

Experimental Practices in Academic and Popular Music: Balancing Heritage and Innovation

Liutsiia Tsyhaniuk^{a,*}, Nataliia Toloshniak^b, Iryna Novosiadla^c, Yurii Voloshchuk^d, & Stepan Yednak^d

^aDepartment of Musicology, Instrumental Training and Methodology of Music Education, Faculty of Humanities, Khmelnytskyi Humanitarian-Pedagogical Academy, Khmelnytskyi, 29013, Ukraine

^bDepartment of Popular and Vocal Music, Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences, King Danylo University, Ivano-Frankivsk, 76018, Ukraine

^cDepartment of Methods of Music Education and Conducting, Educational and Scientific Institute of Arts, Vasyl Stefanyk Carpathian National University, Ivano-Frankivsk, 76018, Ukraine

^dDepartment of Performing Arts, Educational and Scientific Institute of Arts, Vasyl Stefanyk Carpathian National University, Ivano-Frankivsk, 76018, Ukraine

Abstract

This study examines how experimental approaches in academic and popular music mediate between musical heritage and innovation. Rather than being simply preserved or rejected, inherited musical traditions are reinterpreted through contemporary creative practices. The research employed a qualitative documentary musicological analysis of 30 documentary units published or publicly available between 2016 and 2026. The dataset included musical projects, performances, recordings, program materials, digital content, and institutional descriptions related to repertoire reperformance, music revival, genre hybridity, AI-assisted music production, and experimental staging. The findings revealed that hybrid and intercultural projects constituted the largest category (8 units), followed by academic reperformance of inherited repertoire (7 units). Five units each focused on music revival, digital and AI-mediated practices, and experimental performance formats. Heritage was found to be rooted in traditional repertoire, performance practices, genres, cultural memory, musician identity, and recognizable stylistic features. Innovation emerged through reinterpretation, stylistic fusion, improvisation, digital technologies, algorithmic creativity, and experimental visual and spatial performance approaches. The results demonstrate that the most effective experimental practices maintain recognizable connections to musical heritage while adapting it to contemporary cultural and technological contexts. These findings support integrating experimental approaches into music education, enabling students and future music teachers to view heritage as a dynamic resource for creativity, transformation, and cultural renewal rather than as a static object of preservation.

Keywords: violin performance, piano performance, genre and stylistic aspect, music pedagogy of experiment; educational strategies for innovation; development of creative competence.

Received: 17 June 2026

Revised: 17 October 2026

Published: 31 October 2026

1. Introduction

There is a tenuous relationship between musical traditions and the creation of new musical styles in both contemporary and popular music. Both directions have significant potential for development over time. Experimental works created from these musical collections depend on elements of the past, such as genre, style and performance. At the same time, in many cases these elements are transformed: through reinterpretation of the past; through hybridization or improvisation; through the application of digital technologies; or through the application of different forms of their presentation. Because of this reality, neither form can be understood solely as a rejection of what already existed. They are used as a means to change, expand and place musical traditions in a new context. However, when it comes to studying music from both perspectives, they are still often studied as separate entities, although it is more appropriate to consider both musical traditions through experimental work. This will allow for a proper development of understanding of all aspects of both forms of musical expression.

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: matst@ukr.net

Evidence in the reading suggests that the coming of experimental music has created a new way of describing compositions based on conflicting generations of music. According to Ski-Berg (2022), traditional music education continues to balance creativity with established compositional styles, performance practices, and professional standards. Such a view can help to understand why in the academic world of music, experimentation is often not entirely separate from tradition.

The relationship of music to memories has been extensively studied within the field of popular music studies and its impact on cultural heritage. In their article "Musical Culture and the Construction of Cultural Heritage", Bennett & Janssen (2016) discuss, "Popular music heritage, then, is constructed not only via the preservation of past musical traditions but by means of their revival, re-interpretation and dissemination in the public domain. Similarly, Dogantan-Dack (2016) provides an additional perspective on artistic practice as a form of research; experimental practices of performance, interpretation, and creative decision-making can produce new knowledge; therefore, experimentation can be viewed from two angles: as an aesthetic process and as a methodologically-based approach."

Current research shows that new ways to create music will also affect how we learn to perform. According to Minors et al. (2024), research on "artistic" methods in higher education provides opportunities for mindful or reflective, innovative or experimental methods of creating music. Li (2024) also demonstrates that the increase in the number of classical music compositions being performed and the blending together of many different kinds of music have resulted in a more flexible distinction between popular and academic music. However, most studies have examined the areas of performance education, popular music, artistic research, and the blending of styles as separate entities. As such, there is a clear need for further research that examines the shared context of experimentality, wherein the distinction between the heritage and the innovation of academic and popular music can be explored.

Most aspects of this problem of the experimental use of music remain under-researched, even though there currently exists an interest in music experiments. Previous research mostly focused on academic music, artistic research and teaching, and popular music legacy and memory, genre evolution. Types of cultural recognition that both forms of music provide while still transforming their material through a shared set of mechanisms have been discussed to a lesser extent. The relationship of innovation to heritage, canon, memory, and established performance practice is rarely adequately analysed, even though many people believe that innovation is defined solely by stylistic originality. Therefore, the measure of potentially experimental techniques as an area of intersection between change and continuity should be undertaken; rather than being seen merely as opposites of tradition versus innovation.

This study's objective is to determine the role that experimental techniques (used in both academic and mainstream musical realms) play in mediating the connection between a musical heritage and the emergence of new forms of artistic expression. The focus of the research is on how various inherited musical styles, traditions of performance, and cultural memory are not merely maintained or eliminated as new works of art are created; rather, they occur differently at each moment thanks to new strategies for creating with these same musical styles.

The project has the aim to create new techniques for composition using concepts of heritage and the ways in which heritage influences experimentation in both academic and popular music to create new music that includes new styles, new performances, new forms, and genre transformations. The project will also look at different uses of inherited material as a resource for experimentation between both types of music and what are the conditions necessary for experimentation to continue a tradition while producing new artistic meanings.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in the comprehensive rethinking of the destruction and integration of traditional musical material through the prism of modern technological and conceptual transformations. The article proves that innovative digital tools do not destroy tradition, but act as media for its actualization, and also substantiates the transformation of receptive aesthetics, where the listener of experimental music becomes a co-author of meanings in the process of interactive interaction with the audio space.

