this superordinate theme indicated that they both received the same feedback regarding emotional support for singers who did not get through to the next rounds. Mathilda and José both considered this as a very important aspect of being an accompanist.

Mathilda: *I am always sorry for them as their careers depend very much on just getting positive reinforcement and not going through to the next round can be devastating sometimes to a singer.*

José: *I remembered just talking to them by saying the usual thing 'you did great' and 'it is more about people listening and not about you'.
The three singers that I played for ended up in the three places and they were all phenomenal great singers. So I do feel disappointed.*

Corresponding theme 2: Collegiality

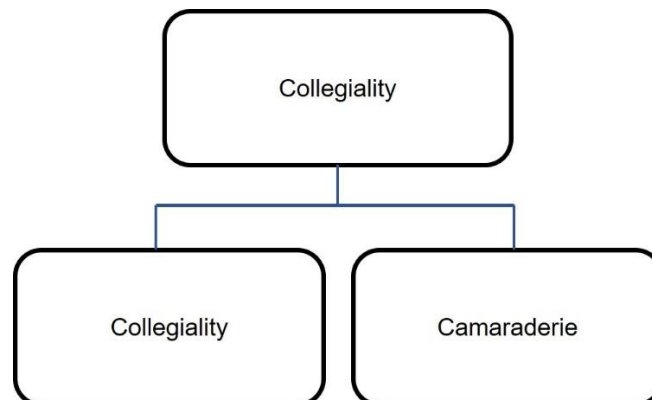


Figure 3-8: The emerging themes and categories associated with corresponding theme 2

Laetitia and Albie focused on the important role that collegiality played for them during this competition as they talked about their fellow participants who were united with them for the same purpose, namely to accompany these singers. They regarded the role that each of the participants played during their experience as very special, seeing that they were together in the same situation and required the necessary support from each other.

Laetitia: *I had so much support from all the other four accompanists. This helped me a great deal.*

There was no competition amongst the accompanists and we all formed a very close bond after the competition. That was an amazing experience.

Albie: *It helps to talk with our colleagues. It is the camaraderie that came out strongly that helped a lot, because we were all in the same situation.*

Both Laetitia and Albie valued the collegiality, specifically within a difficult and stressful environment which contributes to their experience of a challenging competition.

3.8 Cross-case analysis: Unique emergent themes and categories

I will discuss four emergent themes that clearly differ from the key emergent themes and categories dealt with above. Through this IPA study, I have learned in detail about the essence of the participants' experiences during the competition and I have collected valuable data. While analysing the data process in this study, it became evident that there were many similarities between the experiences of pianists at this competition. However, there were a few unique differences between the cases which emerged as follows:

Table 3-8: Difference between the cases

Unique emergent categories and statements	Mathilda	Laetitia	Elna	José	Albie
Miscommunications and expectations	Yes	No	No	No	No
Good communication	No	Yes	No	No	No
Overcoming the impossible	No	Yes	No	No	No
Quantity of repertoire	No	No	Yes	No	No

Unique emergent category 1: Miscommunications and expectations

Mathilda mentioned an incident which occurred early during the planning process and which was later corrected. The other pianists might not have been aware of this issue or, if they were, they did not mention it during their interviews. Mathilda stated that répétiteurs in Europe are full-time employees of the opera houses and duly receive monthly salaries. Part of their job description, which their salaries would cover, is to accompany singers during competitions such as the Belvedere. As a result, they are not paid extra for participating in such competitions. The excerpt from Mathilda's interview revealed her significant concern when she said:

Initially the organiser overseas did not want to pay the accompanists. The overseas organiser is used to having a répétiteur that is employed by the opera houses and it is part of their duties.

It became clear that Mathilda (and in fact all the accompanists) naturally expected to be compensated for their playing during the competition. While the pianists were expected to be paid, the organisers assumed that they were all répétiteurs associated with Cape Town Opera and that their fees would be covered by their salaries. The experience of possibly not being paid was of great concern to Mathilda and was something that the South African organisers had to rectify with the organisers in Europe before she would play.

Unique emerging category 2: Good communication

Laetitia described her experiences of the difference in communication styles between South African singers and foreign singers. In her experience foreign singers were totally prepared, spoke about their needs and could communicate to her about what their preferences were in detail, while South African singers did not convey their needs as well as they did.

Laetitia: *The thing that stood out the most was that the foreigners knew exactly what they were going to do, what they wanted and how they wanted it to be done.*

Laetitia: *As long as a singer can tell me exactly what he wants to do, I can be there for him. I have no problem to follow. I also assured them that no matter what happens, I will be there for them and they don't have to worry about it.*

It was apparent that Laetitia prefers singers to communicate their musical needs directly with her during rehearsals in order for her to know how they would like to express themselves so that their interpretations of the aria will correspond. That would ensure that she would form a good collaboration with the singer. It was a very high priority for Laetitia as an accompanist to follow and support a singer to the best of her ability.

Unique emerging category 3: Overcoming the impossible

Although all the pianists felt that accompanying the singers during the competition and dealing with other aspects of the competition were extremely challenging, Laetitia was the only participant who stated that after looking back on the experience, she was unsure if what was expected was even humanly possible. In hindsight her sense of achievement was immense, because of the overwhelming feeling of accomplishment she felt when she could think of what she had achieved during the competition.

Laetitia: *I accomplished things during the Belvedere that I did not think I was capable of. If you would ask me if I can do what I was asked to do during the Belvedere, I would not think that it was at all possible.*

Laetitia: *That is how the Belvedere competition felt to me: 'humanly impossible'.*

Unique emerging category 4: Quantity of repertoire

What was evident during the interviews was that all of the pianists (to varying degrees) experienced stress due to the uncertainty of not knowing what they were to play for the following rounds but having to have it prepared thoroughly. Elna was not as bothered by this as the other pianists. In fact, she mentions that she experienced playing for local competitions as much more challenging regarding the amount of repertoire which the accompanists are expected to learn. Here she describes her involvement with South African competitions such as the ATKV *Muziqanto* competition as well as the SAMRO and UNISA national and International competitions.

Elna: *To have five opera arias ready on a good standard for this competition and you don't know what they will choose cannot be that difficult for this competition. I think what is difficult is the South African national and international singing competitions, where both Albie and I will play. Because there are four rounds of repertoire that they need to know very well prepared and that is an enormous programme.*

Only five opera arias were required of each contestant in the Belvedere Competition, but four rounds of eight to 10 arias/songs are prescribed to be sung in some of the national competitions which Elna mentioned. What is evident in this statement is the different ways in which a pianist can experience challenges in any one setting. In Elna's case the uncertainty of playing a few arias was not as challenging as the quantity of repertoire required for other competitions for which she has played.

