

# Paper Presentation - Seeking serendipity

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## Seeking Serendipity: The Art of Finding the Unsought in Professional Music

Iwan Wopereis (Open University of the Netherlands)  
Michiel Braam (ArtEZ University of the Arts)

Expertisecentrum onderwijs en professionalisering

Open Universiteit  
www.ou.nl



## Seeking **Serendipity**: The Art of Finding the Unsought in Professional Music

### Definition

- Making discoveries by accidents and sagacity, of things [someone is] not in quest of (Merton & Barber, 2004)
- An unexpected experience prompted by an individual's valuable interaction with ideas, information, objects, or phenomena (McCay-Peet & Toms, 2015)

### Examples

- Impact on society
  - Aspartame
  - Post-It
  - X-Ray
- Impact on the individual
  - SIS (McBirnie, 2008; see also Heinström, 2005)

### Overview

- Introduction
- Method
- Results
- Discussion

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**Introduction** BACKGROUND

- Serendipitous experiences (e.g., SIS) were mentioned in interviews on musical expertise development
- Emerging body of literature on SIS (Makri & Blandford, 2012; McBirnie 2008; McCay-Peet & Toms, 2015)

**Introduction** BACKGROUND

- There seems to be a relationship between the concepts of serendipity and improvisation (McBirnie 2008)
- and... workplace information literacy

**Introduction** BACKGROUND

**Investigating Serendipity: How it Unfolds and What may Influence it**

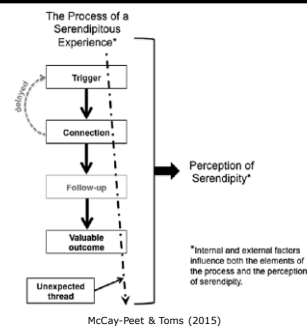
Lois McCay-Peet  
Faculty of Management, Dalhousie University, 6100 University Avenue, Halifax, NS B3N 3J5, Canada. E-mail: mcp@dal.ca

Elaine G. Toms  
Information School, University of Sheffield, Regent Court, 211 Portobello, Sheffield S1 4DP, United Kingdom. E-mail: e.toms@sheffield.ac.uk

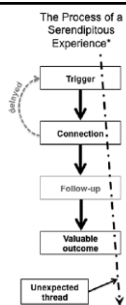
Serendipity is not an easy word to define. Its meaning has been directed to apply to experiences ranging from the immediate to the speculative. Serendipity, however, is fundamentally associated with unexpected and personal, scholarly, scientific, organizational, and social events and phenomena. Chance serendipitous experiences often a conceptual space. Therefore, what lessons can we draw from an exploration of how serendipity unfolds and what may influence it? This article describes an investigation of non-related serendipity. Twelve professionals and academics from a variety of fields were interviewed. The core of the semi-structured

It is important to understand serendipity, what influences it, and what may facilitate it. However, although serendipity leads to goal traditions when it has a substantive and well-reaching impact, serendipity's importance at the micro level should not be dismissed in terms of the positive affective response it evokes and the learning it yields. Serendipity can bring timely pleasures and happiness to a person's everyday life (Duhon, Berkhoff, & Quinn-Harris, 2011) and the positive associated with serendipity has the power to get our minds so good as to think, and learn more.

McCay-Peet & Toms (2015)



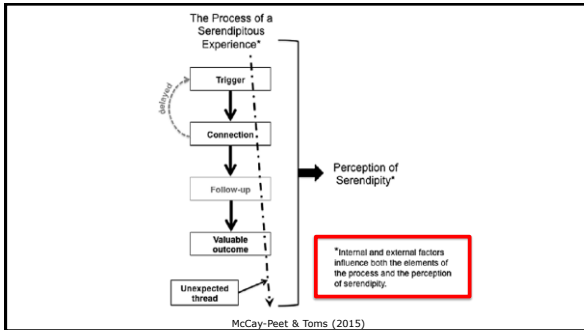
McCay-Peet & Toms (2015)



McCay-Peet & Toms (2015)

**Model** ELEMENTS

1. Trigger
2. Delay
3. Connection
4. Follow-up
5. Valuable outcome
6. Unexpected thread
7. Perception of serendipity



- ### Model INFLUENCING FACTORS
1. Trigger-rich external
  2. Highlights triggers external
  3. Enables connection external
  4. Enables capturing external
  5. Openness internal
  6. Ability to make connections internal
  7. Prepared mind internal

- ### Introduction QUESTIONS
- RQ1: How can we best define work-related serendipity in a creative domain like music and how does it relate to concepts like creativity and improvisation?
  - RQ2: Does the model of McCay-Peet and Toms explain how work-related serendipitous (information) behavior unfolds in professional improvised music?
  - RQ3: Does the model explain conditions that may influence the process of serendipity within the aforementioned context?