2. Literature Review

Current research into the use of experimentation in music has expanded beyond merely seeing experimentation as the presentation of new style to include consideration of experimentation as a way of reworking pre-existing musical forms (heritage), cultural memory, conventions of performance, and technological means of performance; thus, heritage is not necessarily eliminated through experimentation. This is especially critical to the research of both the academic and popular music fields, which share a heritage but approach that heritage differently. Academic music tends to utilise printed or written materials (the canon) as a way to gain access to that heritage, whereas popular music is more dependent upon the circulation and revival of recorded music, and the memory of audiences, as ways to access and

thereby renew that heritage. Therefore, the primary concern is not whether heritage and innovation are averse to one another, but how they are integrated into actual musical practice.

Many studies link musical heritage with digital preservation and technological mediation. For example, the analysis by Chen et al. (2024) demonstrates how AI-generated ethnic music datasets can offer documentation and assessment of cultural heritage; however, a methodological dilemma arises when musical heritage is transformed into data because its living performative and contextual aspects become vulnerable to loss and can be treated simply as classifiable sound objects. Münster et al. (2024) propose a broader research agenda for artificial intelligence in digital heritage, suggesting that innovation should not only happen through technological automation. Digital tools in music enable the preservation, recreation, and distribution of heritage - but they cannot replace the interpretive decisions made by musicians when creating something new artistically from inherited materials. Such problems are also found in Zou et al.'s. The virtual museum component of the digital twin model in the preservation of musical heritage will increase human access to the historical sound culture represented within the virtual museum, and provide a mechanism for the movement of this heritage from live performance environments to simulated environments. These studies show that digital technology can be used as a tool to support the storage of musical memories; however, it also changes the way in which musical memories are experienced, interpreted and reused.

The relationship between experiment and tradition is further complicated by the body of work on artificial intelligence (AI) and music generation. The finding that deep music generation currently struggles with issues of repetition and overall structure often found in popular music indicates that algorithmic innovative creation cannot automatically be expected to yield credible music. This suggests that the recent findings have the potential to impact how popular music is created, since it typically relies on innovative combinations of sounds as well as recognizable forms of repetition, hook structure, and stylistic expectations. The shift of AI from supporting technology to centralised systems of creativity raised questions regarding authorship and accountability for music created by AI. Additionally, He (2026) presents a psychological component to this issue, noting that the use of generative AI in collaborative music creation has changed the ways in which creators perceive their own agency and ownership. These artworks demonstrate that technological experimentation in music is not solely related to composition and production, but also holds implications for authorship, the distribution of authorial intent in creating new works, and whether innovation is of a musical value to a person's musical judgment.

Research on digital platforms / recommendation systems reveals an additional layer to the problem. Deldjoo et al (2024) looked at music recommendations based on content, and the study shows that algorithms increasingly help shape how listeners discover new music. This issue is important for experiments, in that innovations do not cross through the world in a neutral environment; while they may take the form of hybrid or unique, they also reinforce historic patterns of consumption by giving prominence to recognizable music. Mokoena & Obagbuwa (2025) researched automation within streaming services as well, looking at how the consumer responses to subscription services are affected by automated processes. Their interest lay in the efficiencies of these platforms; the bigger concern is that the ways audiences find, are exposed to, and finally consume popular music are increasingly shaped by the systems that organize attention, visibility, and access. In other words, the success of an artist's experimental music comes not from their creative Production alone but from the digital infrastructure that lets an experimental artist succeed through their music.

Music, identity, and cultural renewal is also being studied in another area of literature. Kanhov et al. (2025) is one particularly important study in this area because of their discussion of artificial intelligence, data colonialism and ethics as it relates to Irish traditional music. Their work demonstrates how traditional music can turn into an extractive innovation when traditional music is viewed as raw data rather than as part of the community's cultural heritage, authority and history. This is important because it restricts the use of music to traditional forms and tells us that musical experimentation may support the preservation of heritage in a formal sense, but may not alter or continue the social relationships that measure and provide meaning to the preservation of heritage. On the other hand, Crooke et al. (2024) have looked at how intercultural music can provide a framework for engaging with another culture to create real-world cultural interactions. They are able to clarify that the practice of experimentation will facilitate dialogue across cultural traditions, if at all, only if intercultural exchange is established as participation rather than appropriation. According to Haddon & Klein (2024), musical memory as heritage is not ultimately understood as neutral or equally preserved when it is built into musical canons or catalogued in musical archives because they typically embody unequal access to visibility, due to the gendered recognition and exclusion of popular music.

The article's concerns with continuity and change are directly validated by looking at research into popular music revival and renewal. Istvandy and his colleagues (2025) see popular music revival not simply as nostalgia but as a collection of cultural practices that reactivate sounds, styles and identities of the past in the present. This shows that revival work

can be done on an experimental basis and is capable of changing how received materials are used rather than simply copying them or reproducing. In his work (Zhang 2025), he extends this discussion with hybrid musical genres in educational settings, using hybrid forms as a way to help sustain musical relevancy as the cultural and pedagogical context is ever-changing. Questions are raised as to critical approaches to developing hybridized genres; it is possible to create meaningful innovation through the creation of hybridized music by creating new musical language that are drawn from different source traditions, but there is also the danger that creative combinations will exist as merely decorative markers of diversity.

In Wang et al. (2026), they comment on the use of gamified methods of cultural education within vocal music as well as how to engage modern culture through interactive media and educate students through this medium of learning. Thus, contemporary music education is also making use of both culturally based formats and interactive methods to foster connections to cultural heritage using more contemporary methods of music education than have previously been used. Because of this fact, music pedagogy innovations will not only change the methods or processes used to teach students about music heritage but will be addressed in an entirely different context than traditional styles of music composing, performing, and producing digitally. Thus, while there are many different styles or types of experimental music practice, experimental practice can also involve designing an environment in which learners can be exposed to inherited music through games, media, collaborative interpretation, and culture-specific performance activities.

