

WHAT YOUR ACCOMPANIST IS REALLY THINKING...

GET A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON YOUR MUSICAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH CAREER ACCOMPANIST ISAAC MOUSKOVIAS

The piano. It's an entire orchestra at your fingertips.

As conductor, you can regulate each key that is played, and convey what the composer has thoughtfully crafted. But unlike the collaborative assembly of an orchestra, the piano stands alone. Stepping out into silence, a combination of excitement and anticipation catches your breath as you draw closer to the concert grand.

As a self-absorbed child, the idea of a career in piano seemed extremely appealing. At 13, I was encouraged by a regional voice teacher to accompany two of her students in the local eisteddfod and, as they say, the rest is history.

British classical pianist and accompanist Gerald Moore wrote in *The Unashamed Accompanist* (Hamish Hamilton Press, 1957): "Strangely enough, [a good accompanist] does need in his chemical make-up, that repository of all human feeling, that source of poetry, fire and romance, namely, a heart". I think it takes a certain type of person to make a good accompanist.

As a collaborative artist, there is no room for ego. (So there goes my childhood dream of adoration and glory as a concert pianist.) Finding the balance between constructive feedback and thoughtless opinion is tricky. Anyone who is able to find

this balance is worthy of a Lifetime Achievement Award.

An accompanist wears many hats; teacher, coach, counsellor, friend, a voice of reasoning for the anxious soloist, and, in some cases, an honest opinion about that Juicy Couture velour tracksuit you're wearing. We sometimes, willing and unwillingly, absorb your own nervous energy before the performance. In these moments, it can be helpful to allow your accompanist time to recharge and expel any projected energy.

In my time as an accompanist, I've come to value one important partnership element: trust. A small word with huge impact.

Perhaps you've never worked with your accompanist before, or maybe you're uneasy about the repertoire you're performing. Whatever the reason, there should be no doubt: only complete trust in the musical partnership.

If I had a dollar for every time a vocalist faltered, I'd be able to retire. It's natural to make mistakes. It's my priority to support and smooth over any discrepancy.

Unfortunately, I don't possess the superpower of telepathy – so if you get lost, commit.

Really. Commit to it.

It's highly likely that your accompanist already knows and is right behind you. To help you visualise, a blunder can be likened

to baking: you've got the cake in the oven when you realise you've forgotten to combine the self-raising flour.

Whoops – too late now.

You can't unbake that cake. So *commit* to serving that gluten-free slice. Because chances are, no one will notice. (And everyone loves cake.)

Trust is a two-way street. Teachers, you can start inculcating in your young students a sense of trust for their accompanists, and advise them to keep all channels of communication open. Further, I can't encourage the concept of 'rehearsal performances' enough. Smaller-scale performance settings, where a singer is able to flesh out a piece and build rapport with the pianist, are the best way to strengthen any collaboration. Such small performance settings minimise any distrust between artists.

At the end of the day, creating music with other artists is one of the most rewarding experiences. No single performance is the same, and I glean something new from every collaboration. It's art. This is what we do. We live for it. We die for it.

And there's nothing else I'd rather do.