3.9 Conclusion

What became obvious while working through the data analysis, was that all the participants experienced high levels of stress during the competition. However, they experienced it differently. Laetitia experienced the highest level of stress ever in her career, while Mathilda and José both experienced more anxiety about the unknown repertoire and limited time to rehearse. Albie, who appointed the four pianists for the competition, felt responsible for their stress. He

also experienced insecurities and worried about the uncertainties of the whole competition. Although Elna stated that she does experience stress before any kind of competition, she was not perturbed by the unknown repertoire. The participants all said that although they have played for several competitions during their careers before, playing for the Belvedere was a unique experience not comparable to anything that they have done before.

The participants all said that in order to tackle this daunting undertaking, they needed to be equipped with a specific skill set to ensure a successful performance and collaboration with the singers. The necessary skills included:

- a) To have insight into the musical needs of a singer;
- b) To be able to adapt to the singer;
- c) To be the perfect 'safety-net' for the vocalist;
- d) To have the pianistic skills required to do the job;
- e) To have enough experience and to play well.

Although Mathilda and José had experience as répétiteurs for opera companies in the past and Laetitia is a répétiteur at the tertiary institution where she teaches, none of the participants are currently full-time répétiteurs at opera companies. What this means is that currently they are not exposed to the plethora of repertoire which European opera companies demand that the pianists should be acquainted with on a daily basis. This competition certainly confronted the participants with challenges and the fact that none of them is a full-time répétiteur with a working knowledge of the entire opera repertoire turned out to be extremely problematic, especially for Mathilda and Albie. The limited rehearsal times and unknown repertoire and singers created a great deal of stress for Laetitia and José. Elna felt uneasy about the short rehearsal times that made it impossible to cover the entire repertoire list. Mathilda and José expressed their empathy for the singers not being able to go through to the finals. Knowing, as performers, the impact that winning or losing a competition might have on one's career, they always encouraged the vocalists not to lose heart.

The five participants were all grateful to have received appreciation and validation for their accompaniment from the singers, each other and the audience, despite facing many challenges and difficulties. Laetitia and Albie especially praised the other participants for their collegiality and support throughout the competition.

In this chapter I presented my findings after analysing the data collected from the five interviews. In the following chapter I will discuss how these findings relate to the literature discussed in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Introduction

I embarked upon this study to explore the lived experiences of five South African accompanists during the 2016 Belvedere Competition held in South Africa. The major superordinate and corresponding themes that emerged from the data, were the stress and anxiety, the challenges, the required collaborative skills, the empathy for the singers and lastly the validation and appreciation. This chapter assesses the data and findings against the literature on collaborative pianists.

This chapter provided a synthesis of the empirical findings of the study with reference to the main research question:

How do collaborative pianists make sense of their lived experiences while accompanying singers during a major international singing competition?

This first section of this final chapter will include a discussion of the four superordinate and two corresponding themes and how they relate to the literature on the topic (4.1 – 4.6). The limitation section (4.7) and the discussion on the implications of this study for researchers, collaborative pianists and accompanists (4.8) will follow. Recommendations for future study will be discussed in 4.9 and, lastly, I endeavoured to answer the research questions explicitly (4.10).

4.1.1 Discussion and integration of themes

The distinct lived experiences of five participants during the Belvedere Competition provided an exceptional portrayal of their circumstances. It became clear during the interviews and the research process that the participants used the opportunity of the interview to recall and reflect on their lived experiences during the course of the competition.

Figure 4-1 illustrates the superordinate and corresponding themes as they emerged. As I analysed the data, I tried to find links between the themes and, after reading and rereading the data, the following links became apparent. The challenges of playing for such a high-profile international competition induced stress as a result of the limited

rehearsal time with the singers, the unknown repertoire, the quantity of repertoire possibly to be played, and the fact that none of the participants were full time répétiteurs.

Another link between the themes that emerged was that the pianists required a specific set of collaborative skills in order to mitigate their anxiety and stress and overcome the challenges of the competition. Collegiality among the pianists emerged as a theme and the findings showed that this alleviated the participants' challenges and served the significant purpose of supporting each other. To have empathy for singers emerged as another theme and I argue that it should be regarded as an important collaborative skill. I therefore associated empathy for singers with collaborative skills, as I see this quality as a necessary tool to be a good collaborative pianist in this competition setting. The participants received validation for the collaborative skills in the form of the appreciation which they received from the singers and the audience.

