

## AMBO in South Africa: 11 February – 6 March 2025

AMBO visited the music departments of the universities in Stellenbosch, Cape Town, Pretoria and Potchefstroom, as well as a secondary school in Johannesburg, Jeppe High School for Girls. We taught on thirteen of the twenty-four days in South Africa; three to four hours a day on average. We received different forms of sponsorship (financial, services, organisational support, and so on) from all five institutions.



resting between piano improvisation workshops (Stellenbosch)

We taught in various fields at the universities, but the focus of our teaching fell on piano improvisation with different workshops under the title of **Into Piano Improvisation – from Movement over Interaction**. The aims of these workshops were to

- give musicians impulses for developing as improvisers – for those who start out, and for those who already have some experience with improvisation.
- enable participants to experience how sound patterns and movement patterns can shape one's learning how to improvise in interaction with others.



performing with objects as a 'score' (Stellenbosch)



a quartet of improvisers at the showroom of Ian Burgess-Simpson in Cape Town  
(where the workshops for the South African College of Music, University of Cape Town took place)

<https://www.ianburgess-simpson.com>

A particularly interesting workshop took place at the University of Pretoria under the title **Whys and Ways into Ensemble Improvisation**. We started an interactive demonstration of our understanding of improvisation as participatory sense-making and oscillating agency (constructs from Enactive Cognition) with an audience of about sixty music students and music lecturers, of whom six volunteered to join us on stage during various activities. This was followed by a piano improvisation workshop with thirty-two participants and two grand pianos. Prof Clorinda Panebianco sent us her reflection on our work at the University of Pretoria:

Hannes Taljaard and Alexander Okhotnikov's visit to the Music Department in February at the University of Pretoria was a standout moment at the start of the academic year. Their first guest lecture, presented to the final-year Music Psychology students, was an interactive, inspiring, and thoroughly engaging exploration of embodied cognition and improvisation. Hannes immediately established a strong rapport with the students through his accessible lecture style with clear and compelling explanations of the theoretical foundations of embodied cognition. These concepts were seamlessly integrated into experiential learning as Alexander and Hannes actively (and joyfully) guided the students through movement-based exercises, ensuring that theory and practice were meaningfully connected.

In the afternoon, Hannes and Alexander delivered a workshop demonstration during the weekly seminar series to the entire undergraduate cohort in our concert hall. Their session, titled *The Whys and Ways into Ensemble Improvisation*, invited full audience participation in improvisatory activities, creating an atmosphere of excitement and discovery. The enthusiastic response led to an extension of the session in another venue, as students were eager to continue exploring the topic. The overwhelmingly positive feedback underscores the significance of improvisation in music education—a topic that undoubtedly deserves greater emphasis in our curriculum. Though the session lasted an hour and a half, its impact was far-reaching, leaving students deeply inspired and eager to engage further with these concepts.





playing with picture cards as a 'score' to tell a story (Cape Town)

Regarding the other fields that we worked in, Music Education took the second largest share of our time and effort, and the fields of Music Psychology, Movement Education, Music Theory and a Research Colloquium received almost equal shares. Our teaching in these fields was a demonstration of the potential of Music and Movement Education / Rhythmics as it is practised in Vienna. The opening session of a Symposium for Bassoonists in Potchefstroom, did not involve teaching: we shaped the dynamics of a group of about ten musicians so that the participants could get to know one another. Also in Potchefstroom, we shared ideas during a Research Colloquium in order to receive input on AMBO's work on exploring the artistic processes and potential of Eurythmics.



leading a movement improvisation session



(Stellenbosch)