Four interrelated factors shape how experimentations with music, whether in an academic or popular context, are conceived: (1) digital mediation of recorded historical music (or musical heritage); (2) algorithmic transformation of the process of creating music; (3) innovation of new forms through the circulation of music via platforms; and (4) the cultural negotiation of memory, identity, and ownership through the creation and distribution of music. One of the unresolved issues associated with these four factors is their separation within the existing research; therefore, studies of artificial intelligence tend to focus on its generative capabilities, data sets, and automation, while studies of heritage focus on preserving and remembering and popular music studies focus on reviving, constructing a musical identity, and circulating music. Research on music education tends to focus on pedagogy and the cultural transmission of music. There is currently a lack of an integrative perspective of the experimentation that safeguards tradition and provides ways of experiencing traditional music while creating new music and/or altering how music will be experienced within the context of traditional and contemporary musical experiences. This study is concerned with this void because a single act of experimentation can simultaneously safeguard a tradition, transform a genre's conventions, change the means through which an author does or does not have authorship rights, and provide different experiences for the audiences and the students who will experience traditional music. At the same time, the contribution of the current study adds novelty to the concepts of synthesis of experiments in both areas, positioning of conceptual balance as a development tool, as well as comparative analysis of interspecific diffusion.

3. Materials and Methods

This research project has been designed as a qualitative analysis of the musical documents containing both popular and academic examples of experimental practice and their relationships to each other. The research topic combines classical musicological approaches with methods of studying contemporary culture. The main task of such a methodology is to explain how new technologies and experiments interact with traditional musical canons. Academic literature has been consulted as part of creating the framing document for the research problem but was not treated as a major empirical data set. The research included various types of documents publicly available about the performance and use of music that demonstrate how the two elements of heritage and innovation are combined through creative practice.

It was undertaken in 2025 and 2026. The empirical corpus during this period comprised thirty documentary units available from public resources, such as musical (concert or studio) and audiovisual (music videos or films) institutional sources produced or made available to the public from 2016 to 2026. Each of the documentary units would have one uniquely identifiable musical project (a musical work, performance, release, or collection of documents related to an institution). They included concerts and studio recordings, materials of albums, program notes, descriptions of festivals, digital documentation of performances and statements by composers and/or performers associated with album releases. Also included were online archives of music institutions and documentation on hybrid/interdisciplinary music projects. The documentary units included examples of reinterpreted classical works, fusion genres, digitally mediated performances, music produced with the assistance of artificial intelligence, intercultural collaborations, and popular music practices derived from revival traditions in both academic and popular music contexts.

The methodology involved purposive and nonrandom sample selection and employed an analytical approach aimed at finding a connection between inherited musical material and newly created (innovative) artistic strategies. Materials

were selected because they related to the researched aimed at discovering the relationship between inherited musical material and either newly created or innovative forms of artistic expression (e.g., performances). Inclusion criteria included: (1) materials are in relation to academically or popularly created music; (2) materials are documented as having been created through experimentation in their development; (3) materials have a direct relationship to culture (heritage, canon, genre memory, cultural tradition or performance convention); (4) materials are publicly available or have sufficient descriptive documentation; and (5) sufficient context existed for analysis by qualitative methodologies. All material that: (1) is commercially released as a commercial product without an identifiable experimental component; (2) includes general promotional texts without analytical value; (3) are undocumented performances; (4) are unavailable; or (5) represent innovation that is solely limited to technical sound processing without a clear relationship to heritage; was excluded from the research.

The selection of specific 30 documentary units (scientific works, critical reviews, manifestos, interviews or media files) among thousands of possible sources for the period 2016–2026 is due to the need to clearly demonstrate the dynamics of the interaction between tradition and avant-garde. The reasons and criteria for forming a representative sample: conceptual polarity and hybridization, which involves the interpenetration of genres and the evolution of institutions; technological disruption, which includes the popularization of AI and neural networks, the development of new media; socio-cultural and geographical representativeness. The methodological value of the sources was also taken into account, given their expert status and multimedia for a comprehensive analysis of the sound environment.

The analysis was carried out in a four-step process. In the first step, a screen of potential materials was run to establish whether or not there was a significant relationship between innovation and heritage. The second stage categorized the materials into five groups (academic reinterpretations of inherited repertoire; popular music at certain points of rebirth and renewal; hybrid genre/intercultural projects; artificial intelligence/digital mediated music practice; experimental performance or staging format). The third stage involved coding each of the five units via three indicators: type of heritage; form of innovation; and relationship to continuity/transformation. In terms of the type of heritage, it was coded with reference to Canon(ical), traditional performance practice; genre convention; cultural memory; ethnic/community based musical identity; and historically identifiable style. In terms of the form of innovation, it was coded in relation to Reinterpretation; style fusion; Improvisation; Digital mediation; Algorithm-driven; experimental spatial/visual performance; and pedagogical performance adaptations.

The analysis scheme included the following stages:

- 1) attribution – description of the context of the creation of the work and its authors;
- 2) technological section – fixation of the instrumentation;
- 3) structural analysis – division of the work into parts, fixation of dramaturgical waves;
- 4) search for the genetic code – determination of the tradition on which the experiment is based;
- 5) synthesis – formulation of a conclusion about whether the experiment is an organic development of the tradition or its radical negation.

To achieve scientific validity, such tools as data triangulation and the repeatability criterion were used. The methodology took into account the socio-cultural context: in academic music, the balance shifts towards the intellectual deconstruction of the form (for example, neoclassicism or spectralism), and validity is proven through the analysis of the musical text; in popular music, innovation often lies in the plane of sound recording, timbre and production, and validity is proven through the analysis of the phonogram and technological context.

In general, musicological analysis is considered through the prism of content analysis. This allows us to move from subjective aesthetic evaluation to objective, verified research of the verbal component of musical culture. The essence of the nature of the analysis lies in positioning the text as a projection of sound (the description of the project - application form, press release, concept - is treated as a primary semiotic code), using a quantitative-qualitative approach, when not only metaphors are studied, but also the frequency of use of specific terms, concepts and categories, as well as in a problem-thematic focus (content analysis reveals the hidden intentions of the authors, socio-cultural context and marketing strategies).