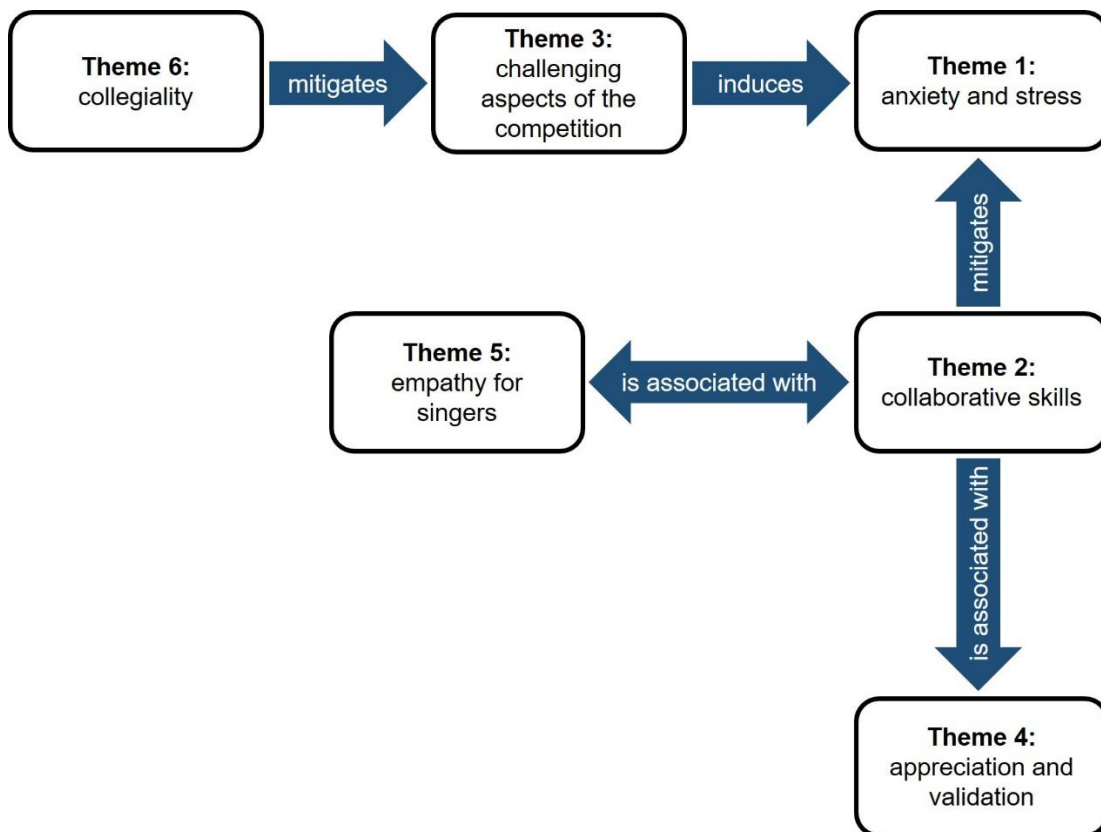


Figure 4-1: Links between the superordinate and corresponding themes

Table 4-1: Literature on superordinate and corresponding emerging themes

Superordinate Themes	Corresponding Emerging Themes	Literature related to the theme
<p>Theme 1:</p> <p>Experiencing anxiety and stress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stress 	<p>Yehuda (2011:87) – What is stress? Simoens (2012:16) – Anxiety often emerges after stress.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The unknown repertoire The quantity of repertoire The unknown singers 	<p>Cupido (2016:123) – Stress, judges and unknown repertoire. Yoshie <i>et al.</i> (2008:121) – Professional musicians exposed to performance situations, detect less anxiety. Garrett & Reynolds (2017:557) – Singers and their own accompanists.</p>
<p>Theme 2:</p> <p>Collaborative skills requirements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sight-reading 	<p>Garrett & Reynolds (2017:557) – Depend on sight reading skills. Kopiez and Lee (2006:97) – Sight reading is an unrehearsed performance. Mansell <i>et al.</i> (1996:19) – Rely on good sight-reading skills. Sellers (2003:15) – Rely on sight reading skills. Katz (2009:278) – Read fluent and grasp things quicker. Garrett (2018:577) – Good sight reading is an essential skill. Asner (1988:20) – Sight reading plays a significant role in the profession of an accompanist.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To sound like an orchestra 	<p>Katz (2009:154) – Develop a feeling for timbre and colour to sound like the orchestra. Sellers (2003:15,16) – Study the orchestral score before playing reductions. Zeger (1997:29-30) – Being a good sight reader will be an advantage to any opera company. Katz (2009:278) – Good sight reading will enhance fluency at the piano.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transcribing from the full score 	<p>Cranmer (1970:45) – Transcribe a piano reduction to fit the pianist’s hands. Garrett (2018:577) – To play transcriptions pianistically. Sellers (2003:15) – Reduce the score to fit under the pianist’s hands. Cranmer (1970:46,50) – Be inventive and creative to duplicate the orchestra. Katz (2009:279) – Realization of accompaniment with figured bass. Arrigo (1998:2) – Get acquainted with the specific performance practice of an opera aria.</p>

Superordinate Themes	Corresponding Emerging Themes	Literature related to the theme
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional support 	<p>Hoekman (2004:91) – Support the singer’s weaknesses and interests. Mansell <i>et al.</i> (1996:18,19) – Singers being vulnerable and need support. Fairman (2015) – To support and inspire the singer Franks (2012:50) – To show support for singers’ psychological fears. Demarest (1964:2,28) – The role of the accompanists became a more prestigious role. Mansell <i>et al.</i> (1996:18) – Accompanist can make or break a concert. Mayer <i>et al.</i> (2001:136,137) – Emotional Intelligence.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility and awareness 	<p>Jepson (1986:1) – Musician must be the centre of accompanist’s focus. Mansell <i>et al.</i>, (1996:18) – Focus on the singer to establish rapport. Mansell <i>et al.</i>, (1996:19) – Teamwork and flexibility.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ‘follow’ the singer 	<p>Jepson (1986:1) – Accompanist must be the conductor with the soloist. Katz (2009:39) – Pianist must be the designer and director. Estrin (2010:57) – Follow the singer and create the best performance.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fluency in languages 	<p>Wenger (2008:32) – Master the basic languages. Zeger (1997:30) – To learn the languages takes years of study.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difference between fluency and a good knowledge and understanding of languages 	<p>Lanners (2010:25) – Understand the sung text. Garrett (2018:578) – Linguistic knowledge. Fairman (2015) – Knowledge of poetry. Garrett (2018:578) – Diversity of skills to be an expert in the field of vocal accompanist / répétiteur. Wenger (2008:32) – Accompanist to show language skills and vast array of repertoire and other skills to be an expert in this field.</p>
<p>Theme 3: Challenging aspects of the competition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not full-time répétiteurs Limited rehearsal time Number of Arias Unknown repertoire 	<p>Franks (2012:50) – Répétiteurs must be able to play a vast array of repertoire. Franks (2012:51) – Build trust with a singer. Zeger (1997:30) – Build trust with a singer. Estrin (2010:59,61) – Singers to bring their own accompanists to lessons.</p>

Superordinate Themes	Corresponding Emerging Themes	Literature related to the theme
		Nix (1997:36) – Competitions can be a dreadful experience for a singer.
Theme 4: Appreciation and validation		Franks (2012:52) – The répétiteur needs the same applause than the singer. Demarest (1964 2,28) – Acknowledge the accompanist's role. Katz (2009:3) – Raised the status of the accompanist. Estrin (2010:57) – The performance is a collaboration between the artists. Garrett (2018:578) – To received gratitude from the singers. Wenger (2008:32) – The collaborator must play a co-operative role rather than a secondary role.
	Theme 1: Empathy for the singers	Franks (2012:50) – Be diplomatic and tactful. Kenny <i>et al.</i> (2004:771) – Accompanist to take care of the singer's voice that is a delicate instrument. Beckman and Graves (1997:20) – Link music and communication to understand the individual roles.
	Theme 2: Collegiality	Katz (2009:279) – Collaboration and collegiality.

4.2 Experiencing anxiety and stress

Research by Kenny *et al.* (2004:760) shows the different but high levels of skill areas including co-ordination, attention and memory, aesthetic and interpretative skills needed to achieve a high standard of performance. To achieve a high level of excellence, years of training and – in the case of musicians, solitary practice – are required of a musician. Hence it is essential to always maintain constant and intensive self-evaluation.

Kenny (2011:12) and several other scholars stated that many musicians (regardless of age, gender, years of experience, the technical level at which they are performing, or music genre) experience MPA during performances. Yoshie *et al.* (2008:120) asserted that the serious and frequent appearance of MPA can often lead to impaired performances. The work of Nicholson *et al.* (2015:445,446) supports this argument and reveals that musicians are currently experiencing the highest form of MPA during solo performances as a result of their fear of negative evaluation. Based on my literature review at the start of this study, I was expecting to observe at least a few cases of MPA among the participants emerging from the data. However, this was not the case. None of the participants mentioned that they experienced MPA during

their playing, but rather that they experienced stress as a result of various contributing factors before and during the competition.

