

Practical hints for more successful musical collaborations:

(These are in no particular order).

Number measures, circle rehearsal letters, a tempo places, etc. This will save endless time in rehearsals

Discuss the mood, story, words, quality of the music with the other player(s). That way, everyone will be in sync and will be telling the same musical “story”.

If a place often falls apart in rehearsal, drag out the metronome. Often it's the only way to tell which performer is accelerating or dragging. Jazz players call the metronome “the TRUTH”

Edit the music and cover up notes you don't plan to play. Mark EVERYTHING that you might miss in the pressure of a performance – accidentals, breath marks, tempo changes, fermatas, dynamics, expressive marks

Especially note that in many editions, ritardandos and other expressive indications are only printed in the “solo” part. Make sure you write these into the piano part as well

Practice in an efficient way. Write in counts if necessary, don't spend equal time on the easy (Alberti bass, e.g.) parts. Start working from the most difficult sections first.

If someone gets lost in performance, vamp, arpeggiate, play either the right hand or left hand alone, repeat the same chord. The audience may not even notice unless everyone stops and looks distressed.

If you can't hear the other instrument or voice, YOU ARE PLAYING TOO LOUD

Occasionally practice faster than performance speed. That way you won't be taken by surprise if someone has an adrenaline rush and takes off.

In difficult pieces, particularly in orchestral reductions, eliminate notes that don't contribute to the overall effectiveness of the piece, particularly if they cause you to mess up. In many instances, octaves are unnecessary. Repeated notes can be simplified by playing alternating octave notes. It is very simple to repeat notes on the flute or on stringed instruments, but not on keyboards. Leave out busy inner lines that are not going to be heard

Page turns – if you don't have a page turner, practice your page turns. Make sure that the pages are dog-eared, and mark which hands will turn and what you will leave out in order to turn. Look ahead at least a measure so that you are not surprised by what's on the next page. You can also write in the name of the first notes on the next page to orient yourself. A piece of only 4-5-6 pages can be copied and laid out flat to eliminate page turns.

In music where you are an equal partner (art songs, piano-violin or piano-cello sonatas) analyze the music (with the other performer preferably) to figure out where the piano needs to be “soloistic” and where it must be subordinate. Remind them that they also need to back off when you are “Soloist”.

Follow the line of the other performer so that you can see how it is relating to your score. If piano and

other performer have the same musical line but at different times, make sure that your shaping and articulation match the shaping and articulation of the other performer(s). Often a singer or instrumentalist can shape more easily and more beautifully than a piano. Learn from THEM!!

Practice starting the piece many times, especially if all instruments enter together. Learn to read nods, breaths, bowings, and other physical gestures. Ask a string player to demonstrate the motion of the bow, to help you “read” it better. There will be a slight delay for the sound to arrive after the string player starts the bow (no percussive attack)

In orchestral transcriptions, look at all available versions on IMSLP. They are not all created equal and some are much more playable than others

*Use square block notation for chords that are impossible to read – or cover them over with a sticky note and rewrite the chord in a way that makes more sense to your eye (and hand). D# 7 chord with a double sharp in the middle or Eb7 chord? You decide.

Laugh often and be encouraging to your fellow performer(s)

Don't be afraid to be assertive if you cannot play a piece at the tempo that the other performer is demanding or if you feel very strongly about the dynamics or shaping of an important melody. But also be open to new ideas and interpretations suggested by the other performer – sometimes they are bringing much wisdom or experience or study to the score. Insist that your name be on the program in a prominent place! And if you're doing a paid gig, make sure that the pay is relatively equitable.

The tessitura of the singer or instrument is the most comfortable range where that person or instrument can resonate well. If the music asks them to go out of this range, their volume might drop precipitously – so the accompanist needs to pay attention to that and be ready to adjust volume as well.

Communicate to your fellow performer(s) that they have to mark their parts to accommodate you, just as you mark your score to accommodate them! For example, if you have a 4 octave jump or something.

Make sure that singers and instrumentalists show you their cadenzas. If they have a spare copy, paste it into your score, or set it by the side so you can follow where they are.

If in rehearsal the singer or instrumentalist has a problem with an entrance, because they haven't been used to counting their rests, put an asterisk. You might have to jump because the singer or instrumentalist hasn't practiced their rests enough. Sometimes you need to make a little ritard before their entrance or, suddenly play quite a bit louder. (as a clue/cue)

Faking is not a crime, and may often result in a better performance. Don't be ashamed, but learn to do it well! (For example, a complicated or irregular arpeggiation of a chord might be simplified.)

*[] A
[::] F#
[::] Db
[] C natural