The use of video coding methods in the context of experimental music research was also envisaged - a method of qualitative and quantitative analysis of video recordings of performances, rehearsals or concerts, which helps to record exactly how musical heritage (traditional techniques, notation) and innovations (new technologies, non-standard sound extraction) interact.

The coding matrix was prepared using Microsoft Excel 2021 and the category distribution across the five clusters was compared. With respect to how category distribution was compared within/out of the five clusters, the study only used descriptive frequency comparisons. The following research methods were not employed in this study: surveys, interviews, audience measurement activities, classroom observations, experiential interventions, inferential statistical tests. In addition, coder consistency was maintained through the re-coding of the same materials and comparing the resulting coded data against research objectives as well as the a priori codings.

4. Results

The current field of research in the field contains a surprisingly high level of conflicting information regarding the development of experimental approaches to music in both popular music and academic circles. Original or inherited musical forms do not exist in isolation, but are discovered through other forms of musical creativity; this includes all forms of inherited or original music (traditional, canonical, etc.) as part of an ongoing process of creating new works, although none of them may contain elements of a previous work. For these reasons, the most common way of presenting experiments in created works is through positive control over previously created musical works.

Stage 1 had 30 documentary units assigned to the five clusters as established by the methodology used. These included: academic reinterpretations of culturally inherited heritage/repertoire, Revival/Renewal of popular music, projects of hybrid genre/intercultural performance, digital and artificial intelligence mediated music practice, and experimental performance and staging formats. Ten (10) representative Documentaries from the total number of Documentaries in Table 1 could illustrate the application of the three analytical indicators for each of the sample Documentary Units. The frequency data analysis's below refers to all thirty 30 Documentaries, not just the twelve listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Representative coding examples from the documentary corpus according to heritage, innovation, and balance mode

Documentary unit	Cluster	Type of heritage involved	Form of innovation used	Mode of balance between continuity and transformation
<i>Recomposed by Max Richter: Vivaldi, The Four Seasons</i> (Deutsche Grammophon, 2014)	Academic reinterpretations of inherited repertoire	Canonical repertoire; historically recognizable style	Reinterpretation	Continuity through recognizable Vivaldi material, transformation through recomposed structure and contemporary sound language
<i>The New Four Seasons: Vivaldi Recomposed</i> (Deutsche Grammophon, 2022)	Academic reinterpretations of inherited repertoire	Canonical repertoire; traditional performance practice	Reinterpretation; digital mediation	Continuity through the same canonical source, transformation through renewed recording and mediated sound presentation
<i>ANNO: Four Seasons</i> (Meredith, n.d.)	Academic reinterpretations of inherited repertoire	Canonical repertoire; historically recognizable style	Reinterpretation; stylistic fusion	Continuity through Vivaldi's seasonal cycle, transformation through the interaction of Baroque material and contemporary composition
<i>Radio Rewrite</i> (Reich, 2012)	Hybrid genre and intercultural projects – hybrid genre subcase	Genre convention; popular music memory	Reinterpretation; stylistic fusion	Continuity through traces of popular source material, transformation through minimalist compositional procedure
Philip Glass's <i>Akhmaten</i> , Metropolitan Opera production (Metropolitan Opera, n.d.)	Experimental performance or staging formats	Canonical repertoire; institutional performance tradition	Spatial or visual performance experimentation	Continuity through operatic repertoire, transformation through visual, theatrical, and staging-based mediation

Documentary unit	Cluster	Type of heritage involved	Form of innovation used	Mode of balance between continuity and transformation
<i>Act II: Cowboy Carter</i> (Beyoncé, 2024)	Popular music revival and renewal	Genre convention; cultural memory	Stylistic fusion	Continuity through country, blues, and popular music memory, transformation through contemporary genre repositioning
<i>They're Calling Me Home</i> (Giddens & Turrisi, 2021)	Hybrid genre and intercultural projects	Cultural memory; ethnic or community-based musical identity	Stylistic fusion; improvisational transformation	Continuity through folk, diasporic, and early music references, transformation through cross-cultural arrangement
<i>Folk Songs</i> (Kronos Quartet, n.d.)	Hybrid genre and intercultural projects	Cultural memory; community-based musical identity	Reinterpretation; stylistic fusion	Continuity through folk song sources, transformation through contemporary string quartet mediation
<i>Ladilikan</i> (Trio Da Kali & Kronos Quartet, n.d.)	Hybrid genre and intercultural projects	Ethnic or community-based musical identity; traditional performance practice	Stylistic fusion; improvisational transformation	Continuity through Mande musical identity, transformation through cross-traditional performance interaction
<i>Sing Me Home</i> (Silkroad, n.d.)	Hybrid genre and intercultural projects	Cultural memory; community-based musical identity	Stylistic fusion; improvisational transformation	Continuity through multiple musical traditions, transformation through ensemble-based recombination
<i>PROTO</i> (Herndon, 2019)	Digital and artificial intelligence-mediated music practices	Historically recognizable style; genre convention	Algorithmic assistance; digital mediation	Continuity through vocal, choral, and electronic references, transformation through machine-assisted creative procedure
<i>Celebrating Johann Sebastian Bach</i> (Google, 2019)	Digital and artificial intelligence-mediated music practices	Canonical repertoire; historically recognizable style	Algorithmic assistance; digital mediation	Continuity through Bach-related harmonic style, transformation through interactive digital mediation

Source: compiled by the author based on qualitative coding of the documentary corpus.

The first basic trend within this cluster of scholarly re-readings of old works was that known compositions tended to be upheld as easily recognizable, while changes in innovation affected the organization of internal structure, texture, or mode of performance of the present. Two instances of this pattern are the two documentaries by Max Richter both of which had the same content from Vivaldi's 'The Four Seasons', but for each one, the element or aspect of the historical cycle was a flexible musical resource rather than a static historical document (Deutsche Grammophon 2014; Deutsche Grammophon 2022). The project ANNO: Four Seasons created by Meredith expands upon this analysis further by placing the Vivaldi work in a hybrid connection with the current compositional material and showing how the classical material functions as a layer in the overall experimental composition. Therefore, in these instances, there was an agreement between continuance and transformation in the source materials being audible, yet their structural and aesthetic functions had changed.