Stress, as opposed to MPA, is described by Yehuda (2011:87) as a response/reaction to an external event that disturbs the normal functioning of an organism/entity – in this case an individual. Stress is associated with physiological responses that escalate into a rise in blood pressure and heart rate. Albie's experience was most explicit as he stated: *we all just wanted to run away.*

As illustrated in Figure 4.1, it was evident that the stress experienced by the participants was induced by the challenges of the competition. I would like to posit that the anxiety experienced by these participants was not as a result of the inherent disorder (MPA) associated with many musicians but was rather induced because of the unique challenges faced during this high-profile competition. My argument is supported by research conducted by Simoens (2012:16), who asserts that anxiety often only emerges after some stressful experience. However, while many musicians who inherently suffer from MPA will always experience some form of anxiety during any performance setting, nothing seemed to suggest that these participants would continue to experience any maladaptive behaviour after the stress of the competition has subsided.

During the competition these five collaborative pianists experienced a level of stress that induced anxiety in the following ways. Since Albie was the person to invite and coordinate the other four participants to take part during this competition, he felt responsible for and took ownership of their stress. He consequently felt terrible about it. Mathilda attributed her stress to not knowing the entire prescribed repertoire. To her, this felt like an impossible task as she had to play for six singers in every round, without knowing who they would be and what repertoire they would be singing. Cupido (2016:123), who attended the competition, made the comment that the accompanists were under scrutiny by members of the audience, the jury, coaches and some music students. However, Mathilda emphasised that it was neither the audience nor the judges that scared her, but only the unknown repertoire. An interesting remark by Mathilda, who was in fact the only participant to experience this, revealed that she detected some impatience from a singer for not knowing the aria that well. By playing through the aria a few times, this difficulty was resolved.

Uncertainty was also a stress trigger for Laetitia. She identified three 'unknown' aspects: a) the unknown competition, b) the unknown singers, and c) the unknown repertoire. As she plays for many competitions, she is always well prepared in advance because she knows what the

repertoire will be and arranges rehearsals well in advance with the specific singer. In Laetitia's case her conventional method of alleviating this type of stress caused by uncertainty would be to practise several times before the competition. Since this was not possible during this competition, she had to find alternative ways to alleviate her stress. The ways in which Laetitia and the other participants mitigated their stress will be expanded upon later in this chapter.

In addition to Albie's induced stress because of his taking ownership of the pianists' concerns, both he and José stated that another trigger of stress was the uncertainty of not knowing which arias they would play during the various rounds. As per the rules of the Belvedere Competition, the singers only had to commit to their final programme on the day of registration, with the result that the accompanists did not know what repertoire they would play and whom they would accompany. In addition to this, their limited time to prepare in advance also compounded the problem.

Elna's experience of stress was quite different from that of the other pianists. As evidenced in the findings, she mentioned that while she always experiences a healthy, non-debilitating amount of stress before any competition, in contrast to the other pianists the limited rehearsal time or uncertainty over which arias she would play did not affect her stress levels. I would like to posit that this might be because, of all five pianists, Elna frequently plays for several competitions during the year. Michiko Yoshie *et al.* (2008:121) state that professional and experienced musicians who are frequently exposed to performance situations experience a decrease in anxiety. While all of the pianists might be exposed to a variety of operatic literature in various settings (i.e. in the classroom, in recitals and other), I argue that because Elna has learned to mitigate her stress because she faces the challenges of a singing competition on a more frequent basis. Garrett & Reynolds (2017:557) states that it will be in the singer's best interest to perform with their own accompanist during auditions in order to guarantee good collaboration and support for each other. I argue that if the South African singers were at least able to bring their own accompanists to the Belvedere Competition, or if they were allocated a South African accompanist in advance in order to rehearse, it would have caused less stress for both the singers and accompanists.

It has been established what the main reasons were that induced stress among the pianists. I will now discuss how these pianists mitigated their stress through the collaborative pianistic skills which they have acquired throughout their careers.

4.3 Skill requirements of collaborative pianists

In the field of accompaniment, a unique set of skills is required of a collaborative pianist (which might differ from those of a concert pianist) and the data reflected that these five pianists relied on these skills to mitigate their stress and overcome the challenges of the competition. During their interviews all the participants commented on about what they deemed to be the most important characteristics of a successful accompanist, specifically when accompanying singers who sing operatic repertoire. Skills such as sight-reading, the ability to make the piano sound like an orchestra, adapting to requirements of the singer, being the perfect 'safety-net' for the singer, and having excellent language and technical skills were emphasised by the participants.

Garrett & Reynolds (2017:557) asserts that singers depend on the excellent skills of collaborative pianists that comprise of sight-reading skills; a vast knowledge of opera and song repertoire and lastly enough experience to play for auditions without any rehearsals. Singers will benefit from an accompanist being well prepared to allow them (the singers) to have successful performance and positive auditions. Regarding the competition, it is possible to claim that singing in this prestigious competition is likely one of the most important "auditions" in these singers' careers, considering that many casting directors and administrators are not on the panel but can offer roles to many of the finalists.

The five participants highlighted the skill of sight-reading as a prerequisite for a proficient accompanist, especially for a vocal accompanist. Sight-reading is described by Kopiez & In Lee (2006:97) as an unrehearsed performance of music, which makes this skill essential in a competition such as the Belvedere.

4.3.1 Sight-reading

Mathilda stated that she saw some music for the first time during rehearsals and therefore had to rely on her sight-reading abilities to cope in this situation. According to the participants, they had no idea what repertoire they had to play for each singer until the day before the rounds. Both Greer (Mansell *et al.*, 1996:19) and Buccheri (Sellers, 2003:15,17) point out that as accompanists they see the repertoire (and the singers) for the first time only when they are playing during auditions and consequently they need to be good and reliable sight-readers.

Laetitia, Elna, José and Albie agreed that sight-reading is a prerequisite skill for any vocal accompanist. José stated that he always aims not only to play the notes of the music he

sees for the first time, but to also create music with the notes at the same time. Elna and Albie emphasised that good sight-reading skills will enhance good collaboration between the pianist and singer. A confident accompanist will therefore have a positive effect on the singer.

Mathilda, who had worked as a répétiteur earlier in her life, affirmed that she could sight-read any music when she was at the top of her career and confirmed that a répétiteur needs to be an excellent sight-reader. Spillman (Nix, 1997:32) emphasises that no répétiteur/coach will ever be appointed at any institution without being a highly accomplished sight-reader.

According to Katz (2009:278), a successful collaborative pianist must have the ability to have quick understanding of the music and also read fluently for an audition, rehearsal or a lesson. Epperson confirms Katz's statement that all pianists must be specialists in sight-reading (Wenger, 2008:32). The significant role that sight-reading plays in the profession of accompanist is also highlighted by Garrett (2018:577) and Asner (1988:20).