- ### Overview
- Introduction
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  - Discussion

- ### Method
- Subject
    - Professional musician (jazz, and improvised music); Professional > 30 years
  - Cases
    - Case 1: Toxic
    - Case 2: Globe

- ### Method
- Procedure
    - Data collection (McCay-Peet, 2013)
      - Quadripartite Narrative Interview (total 3 hours)
        - Work
        - Definition
        - Examples
        - General
    - Data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
      - Thematic open coding of interview data

## Case 1



Britney Spears - Toxic (Official Video) - YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0DzavV8T1U>

Songteksten

Oh,  
The taste of your lips

## Case 1 TOXIC

During a search for musical information on YouTube, this system recommended MB to watch the music video 'Toxic' of pop musician Britney Spears. This recommendation surprised MB: "[This kind of music] takes place completely out of my comfort zone. Let's say that Britney Spears does not have my direct interest. Excellent singer, nothing wrong with that, but it's not the kind of music I would normally listen to."

## Case 2



<https://rockinfiles.com/sam-RC/Michiel%20Braam-1999-11-07.mp3>

## Case 2 GLOBE

The rationale of the Globe project was to form a group of musicians from different corners of the world (i.e., **The Tuva Ensemble** from Tuva, **The Bisserov Sisters** from Bulgaria, **The Ndere Troupe** from Uganda, and improvisers **Fred van Duynhoven and MB** from the Netherlands) and perform a series of concerts at the Music Meeting [Nijmegen, NL] and other musical sites in the Netherlands.

## Overview

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- **Results**
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## Results RQ1 DEFINITION

- MB: "This [...] is actually very useful for everything I do ... What's here is all about improvisation."
- However these definitions "... have nothing to do with serendipity" as someone should be "in search of something else."
- THUS: Serendipity is "Finding B, when looking for A"

**Results** RQ1 DEFINITION

- With regard to improvisation, MB tries "... to have as few expectations as possible in advance" when he starts to play.
- This position towards the improvisational act has developed over the years: "The more I improvise and the longer I do it, I think that I should really sit 'completely empty' there [in other words, on stage], and then I'll see what will happen. **That means, it can never be a serendipity, because I'm not looking for something.**"

**Results** RQ1 DEFINITION

- However, during the member check in the third interview MB nuanced his initial view on improvisation and search.
- "I think it is difficult not to be in search of something during an entire concert." "During a concert, you actually start completely empty. ... And at some point something [musically] happens and you start investigating it, which is a search for a concrete solution. During this search new things can be discovered."

**Results** RQ1 DEFINITION

- MB illustrates this by mentioning an example to investigate a certain chord, because it sounds so awful (in this case, a C Majeur 7 or c-e-g-b):
- "And then [while performing] you discover that a reversal of notes can result in an interesting rhythmic pattern in which the original notes of the chord actually sound much nicer. ... It [i.e., the unsought finding] becomes part of your 'backpack'

**Results** RQ2 – MODEL PHASES

- Case 1 and 2 fit McCay-Peets and Toms' model.
- Model 'phases' were identified, particularly
  - Trigger
  - Connection
  - Valuable outcome
  - Unexpected thread
  - Perceived serendipity

**Results** RQ2 – MODEL PHASES

- Case 1
  - Trigger Toxic with stringed instruments
  - Connection with need for repertoire for BB
  - Valuable outcome arrangement song for Big Band
  - Unexpected thread surprising suggestion by YouTube

**Results** RQ3 – INFLUENCING FACTORS

Case 1 (Toxic, SIS): 'Prepared mind' MB is aware that recommendation systems are 'algorithm-based'

### Results RQ3 – INFLUENCING FACTORS

Case 1 (Toxic, SIS): 'Prepared mind' MB is aware that recommendation systems are 'algorithm-based'

"There's also a negative side to it. When someone is searching the [YouTube] system and gets something in the right column, he/she is inclined to select the first videos in the list. ... There is a danger that you don't think anymore ... What kind of society we'll get when Google or YouTube search for you? Then we'll get an algorithmic society."

### Results RQ3 – INFLUENCING FACTORS

CONTINUED

"Although I don't believe in conspiracy theories, I think these companies try to create mainstream. You can control mainstream, not chaos."

### Results RQ3 – INFLUENCING FACTORS

- Factors are present in case 1 and 2, e.g.:
  - 'trigger-rich' (YouTube recommender systems; musical projects that focus on variability, unusual group composition)
  - 'openness' (in order to 'witness' serendipity, one should be open to 'triggers')
  - 'prepared mind' (one should have a knowledge base in order to 'spot' serendipity: see Globe)

### Results RQ3 – INFLUENCING FACTORS

- New factors
  - Curiosity (e.g., 'being interested in other music')
  - Initiative (e.g., 'take initiative to 'explore' new pathways and/or information')
  - Interest in others (i.e., 'serendipity is often the result of group work')

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### Discussion

- McCay-Peet and Toms' model is valuable to describe work-related serendipitous experiences in the domain of music

## Discussion FUTURE RESEARCH

- Varied focus, varied methods
  - Serendipity on *micro level*: recordings, cued retrospective interview and observation
  - Serendipity on *meso level*: retrospective interviews
- Scaling up
  - Multi-case studies in order to generalize findings

## Meer informatie

[iwan.wopereis@ou.nl](mailto:iwan.wopereis@ou.nl)

Expertisecentrum onderwijs en professionalisering

Open Universiteit  
[www.ou.nl](http://www.ou.nl)