Experimental practices in music are the main driver of its evolution, where the balance between heritage (tradition) and innovation determines new artistic forms. Artistic transformation in this context destroys old canons, but at the same time rethinks them, creating new meanings both in the academic environment and in popular culture. This

transformation manifests itself in the context of aesthetics (the emergence of unique soundscapes, new emotional triggers), technology (the creation of new instruments, the accessibility of creativity), socio-culture (the destruction of snobbery, the unification of completely different audiences). At the same time, the balance between heritage and innovation is mobile. Artistic transformation proves: innovation does not destroy heritage, but gives it new life. Without tradition, experiment loses its fulcrum and becomes chaos; without innovation, tradition turns into a dead museum exhibit.

Most of the heritage in modern pop music is grouped according to its style and the way it's remembered, but examples of this cluster don't show that a revival of the past can only refer back to the same thing. Rather, they show a way of using the past to produce something new by using genre to produce an artistic expression that we can think of as an experimental re-classification of historical genre markers. An important characteristic of this new form of revival is an eclectic form of traditional styles and/or sounds, through which new forms of music can be created that do not refer to the original genre but would still be recognized and associated with the original genre.

The third cluster of the complete database of performances, hybrid genres and intercultural projects, was home to the greatest number of entities. This group of materials provides evidence that experimentation with hybrid genres occurs through the transfer of inherited materials between different performance traditions, ensemble structures and cultural contexts. For example, They Call Me Home, utilized both folk, diaspora, and early music references in a combined chamber configuration creating an audible representation of cultural memory with an intimate, cross-culturally arranged collaboration (Giddens & Turrisi, 2021). In addition to They Call Me Home, Folk Songs and Ladilikan also provide similar systems of creation using different heritage codes. Folk Songs, for instance, utilized community related material and transferred it to a contemporary string quartet format (Kronos Quartet, n.d). Conversely, Ladilikan provided a visible representation of Mande cultural musical identity and performance practice, while transforming the stylistic fusion and improvisation of the original material through the performance environment in which the inherited material was performed (Trio Da Kali & Kronos Quartet, n.d.). Sing Me Home provides for a larger, ensemble based model whereby two or more traditions are reconfigured and performed collaboratively (Silkroad, n.d).

Radio Rewrite has a definite role in the larger context of the hybrid and intercultural genres. It wasn't developed as an intercultural project per se but rather as a response to the hybridization of genres with no intercultural exchange being involved. I looked at the documentary unit as also contributing to the Hybrid Genre Subcase because it relates to popular memories of music made by a specific pop artist, Radiohead, and using the academic minimalist compositional process developed by Steve Reich (2012). The impact of this case is significant because it takes away the simple dichotomy between popular and academic music. The use of popular source materials doesn't only come in the form of direct quotations; they also undergo a process of transformation into a compositional landscape of process-oriented, repetitive, formal, and re-worked music.

The fourth set of clusters, digital and AI-based music-making, demonstrated that innovation can exist in the processes by which music is created or appropriated as well as in the styles of music. For example, PROTO was coded as algorithmically mediated and digital mediated because its experimental nature required both the human practice of singing and the production of electronically recorded sound (Herndon, 2019). In this example of cultural heritage, there were no single representative works that met the definition of being "canonical." Rather, there were many recognizable historical examples of singing/vocals and choral/electronic music. Within this experiment's context, reinterpreting source material as a way to find balance-in-relationship-to-one-another was changed to transforming the process of creative practice in order to achieve balance. Another example of digital mediation would include the Google Bach Doodle. This experiment illustrated how historical styles could be logged as historical examples and that by using algorithmically based systems, the style of harmonics based on the music of Bach would be made available to the listener in an interactive digital medium (Google, 2019).

The fifth cluster, 'staging formats or experimental performances', indicated that new ideas could come from how performances are presented rather than from the music itself. Akhnaten by Philip Glass at the Metropolitan Opera was presented as part of a canon of classical music and as an institutional-style performance. The innovation code on Akhnaton was based on spatial/visual experimentation (Metropolitan Opera, n.d.). This means that staging could become a key site for experimentation through how visual organization, theatrical movement and performance formats impact upon how a specific repertoire is experienced in terms of what has already been performed. Therefore, although the same piece of music can still be played, its cultural/perceptual lens will be different.

The overall corpus contained three general patterns. Academic interpretations of music typically provide continuity via canonically recognizable form, yet produce transformation through re-interpreting the music itself, and change the mode of performance. Popular and intercultural projects typically provide continuity through cultural memory, genre

convention, or local identity, but produce transformation through fusing differing creative styles and using improvisation. Digital and AI-mediated practices typically provide continuity through historically recognizable forms/structures/styles, but produce transformation through using algorithmic assistance to re-create sounds or using digital media to create sounds. These 3 types of music experimentation were not seen as universal laws of musical experimentation, but rather as outcomes of codes based on documents within the samples.

Based on the five clusters of experimental practices identified and their mechanisms for balancing heritage and innovation, specific educational recommendations for institutions of higher music education can be formulated. Table 2 below systematizes these recommendations, correlating each cluster with a type of heritage, a form of innovation, and suggesting practical pedagogical measures. The goal of these recommendations is to integrate experimental approaches into curricula in order to develop in student musicians the ability to consciously balance between preserving traditions and creative renewal (Table 2).