The findings therefore correspond with the literature that an accompanist can simply not be successful without having mastered the art of sight-reading. Findings from the participants showed that they could collaborate with the singers admirably because of their excellent sight-reading skills, which mitigated their feeling of stress during this competition setting.

4.3.2 To sound like an orchestra

Although some of the other participants mentioned the importance of sounding like an orchestra, Mathilda was the only pianist to elaborate on this fact in detail. Her comments clearly highlighted the difference between playing a part specifically written for the piano and playing orchestral reductions such as the operatic literature which formed the exclusive repertoire of this competition. She stated that she made use of different techniques to simulate an orchestral colour or instrument, while taking into account the limitations of the piano. She stated that an experienced répétiteur will always aim to let the singer feel secure by providing support as if an orchestra is accompanying them.

Albie's findings showed a unique approach towards making the piano sound like an orchestra. He firstly had to make sense of the details of the orchestral score in order to understand what will be the important parts to play. Katz (2009:154) states that

accompanists must simply 'cut' out any extra material in the accompaniment to make the arias more playable and they need to develop a feeling for timbres and colours in order to imitate the sounds of the orchestra. Albi's views were supported by Buccheri (Sellers, 2003:15, 16), who asserted that one firstly has to study the orchestral scores carefully before making any decisions on playing the reductions. Buccheri endeavours to make the piano sound as similar as possible to an orchestra. José affirmed that he always aspires to create the sound of an orchestra in order to support the specific voice he is accompanying and for the singer not to feel exposed.

Zeger (1997:29-30) states that an accompanist who possesses both a brilliant keyboard technique and the ability to make the piano sound like an orchestra will be an immense advantage for any opera company. His statement correlates with Elna's view that the accompanist needs to have an infallible technique and keyboard sense. Katz (2009:278) mentions that no musician will approach a pianist to accompany them unless he/she meets the requirements of fluency at the instrument. Clearly, the ability to evoke an orchestral sound from the piano could enhance the performance of a singer.

4.3.3 Transcribing from the full score

Apart from having the ability to sound like an orchestra, pianists often find themselves in situations where they do not have an orchestral reduction of the opera and have to be able to transcribe directly from the full orchestral score of the opera. The literature therefore places a great deal of emphasis on the skill and knowledge for an accompanist to play piano reductions of orchestral scores. Cranmer (1970:45) refers to the ability of a pianist to transcribe an orchestral score so that it can fit under the span of his hands. Garrett (2018:577) and Buccheri (Sellers, 2003:16) refer to *répétiteurs* who play large quantities of opera and oratorio repertoire for singers and thus need to play reductions pianistically in order to imitate the sound of the orchestra.

The way Albi describes his process of analysing the most important parts of the orchestral score suggests that while he may not have had to transcribe from a full score for the competition, he needed to have knowledge and understanding of the full score before he can play the reduction to imitate an orchestral sound. His aim was to reflect the most important instruments in the orchestra even if it was not written in the reduction, in a way creating his own transcription while using the colours of the piano to best bring out the orchestral colours. Buccheri (Sellers, 2003:15) teaches her students that an essential aspect of transcription is not to play exactly what is written in an orchestral reduction, but

to study the orchestral score with care and to have insight into the orchestral score to see what is important and what is not. Cranmer (1970:46, 50) points out that the accompanist will have to be inventive and apply creative skills to duplicate what was written originally for the orchestra.

One would assume that because of the prestige of this competition, the preparedness of the singers and the fact that operatic literature is readily available for singers, few singers would have brought a full score that would need to be transcribed. While this was mostly true, it does sometimes occur with obscure repertoire or less familiar arias from the Baroque era, as José experienced. José was the only participant in fact who needed to transcribe a piece during the competition when playing a Handel aria from an orchestral score with only a figured bass available. He was equipped to transcribe this aria because of his previous opera experience. Katz (2009:279) stated that when an accompanist plays vocal or instrumental Baroque music – though this is also applicable to bel canto repertoire – they often have available in writing only a figured bass. An accomplished accompanist will have to realise the figured bass score and needs to invent some ornaments. José certainly showed that he was more than capable of meeting this challenge skilfully.

According to Arrigo (1998:2), the accompanist must firstly become acquainted with the traditional performance practice of the opera aria before transcribing from the orchestral score. He advises that, besides acquiring a complete understanding of the orchestration, an accompanist also has to have detailed knowledge of the text (the libretto) in order to think, breathe and play like a singer in order to enrich the soloist's interpretive efforts.

Although the skill of transcribing from the full score was mentioned only by Albie and José, this does not mean that the other three participants do not have the ability, or do not regard this as a very important skill to develop.

4.3.4 Emotional support

Although emotional support for singers is not often described as one of the typical skills required of a collaborative pianist, the data reflected that empathy for singers was in fact associated with the skills required to enhance collaboration in this competition setting. I would like to suggest that providing emotional support for the singer should be considered as being just as important as sight-reading or transcribing from the score, for example. Accompanists need to support singers emotionally (as well as musically) during

performances. Hoekman (2004:91) stated that each singer has his or her own weaknesses, interests and strengths that can be challenging and will thus need the accompanist's emotional support. The participants described the support they provided as going beyond the stage to the post-performance moment as well. They provided emotional support to the singers, whose careers could be greatly influenced by the outcome of this competition. This in itself makes playing for a competition such as this very different from accompanying singers in other concert settings.

Mathilda in particular regarded providing emotional and musical support as an important skill in her collaboration with singers. She referred to singers as unique and unpredictable (especially on stage), who will always need their accompanists' support. When a singer does not make it to the next round in a competition, she feels distressed, knowing that their whole career may be at stake. Johnston (Mansell *et.al.*, 1996:18,19) emphasises the vulnerability of the singers standing on the stage, whereas part of the accompanists' task is to reinforce the singer's confidence.

José showed his support when the singers experienced disappointment by encouraging them. Roger Vignoles highlights the need for a pianist/accompanist to inspire and support singers, especially when something goes wrong (Fairman, 2015:2). To achieve good collaboration, Laetitia displayed an exceptional skill when she showed emotional intelligence in order to understand and respond to the singers' different personalities. In research done by (Mayer *et al.*, 2001:136,137) the emotional intelligent person will have the ability to be more aware of someone else's feelings and to differentiate among feelings. They will furthermore be able to create better and deeper relationships and will have greater respect for one another.

Elna's comments showed that she never allows herself to become emotionally involved with the singers when she accompanies them for competitions. Playing for many competitions, she is able to detach herself from getting personally involved regarding whether the singer makes it to the next round or not. Franks (2012:50) suggests that *répétiteurs* must not only show love and understanding of the art of all singers, but must be able to understand the singer's psychology and fears. Emotional support and empathy for a singer are unquestionably linked to each other. Both of these qualities show a direct association with collaborative skill requirements.