Table 2. Educational recommendations based on clusters of experimental practices in music

Experimental Practice Cluster	Inheritance type	Form of innovation	Recommended educational activities
Academic reinterpretations of inherited repertoire	Canonical repertoire; historically recognizable style	Reinterpretation; digital mediation	Courses in historical arrangement; recomposition laboratories; "old music - new sound" projects
The revival and renewal of popular music	Genre convention; cultural memory	Stylistic fusion	Analysis of genre transformations; creation of revisionist cover versions; study of nostalgia in music
Hybrid genres and cross-cultural projects	Cultural memory; ethnic identity	Stylistic fusion; improvisational transformation	Ensemble laboratories on intercultural dialogue; master classes with ethnic musicians; fusion projects
Digital and AI-mediated musical practices	Historically recognizable style; genre convention	Algorithmic assistance; digital mediation	Modules on generative AI in music; courses on sound design; ethics of authorship in the digital age
Experimental performances and stage formats	Canonical repertoire; institutional tradition	Spatial-visual experimentation	Performing arts workshops; working with non-traditional concert venues; integrating theater and music

Source: compiled by the author

As noted above, the analyzed corpus conveys that the experimental methods of the academic and popular music were able to balance heritage and innovation through the means of mediation. Heritage was important in terms of the ability to identify it as a repertoire, the memory of a genre, an aspect of cultural identity, the specific way of performing, or having the visual identity of the style. Innovation also had analytic significance in terms of changing the function, context, procedure, or presentation of heritage. Thus, the results should be considered to represent outcomes of desk-based research musicological coding and to not represent audience reception, intention of the performer by documentation, commercial success, and social impact as measurable.

5. Discussion

The analysis of coded documentary data suggests that the experimental practices of both musical genres (academic & mainstream) are not rejections of musical tradition/historical influences, but rather a means by which they are being transformed in a manner that can be controlled. Within all examined excerpts, every piece of inherited source material (ie., excerpts of music from previous generations) was still identifiable based on common forms of repertoire (canonical interpretation), genre conventions, cross-generational collective memory, customary performance practice, or historically divided styles. This finding is significant to the discipline (academic and otherwise) because it takes the focus away from the relationship/existence versus absence of musical traditions (ie., old/new) and on the specific mechanisms that each creates for preserving continuity in a work of music, performance, and documentation, while making changes to the conditions under which those works exist to be equally interpreted, mediated, and understood (ie., artistic meaning).

The most significant inclination observed for the use of these projects was within the typological clusters of academic reinterpretations or hybrid genre/intercultural projects; this was in line with Cook's premise that music cannot be simply

defined by its written score because performing creates a context where the meaning of music can be created and reinterpreted (Cook, 2013). These findings therefore validate that argument; in fact, the units being examined show that the concept of heritage regarding music did not exist solely within the original composition or source tradition, but was also found through performance choices, arrangement decisions, staging of performances, ensemble formats, and the events in which they were recorded. These acts of reinterpretation were therefore used as practical processes through which the accumulated repertoire was transformed into contemporary forms while retaining their recognized aesthetic.

The findings were also consistent with the findings of Mykhats et al. (2024) regarding innovative approaches to contemporary performances and/or reinterpretations of traditional works. However, this research has provided a more detailed analysis than previous studies. Specifically, through the use of video coding techniques, it has been found that the definition of innovation within an academic canon has not only included new interpretations through performing arts and/or reinterpretation of an existing work, but will also include new types of digital media and the use of physical space or visual effects during performances. This has allowed many new interpretations to occur in both how we experience the music and understand the relationship between the music and the way we listen today. Through this, our analysis indicates that the classical canon will continue to evolve through multiple avenues for example: recomposing pieces, creating new productions of pieces, creating hybrid forms, or producing and exhibiting pieces using digitally mediated forms.

The hybrid or intercultural cluster was the largest of the four clusters analysed, indicating that many contemporary experiments involve moving musical materials across genre and cultural boundaries. This finding is consistent with Putiatytska et al. (2024), who have referred to contemporary music as a fusion of styles/genres/traditions. However, it must be noted that fusion cannot be viewed as a simple decorative blend of styles in this study; stylistic fusion within the selected examples can only be seen as significant when there is a demonstrable connection back to either cultural memory, a community-based identity or the conventions of a genre. Thus, this distinction serves to separate analytically supported experimentation from merely superficial eclecticism.

The results support Segate's interpretation of musical heritage using an alternative view of 'musical treasures' through the lens of performativity. Segate (2019) argues that musical heritage must be understood through its performative legacy and functional legacy, rather than simply viewed as a physical object to be preserved. My analysis shows that documentary units indicate that heritage remains active through performance, recomposition, staging, mediation and recontextualisation. So, musical heritage is not treated as a static object kept in an archive; rather it is used as the material for creative artistic reuse.

A partial tension exists in relation to Rolfhamre's exploration of advanced performance development in music and the quality of higher music education. Rolfhamre (2020) illustrates how institutional structures create regulatory authority and normative standards for traditional classical performance. Overall findings appear to indicate that institutional structures do not preclude experimentation; however, they have an influence on how permissible the different types of experimentation are. Innovations within academic reinterpretations were predominantly connected to an established repertoire of music and an established authority for performing that repertoire. Therefore, institutional legitimacy may play a larger role in determining whether an experimental approach can be pursued for music within a classical music framework than would be the case for experimental music being pursued in a popular or hybrid framework.

The analysis allows us to formulate specific educational recommendations for institutions of higher music education, art schools, and teacher training programs.

First, the model of balancing the recognition of the canon and its structural transformation, identified in academic reinterpretations of heritage, can be directly implemented in music history and performance courses. Instead of passively memorizing canonical works, students should be given tasks to "creatively reread" the classical repertoire – creating their own arrangements, recompositions, or modern interpretations while preserving recognizable thematic material. This forms not only performance skills, but also the ability to cultural reflection and understanding heritage as a living process.

Second, the largest cluster group in terms of volume – hybrid genres and intercultural projects (8 units) – indicates that modern music education should actively integrate intercultural and intergenre dialogue into practical classes. Students need to be taught to work with different musical traditions, to combine styles, to improvise at the boundaries of genres. This requires a review of traditional curricula, which often isolate academic from popular music, and Western from non-Western. Pedagogy of musical experimentation should create conditions for safe crossing of these boundaries.

Third, practices in digital and AI mediation (cluster 4) indicate the need to include modules in algorithmic creativity, sound design and interactive media in educational programs. Students should not simply consume technology, but also

critically reflect on how authorship, agency and cultural memory change when using generative neural networks. This involves the creation of interdisciplinary laboratories at the intersection of music, computer science and media studies.

Fourth, experimental stage formats (cluster 5) demonstrate that the performative component of music education needs to be updated. In addition to traditional concert performance, students should be involved in projects with spatial and visual experimentation, theatricalization of musical performance, and the use of non-traditional concert venues. This expands the understanding of “where” and “how” music occurs, and prepares future musicians for work in contemporary performing arts.

The results of the study should be implemented in music teacher training programs. Teachers should realize that experimentation is not a threat to cultural heritage, but rather a tool for its actualization. Accordingly, the methodology of teaching music disciplines should include strategies for encouraging student experimentation, creating a safe environment for creative risks, and developing the ability to make reasoned choices between preserving tradition and transforming it.

The study reveals that heritage and innovation form a multiplicity of recurring documentary forms rather than a single example of each. Most examples of academic music appear to reformulate established music traditions by using new ways of interpreting established music and performing it through different mediation. In contrast, examples of popular and hybrid music seem to reformulate memories of music genre and musicianship through stylistic blending. Digital and artificial intelligence-based contemporary practice has moved the focus of experimentation toward process, media, and creative agency. All of these findings should be considered as reflections of the documentary coding process and should not be interpreted as any evidence of how audiences received the work, how performers intended their work to be interpreted beyond what is documented, or how the work has become relatively established in the culture over time. Additional research could continue to build upon this corpus by comparing different geographical areas and/or institutions or providing insights from performers themselves as to how they identify the line between traditional and modern in the production of new music.

6. Conclusion

Studies suggest that making experimental music in academia and popular culture primarily consists of transforming the previous generations' works rather than totally rejecting them. A sample size of 30 documentaries supports this and has demonstrated that creating continuity through a variety of means (the original works, traditional performance, genre, cultural memory, community identity, historically recognized styles, etc.) is accomplished through a variety of methods. These include but are not limited to reinterpretation, fusing styles, improvisationally transforming, digitally or machine mediating, algorithmic assistance, using experimental performance methods, and adapting performance practices for educational purposes.

The distribution of the corpus reveals that the mass of hybrid/intercultural genre/projects has the most units (8). Following them was the amount of academic reinterpretations of the inherited repertoire (7). Five units each representing Popular Music Revival/ New, Digital/AI-Mediated Practices and Experimental Performance/Staging Formats, respectively. The quantitative measures of these units illustrate that there are a frequent number of occasions whereby a point of balance occurred when crossing over into another style (song), region (cultural), technology (recording), and/or performance/creation (staging) boundaries when using any musical material with/without a defined boundary between it/them.

Based on their observations, participants' qualitative results appear to indicate that the academic areas of music will be engaged with in ways that are different to how traditional forms of cultural heritage are applied. Academic music will also engage differently with how these performances have been documented and mediated. In contrast to academic forms of music, popular genres tend to rely more on the documented histories and revivals of their respective genres, as well as how their cultures and/or traditions are *repositioned* in relation to various forms of contemporary music. Many hybrid and intercultural projects are based on combining styles of music from two or more ethnic/racial influences, thereby maintaining some degree of the recognised culture, while producing new artefacts. Methods of using digital and artificial methodologies for experimentation in performance have evolved from earlier methods of performing into procedural, interfaced and algorithmic paths of creative expression, while new methods of creating performance spaces are changing the way in which performers create art.

The coding framework proposed is the practical take-away from this research; that is, it is a way in which researchers can look at documented pieces of music by utilizing coded values rather than through other forms of research (i.e., surveys, interviews, and measuring audience). Also, experimental practices in academic and popular music create a

unique balance between preserving heritage and introducing innovations, which is of critical importance for modern education. Music education today is transforming from strict copying of canons to the upbringing of flexible, creative thinking. The significance for music education lies in the development of students' critical thinking through the deconstruction of classical structures, overcoming genre barriers, creating a single artistic space, and forming an identity. Consequently, in its use of only existing documented resources as the foundation for examining this research, the following limitation of the study exists: Researchers cannot assess how listeners received the works or how the original performers intended them to be received by their original audiences.

From an educational perspective, the findings suggest that higher education institutions should redesign their curricula to integrate experimental practices across all five clusters. This includes: developing students' ability to reinterpret canonical repertoire through contemporary compositional and performance strategies; developing genre hybridity and cross-cultural collaboration as key competencies; preparing future musicians to work with digital and AI-mediated creative processes; incorporating experimental stage formats into performance training; and preparing music educators to balance heritage preservation and creative renewal in their own pedagogical practices. The proposed coding framework can serve as a tool for curriculum developers to assess the extent to which educational programs enable students to navigate between continuity and transformation.

Additionally, researchers are unable to assess how long term cultural impact may exist from the coded works documented within the study. Future studies could utilize the corpus and archive to create additional works or could utilize comparative research methods to compare different musical regions or musical institutions utilizing performer- or audience-based evidence to assess the same music, as long as the differences between the two types of evidence (i.e., documentary evidence and audience reception evidence) are maintained.

References

- Bennett, A., & Janssen, S. (2016). Popular music, cultural memory, and heritage. *Popular Music and Society*, 39(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2015.1061332>
- Beyoncé. (2024). *Act II: Cowboy Carter*. Parkwood Entertainment. <https://music.beyonce.com/>
- Chen, D., Sun, N., Lee, J.-H., Zou, C., & Jeon, W.-S. (2024). Digital technology in cultural heritage: Construction and evaluation methods of AI-based ethnic music dataset. *Applied Sciences*, 14(23), Article 10811. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app142310811>
- Cook, N. (2013). *Beyond the score: Music as performance*. Oxford University Press. https://books.google.com.ua/books/about/Beyond_the_Score.html?id=BnhCAGAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y
- Crooke, A. H. D., Davidson, J., & Fraser, T. (2024). Exploring the real-world applicability of an intercultural music engagement (ICME) framework. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2024.2362747>
- Dai, S., Yu, H., & Dannenberg, R. B. (2022). What is missing in deep music generation? A study of repetition and structure in popular music. *Proceedings of the 23rd International Society for Music Information Retrieval Conference*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2209.00182>
- Deldjoo, Y., Schedl, M., & Knees, P. (2024). Content-driven music recommendation: Evolution, state of the art, and challenges. *Computer Science Review*, 51, Article 100618. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosrev.2024.100618>
- Deutsche Grammophon. (2014). *Recomposed by Max Richter: Vivaldi, The Four Seasons*. <https://www.deutschegrammophon.com/en/catalogue/products/recomposed-by-max-richter-vivaldi-four-seasons-6618>
- Deutsche Grammophon. (2022). *The New Four Seasons: Vivaldi Recomposed*. <https://www.deutschegrammophon.com/en/catalogue/products/the-new-four-seasons-vivaldi-recomposed-max-richter-12667>
- Dogantan-Dack, M. (2016). *Artistic practice as research in music: Theory, criticism, practice*. Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Artistic-Practice-as-Research-in-Music-Theory-Criticism-Practice/Dogantan-Dack/p/book/9781138284548>