4.3.5 Flexibility and awareness

In order to mitigate stress, Elna, José and Albie indicated that they had to show flexibility, to adjust to the singer's performance, to form a perfect 'safety-net' and to follow the singers musically. Garrett (Jepson, 1986:1) stated that a professional accompanist must keep his/her focus on the musician during a performance and needs to be a sensitive and responsive partner.

Greer (Mansell *et al.*, 1996:19) indicated that in order to support the singer, the emphasis must be on teamwork and thus for the accompanist to be flexible in terms of changes of tempi and breathing. This is especially true in this competition setting, when the stress of the occasion might make the singer do things that they did not do in the limited rehearsal period. Mathilda highlighted the unpredictability of singers who can perform totally different on stage to what was rehearsed. With this statement she refers to singers, who always need more or less time for breathing, or do not count. She consequently emphasises the need for flexibility in accompanists, as well as being highly alert at all times during a performance. Ralls (Mansell *et al.*, 1996:18) states that an accompanist must be a responsible musician in his own right, but also has to adapt to the needs of the singer in order to establish a rapport with the singer which shows the necessary compassion and respect for the vocalist.

4.3.6 To 'follow' the singer

Garrett (Jepson, 1986:1) commented on a pianist's accompaniment not being up to standard, stating that an accompanist cannot just 'follow' the singer, but has to think of himself as the conductor working with a soloist. She therefore emphasised the significance of good collaboration between the accompanist and soloist. Laetitia asserted that she had no problem 'following' a singer, as long as singers can tell her exactly what they wanted her to do. Her view supports the idea of being the conductor in that scenario. Katz (2009:39) referred to the pianist as the designer as well as the director, while Pamela Viktoria Pyle stresses the importance of ensuring sound dialogue between accompanist and singer by emphasising the ability of an accompanist to follow the singer in order to create the best performance (Estrin, 2010:57).

4.3.7 Fluency in languages

Each vocal accompanist/répétiteur will benefit from being fluent in languages typically associated with the operatic literature, and the data reflected that this in fact mitigated the participants' stress levels. If a pianist understands the text literally, they are able to bring various colours to their playing and support the singer. Both Albie and Mathilda noted the importance of knowing the main languages. Epperson (Wenger, 2008:32) encourages the répétiteur/vocal coach to learn and master the basic languages which include Italian, German, French and English.

José, native to Portugal, was the only participant to be fluent in five relevant languages in opera repertoire, namely Italian, Spanish, French, German and English. His fluency in these languages ensured easier communication between the singers and him and created a pleasant rehearsal atmosphere. Zeger (1997:30) points out that to master each language would take years of study.

Elna specifically mentioned that she cannot speak French or Italian. However, she always intentionally asks the singer before the rehearsal to give a brief explanation to what the aria deals within order for her to create the required atmosphere. But in this competition it was a challenge, because of the limited rehearsal time.

4.3.8 The difference between fluency and a good knowledge and understanding of languages

As the previous point suggests, pianist who are fluent in foreign languages have a huge advantage not only in communicating with singers from other countries during the competition, but also allow them to better interpret the text of the aria. However, if a pianist is not fluent in these languages, a working knowledge would help in the overall interpretation of the arias. What I mean by this is that many singers and pianists might not be able to carry a conversation with a mother-tongue French, Italian or German speaker, but when presented with a score they will have enough knowledge of the language to understand what is written on the page. Lanners (2010:25) asserts that in accompanying vocalists, the meaning of the sung text will serve as an interpretative guide to performing the music. The translation of foreign languages must therefore not only be done poetically, but a word-for-word translation would enable the vocal accompanist to read all the parts of the song.

Albie, in particular, stipulated the essence of being a vocal accompanist, namely having an interest in the meaning of the words of an opera aria and to understand the dramatic situations as they happen in opera. Garrett (2018:578) stated that a vocal accompanist with knowledge of the language of the song will certainly be the first choice from any singer's point of view. Albie mentioned that another important skill for a vocal accompanist to have is a more general knowledge of languages, how they sound and what they mean. Roger Vignoles (a world-renowned accompanist), through years of experience, states that to be a vocal accompanist requires knowledge and the ability to create colours and different moods in the music; the ability to determine the correct balance between different soloists, as well the ability to possess over the necessary knowledge of poetry when accompanying songs (Fairman, 2015).

As the data emerged it became clear that the pianists experienced that their acquired skill set helped them to overcome the challenges of the competition. These skills included knowledge of languages, repertoire and lyric diction; excellent sight-reading abilities; knowledge of the art of orchestral reduction and repertoire, and having an exceptional piano technique. These skills were also confirmed in the literature (Garrett, 2018:578; Epperson in Wenger, 2008:32).

4.4 Challenging aspects of the competition

When considering the high level of the challenges that the participants experienced, this superordinate theme proved to be most significant in the lived experiences as evidenced in this research. As portrayed in Figure 4-1, the challenges induced the participants' stress.

The five participants are experienced vocal and instrumental collaborative pianists in South Africa. However, it is important to state that they are not full time répétiteurs and were not familiar with the entire vocal repertoire (as répétiteurs in Europe might be). At present Cape Town Opera is the only full-time opera company producing full-scale works with orchestra. As a result, the industry in South Africa does not provide the necessary infrastructure to support répétiteurs as one find in Europe. Therefore, it would be logical to deduce that a répétiteur in Europe or America would be more familiar with the ever-growing operatic literature and would be well equipped to meet the demands of this specific competition. Franks (2012:50) supports this argument that répétiteurs who are appointed on a contract basis at opera houses in Europe (and abroad) are able to meet the requirements of being excellent pianists and répétiteurs, especially during a competition such as the Belvedere. Franks states that it is indispensable for

a répétiteur to have a vast knowledge of the repertoire and to be able to play repertoire from Handel to Stockhausen.

Albie stated that the organisers did not understand, or were unaware, that they (the five accompanists) had other jobs and were not full-time répétiteurs in South Africa. Mathilda concurred with Albie and also mentioned issues concerning their payment. According to her, the overseas organisers were used to the fact that full-time répétiteurs appointed at opera houses receive salaries and that playing for a competition like the Belvedere would be part of their duties. The miscommunication and different expectations presented a challenge to the pianists and Albie experienced high levels of stress trying to negotiate these financial challenges. Once this was resolved, the pianists could focus on their relationships with the singers and their performances.

Franks (2012:51-52) and Zeger (1997:30) address the importance of building 'trust' between the singer and the répétiteur during coaching sessions and rehearsals. However, findings from the data showed that all five participants agreed that it was not possible to build any relationship with the singer because of the limited rehearsal time. The limited rehearsal time furthermore meant that the participants could not cover the five arias within the 20 minute available. The findings indicate that the participants saw some of the repertoire for the first time during their rehearsal session. The challenge thus was to familiarise themselves with the arias and to use their knowledge about these arias from different composers and styles. I therefore would like to posit that more rehearsal time with the singers in the future, may contribute to better preparation and will improve the overall collaboration. If this competition or another international competition of this stature were to be held in South Africa again, organisers will have to take cognisance of the fact that these pianists are not full-time répétiteurs and would need more rehearsal time to alleviate stress and promote better performances. This argument is supported by Anne Epperson, who requests musicians to bring their own partners (pianists) when attending lessons (or in this case the competition) to ensure quality collaboration. While it would be impossible for the foreign singers to bring their own pianists, South African contestants could possibly have the option of bringing their own accompanists in future. If this cannot be arranged, it would be vital for the pianists to receive the music well in advance and to come prepared to the rehearsal (or in this case the competition rehearsal) (Estrin, 2010:59-61). Wenger (2006:60) supports this argument that rehearsals should be scheduled in advance to ensure sufficient time for both the musicians to learn and rehearse multiple times.

According to José, Laetitia and Albie, it was quite demanding to cope with the number of arias they had to prepare; they described it as an impossible task to learn 200 opera arias in such limited time. Elna, on the other hand, was the only participant to comment that even though she

did not know all the arias, she was able to manage the repertoire. Mathilda and José also mentioned that the singers did not stay with the same accompanist during the course of the rounds, which also triggered some of their stress. One way to mitigate the stress of this unique situation in South Africa compared to our European counterparts might be to ensure that singers stick with the same pianist in the early rounds, so that they could have a better collaborative experience with the pianist.

Albie added to the theme of challenges and asserted that competitions in general are not always a positive experience for singers/musicians. I therefore would like to posit that competitions create more stress to the singer/musician and sometimes ruin their musical careers. My argument is supported in an article by Spillman (Nix, 1997:35) who asserts that singers depend on competitions and/or auditions, which are sometimes a dreadful experience. Some singers are unsuccessful due to choosing the wrong repertoire, or repertoire that is too wide. Results from research by Nicholson *et al.* (2015:440) shows that on the one hand, some musicians experience severe MPA during either solo or audition performance situation settings, while on the other hand function normally outside the stress situations. With my argument I thus not suggest the competitions should be abandoned altogether, but simply would like to emphasise the prevalent and distressing problem among musicians during a competition/audition setting.

4.5 Appreciation and validation

Experiencing appreciation is quite often overlooked when one considers the overall lived experiences of collaborative pianists. As the data suggested when the pianists were shown appreciation, this validated their own playing and pianistic skills. Franks (2012:52) refers to the vital work of a répétiteur, who needs the same acclamation as the singer performing on stage. However, the répétiteur seldom gets a bow at the end.

Samuel Sanders continuously fought for raising the status of the accompanist (Estrin, 2010:57). Pianists like Gerald Moore (Demarest, 1964:2, 28), Martin Katz (2009:3) and others raised the status of the accompanist by recognising and acknowledging the role of the accompanist during concerts and ensuring that the accompanist's name appears in the program. As a result of their work, the status of the accompanist has been greatly improved and the art of collaborative pianists has gained the recognition that it deserves.

Although Laetitia experienced insecure feelings regarding her abilities to fully function before and during the competition, she was extremely grateful for the appreciation expressed for her

support of the singers during their performances. This in turn validated her skills and artistry as a collaborative pianist.

Elna regarded herself very fortunate to be a part of the competition and was grateful to receive positive feedback from the singers. Albie received compliments for his ability to create a colourful sound and to enrich the character of the music. These compliments from the singers and colleagues served as a great validation for him as it spoke directly to his ability to bring out the sound of the orchestra from the piano. This attribute was very important to him as a collaborative pianist playing operatic literature. Garrett (2018:578) stated that she always appreciates the gratitude and respect shown from the singers themselves, much more than that of the audience. Mathilda stated that she is not a full-time répétiteur, however, she received positive feedback and was very appreciative when some of the singers commended her on being a real répétiteur.

José referred to the challenge of having to play through five arias within a 20-minute rehearsal time. However, he felt gratified to receive the biggest compliment he could hope for as an accompanist when he received praise from people saying that it sounded like a well-rehearsed performance.

Anne Epperson states that the emphasis for a collaborator must be more on co-operative playing rather than playing a secondary role throughout the performance process (Wenger, 2008:32). Epperson's view is a confirmation of the participants' satisfaction at having received appreciation and validation from the singers and audience for playing a major part in the performances of the singers.

4.6 Empathy for singers

Mathilda and José showed empathy for the singers by highlighting that singers' careers depend on being successful during a competition and it can therefore be a devastating experience for them when they do not go through to the next round. José and Albie showed their empathy by consoling and encouraging the singers to believe in their own abilities as singers. Albie told them that it was mainly about the judges listening to them and not a personal thing. Although they both rated the assessment by the judges as obviously important, they also emphasised the fact that this was the judges' personal opinions. The singers should therefore not take these competition results too personally. They must rather start preparing for the next competition rather than withdraw when they have not won or gone through to the final round.

There is limited literature on empathy in particular, but an article by Franks (2012:50) addresses empathy in the following way. She states that a pianist should show diplomacy and tact, especially while collaborating with singers. Research by Kenny *et al.* (2004:771) demonstrated that the singer's voice is a delicate instrument that needs to be taken care of and maintained, especially during a performance. This was certainly evident during the Belvedere Competition and hence every singer appreciated the empathy and support they received from their accompanists.

Elna's comments showed that she never allows herself to become emotionally involved with the singers when she accompanies them for competitions. Playing for many competitions, she is able to detach herself from getting personally involved regarding whether the singer makes it to the next round or not.

I argue that empathy can provide emotional support for a singer, empowering them to cope with competition stress and unfamiliar circumstances. Beckman and Graves (1997:20) link music and 'communication' within a performance, where both the pianist and the singer understand their individual roles in musically 'communicating' with each other. This collaboration will definitely display some mutual respect between the pianist and vocalist.

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Mathilda and José showed empathy for the singers by highlighting that singers' careers depend on being successful during a competition and it can therefore be a devastating experience for them when they do not go through to the next round. José and Albie showed their empathy by consoling and encouraging the singers to believe in their own abilities as singers. Albie told them that it was mainly about the judges listening to them and not a personal thing. Although they both rated the assessment by the judges as obviously important, they also emphasised the fact that this was the judges' personal opinions. The singers should therefore not take these competitions results too personally. They must rather start preparing for the next competition rather than withdraws when they have not won or gone through to the final round.

There is limited literature on empathy in particular, but an article by Franks (2012:50) addresses empathy in the following way. She states that a pianist should show diplomacy and tact, especially while collaborating with singers. Research by Kenny *et al.* (2004:771) demonstrated that the singer's voice is a delicate instrument that needs to be taken care of and maintained, especially during a performance. This was certainly evident during the Belvedere Competition and hence every singer appreciated the empathy and support they received from their accompanists.