- Giddens, R., & Turrisi, F. (2021). *They're Calling Me Home*. Nonesuch Records. <https://rhiannongiddens.bandcamp.com/album/theyre-calling-me-home-with-francesco-turrisi>
- Google. (2019). *Celebrating Johann Sebastian Bach*. Google Doodles. <https://doodles.google/doodle/celebrating-johann-sebastian-bach/>
- Haddon, M., & Klein, B. (2024). Introduction: Gender and popular music knowledge. *Popular Music and Society*, 47(2), 87–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2024.2320552>
- He, W. (2026). Subjective task load and psychological ownership in generative AI collaborative music creation: Mechanisms shaping creators' state sense of agency. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 17, Article 1835406. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1835406>
- Herndon, H. (2019). *PROTO*. 4AD. <https://shop.4ad.com/release/339131-holly-herndon-proto>
- Istvandity, L., Luo, M., & Tebbutt, J. (2025). Introduction: Popular music, revival and renewal: Histories, cultures, practices. *Continuum*, 39(3), 379–383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2025.2480372>
- Kanhov, E., Kaila, A.-K., & Sturm, B. L. T. (2025). Innovation, data colonialism and ethics: Critical reflections on the impacts of AI on Irish traditional music. *Journal of New Music Research*, 53(1–2), 47–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09298215.2024.2442359>
- Kronos Quartet. (n.d.). *Folk Songs*. <https://kronosquartet.org/recordings/detail/folk-songs/>
- Li, A. (2024). The historical evolution of the popularization of classical music and the development of the fusion of multiple musical styles. *Herança*, 7(1), 113–125. <https://doi.org/10.52152/heranca.v7i1.810>
- Meredith, A. (n.d.). *ANNO: Four Seasons by Anna Meredith & Antonio Vivaldi (ft. Scottish Ensemble)*. <https://www.annameredith.com/shop/annofourseasons>
- Metropolitan Opera. (n.d.). *Music in the air*. <https://www.metopera.org/user-information/nightly-met-opera-streams/articles/music-in-the-air/>
- Minors, H. J., Östersjö, S., Dalagna, G., & Salgado Correia, J. (Eds.). (2024). Teaching music performance in higher education: Exploring the potential of artistic research. Open Book Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0398>
- Mokoena, N., & Obagbuwa, I. C. (2025). An analysis of artificial intelligence automation in digital music streaming platforms for improving consumer subscription responses: A review. *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence*, 7, Article 1515716. <https://doi.org/10.3389/frai.2024.1515716>
- Münster, S., Maiwald, F., di Lenardo, I., Henriksson, J., Isaac, A., Graf, M. M., Beck, C., & Oomen, J. (2024). Artificial intelligence for digital heritage innovation: Setting up a R&D agenda for Europe. *Heritage*, 7(2), 794–816. <https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage7020038>
- Mykhats, R., Dmytrieva, O., Matiichyn, I., Zhukova, O., & Makovetska, I. (2024). Exploring new perspectives on classical compositions: Innovative methods in modern performances and adaptations of classical music. *AD ALTA: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 14(1). <http://ir.dspu.edu.ua/jspui/handle/123456789/3691>
- Putiatytska, O., Ryndenko, O., Osoka, O., Putiatytska, L., & Shchyrytsia, D. (2024). Exploring global musical diversity: Analysing the fusion of styles, genres, and traditions in modern music. *AD ALTA: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 14(1). https://www.magnanimitas.cz/ADALTA/140142/papers/A_15.pdf
- Reich, S. (2012). *Radio Rewrite*. Boosey & Hawkes. <https://www.boosey.com/cr/music/Steve-Reich-Radio-Rewrite/54072>
- Rolfhamre, R. (2020). When classical musical instrument performance tuition in higher education meets managerial quality assurance. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, 19(1), 81–117. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act19.1.81>
- Segate, R. V. (2019). Reconceptualising musical treasures: The functional legacy of performativity. *Art Antiquity & Law Review*, 24, 89–105. <https://ial.uk.com/product/reconceptualising-musical-treasures-in-italy-the-eu-and-the-world-the-functional-legacy-of-performativity-by-riccardo-vecellio-segate/>
- Silkroad. (n.d.). *Sing Me Home*. <https://www.silkroad.org/listen>

- Ski-Berg, V. (2022). Between innovation and tradition: The balancing act of higher music education. *Nordic Research in Music Education*, 3(1), 15–29. <https://doi.org/10.23865/nrme.v3.3699>
- Trio Da Kali, & Kronos Quartet. (n.d.). *Ladilikan*. Kronos Quartet. <https://kronosquartet.org/recordings/detail/ladilikan/>
- Wang, H., Liu, J., Wang, X., & Aziz, M. (2026). Game-based cultural pedagogy in vocal music: A grounded theory model from Black Myth: Wukong. *Music Education Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2026.2619692>
- Wei, L., Yu, Y., Qin, Y., & Zhang, S. (2025). From tools to creators: A review on the development and application of artificial intelligence music generation. *Information*, 16(8), Article 656. <https://doi.org/10.3390/info16080656>
- Zhang, Z. (2025). Fusion and innovation-advancing sustainability through hybrid musical genres in education. *Acta Psychologica*, 255, Article 104851. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2025.104851>
- Zou, C., Rhee, S.-Y., He, L., Chen, D., & Yang, X. (2024). Sounds of history: A digital twin approach to musical heritage preservation in virtual museums. *Electronics*, 13(12), Article 2388. <https://doi.org/10.3390/electronics13122388>