I argue that empathy can provide emotional support for a singer, empowering them to cope with competition stress and unfamiliar circumstances. Beckman and Graves (1997:20) link music and 'communication' within a performance, where both the pianist and the singer understand their individual roles in musically 'communicating' with each other. This collaboration will definitely display some mutual respect between the pianist and vocalist.

4.7 Collegiality

Laetitia and Albie both stated that they received indispensable support from their colleagues, which enabled them to endure the stress and challenges during the competition. Figure 4-1 illustrates and confirms their statements that collegiality unquestionably mitigated the challenges of the competition.

The fact that all the participants experienced the same challenges and stress, and that they could express their insecurities to each other made them very appreciative of their colleagues' support. Laetitia was the only participant to observe and mention that there was no competition amongst the accompanists. The fact that it was not mentioned by the other participants is not to say that they did not experience the same sense of collegiality. However, she revealed that all the participants formed a very close bond after the competition, which she experienced as a remarkable phenomenon. According to her, this sentiment was shared amongst all the participants.

The literature focuses more on topics such as the art of collaborative playing, but has little to say about subjects such as collegiality. Katz (2009:279) connects love for people and helping them to the best of your ability with effective collaboration.

4.8 Implications for different audiences

From reading the transcriptions of the interviews, it is clear that the participants were eager to discuss their experiences and that this research could provide an insider's perspective of a collaborative pianist who has to play for a prestigious opera competition, which usually draws on accompaniment by full-time répétiteurs. Therefore, I would regard their experiences as creating valuable awareness for organisers hosting international singing competitions in future in South Africa, or in other countries that may also have wonderful collaborative pianists at their disposal, but who may not necessarily be professional répétiteurs.

The prominence of the profession of being a professional collaborative pianist/répétiteur, may improve if music students who would like to pursue this art, should have the opportunity to study specifically as a répétiteur at any South African University. There is great promise that this could be a rich and valuable research area.

4.9 Future research

The present study demonstrates the role that the accompanist plays in terms of their contribution to the overall performance of the singers during an international opera competition.

Although this research provided insight into emotional support for singers in this specific competition, future research could expand upon the emotionally supportive role an accompanist provides in the life of a singer, specifically during competitions.

This study furthermore aims to encourage more research, specifically in the field of accompaniment in a singing competition, in the hope of discovering more about the experiences of the accompanist within a competition situation. It would be helpful for researchers in the future to explore the experiences of full-time répétiteurs who accompany such competitions in contrast to the experiences of these five collaborative pianists. For future research it will be valuable to document the experiences of the singers, specifically after a competition. Their opinions regarding collaborating with the pianist and their expectations of the accompanist in a competition setting, would be a worth-while study.

4.10 Central research question answered

How do collaborative pianists make sense of their lived experiences while accompanying singers during a major international singing competition?

This study provided rich and valuable data on the experiences by five participants and how they overcame or mitigated these difficulties. The participants' experiences remained the primary focus. Six emergent themes (four superordinate and two corresponding themes) summarised these experiences and showed results from the analysis process which provided a window into the world of the participants.

Factors that contributed to their stress included the uncertainty of this competition with its extensive repertoire lists, unknown singers who did not necessarily stay with one accompanist for the duration of each round, the limited rehearsal time and the unknown repertoire. However, the main concern for the participants was the fact that they are working as collaborative pianists and teachers in their daily life and that they are not full time répétiteurs.

The participants' stress was mitigated by their collaborative accompaniment skills, which included outstanding sight-reading skills, producing an orchestral sound from the piano to support the singers, showing flexibility and adaptability to meet the singers' requirements, to have a working knowledge of the main operatic languages, ability to play orchestral reductions, and their ability to play with an infallible technique.

The fact that all five participants received positive feedback, recognition and validation from the singers, indicated their expertise in being proficient collaborative pianists. The singers expressed their appreciation towards each of the participants after their performances. Empathy for singers were regarded as a vital aspect of being a collaborative pianist and was consequently associated with the ability to display good collaborative skills abilities. Collegiality between the participants mitigated the challenges they all experienced during the competition. The participants had the confidence and trust in each other to share their stress and feelings, seeing that they all were in the same situation.

4.11 Conclusion

The participants' accounts of their experiences during the 35th International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition provided a wealth of information supported by the data using IPA as a research approach. Their experiences revealed that the role of the accompanist encompasses more than simply being a competent pianist and musician. The aim was not to provide specific answers, but to explore and describe their experiences. Furthermore, the study gave them a voice and an opportunity to speak freely and openly about their experiences in order to understand their difficulties and hardships. These aims were met throughout the research process. While reading and re-reading the transcripts, I was struck by the participants' dedication to constantly push through each challenging round, regardless of their stress.

The pianists had to overcome significant challenges during this competition. However, they demonstrated their skills, excellence and support in accompanying the singers, musically and emotionally, to the best of their ability in spite of the challenging process. This account of the lived experiences of the pianists during this competition has hopefully filled a gap in the literature regarding pianists who need to apply every skill they have acquired in order to fulfil a role such as *répétiteur*, even when that is in fact not what they do for a living.

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ANNEXURE A

Informed Consent

You are being invited to be a part of a research study that is investigating the experiences of accompanists who were involved in the Belvedere International Singing Competition held in South Africa in 2016. What makes this study differ from other research on accompanists in general is that the Belvedere Competition induces stressful situations which are unique to this type of high profile competition. Also the singers participating have been previously selected and constitute some of the most advanced singers in their respective countries. Arguably, the standard of singing and repertoire required should be extremely high. You are a potential participant because you were engaged as a collaborative pianist during the 35th International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition held in Cape Town from 25 June to 2 July 2016 and share similar lived experiences as those of the other pianists.

This informed consent outlines the study. After reading and signing the document, you are giving consent to participate in the research study. This study is being conducted by Sonja van Zyl, a DMus student at North West University in South Africa. If there are any questions or concerns about the study, please email me at svanzyl727@gmail.com.

Participation in this study is voluntary. As a result of participating in this study, you will be asked to reflect on your time and experiences as an accompanist during the above mentioned Singing Competition. There are no foreseeable risks for your participation. You will have access to the outcome of my research and will be free to withdraw at any time, for any reason.

I will protect your identity should you choose to remain anonymous and elect not to have your identity disclosed and you will therefore be given a pseudonym for the study, should you prefer that.

Digital documents will be stored on a password protected computer and in a password protected folder on my computer. I will not share these passwords with anyone. I will delete all documentation after three years.

I have read and understand the description of the study and contents of this document. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this study.

Name: (Printed) _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____