
SYMPOSIUM 6: Understanding Performance Practice Through Music Perception

Symposium: Understanding Performance Practice Through the Study of Music Perception

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1. Background

This symposium examines the contribution that music psychology can and has made to understanding some performance practice issues. Traditional historical musicological approaches of examining source material have been profitable but not sufficient in addressing some important issues in performance practice.

2. Aims

Each paper in the symposium treats music as a living, breathing stimulus, rather than a stimulus which exists in notation, and is accessible through archival documents and analytical introspections.

3. Main Contribution

Issues addressed include alternative and perhaps more rigorous perceptual, methodological and philosophical approaches to understanding the issues in the performance and expression of music. For example, timings used by performers are examined in several papers.

4. Implications

This gives us information not about how music can be performed, but how it *is* performed. The papers focus on the performance of baroque and north Indian music. Relationships between improvisation and expression are some of the topics that will emerge.

5. Proposed Structure

A two hour session. 4 × 20 minute papers (a couple of quick clarifier questions at the end of each paper, if necessary, but papers will be presented directly in sequence) followed by 5 to 10 minutes of commentary by discussant, 10-15 minute 'debate' between contributors (led by discussant) and 10-15 minutes of general questions and comments. Wrap up by discussant (2 minutes).

Dotting Your Ears: Some Implications of the Kerning Illusion in the Study of Performance Practice

Emery Schubert, Dorottya Fabian; University of New South Wales, Australia

Time: Fri 19 8.30 am, Stream: B
Venue: Burrows Lecture Theatre

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The kerning illusion, first reported at ICMPC 6, has important implications in performance practice research. The illusion comes about through the abbreviation (or 'kerning') of the third note in a group of three notes, where the first two notes constitute a dotted-followed-by-short-note pair. Although the third note has no bearing on the first two in terms of dotting ratio, the shortening of it led to the perception of a more dotted sound. This finding, recently replicated, is applied to issues in performance practice in the present paper. Specifically, we argue that traditional historical-musicological approaches are limited in their ability to address performance practice issues because they cannot account for effects such as illusions and generalized listener behaviours. While the last 50 years of traditional approaches have achieved considerable results in reviving long forgotten composers, pieces and practices, they have also left many controversies that cannot be resolved by common musicological methods alone. We argue that the long standing traditions found in experimental psychology provide important additional approaches which can provide a glue to fill in the holes left by conventional methodology.

How Soon is Immediately? The Delay in Accompaniment in North Indian Singing

John Napier; University of New South Wales, Australia

Time: Fri 19 9.00 am, Stream: B

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Venue: Burrows Lecture Theatre

In North Indian classical vocal music a melodic accompanist imitates or doubles the singer's lines, either completely, in outline, or with some degree of variation, and continues playing whilst the soloist rests. In this paper I investigate three aspects of the delay between the vocalist and the accompanist, the "following distance". How soon is soon? Is the accompanist endeavouring to 'catch up' with the soloist? To what extent may the distance at which the accompanist follows be understood in reference to the underlying beat? In each of the three aspects, the results of this investigation are varied. The notion of 'as soon as possible', for example, does not do justice to the richness, the flexibility and the multiply determined 'messiness', that go to make up this aspect of the practice.

A Statistical Analysis of Tempi in Bach's D Minor Partita

Richard Pulley; University of New South Wales, Australia

Time: Fri 19 9.30 am, Stream: B

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Venue: Burrows Lecture Theatre

In many music writings, authors have made assertions regarding the tempo that is appropriate for a particular work, or the tempo that a particular performer has chosen. A performance may be judged as being too fast or too slow; or sometimes a chronological trend may be evident, such as "modern players play this work faster than fifty years ago." Often these statements are subjective perceptions, based upon the listener's gut feeling, and are sometimes supported anecdotally by reference to only a small number of performances.

This paper describes how sound recordings may be used to objectively measure and compare different *tempi* throughout the twentieth century, referring in particular to J.S. Bach's Second Partita in D minor for solo violin. Specifically, a simple statistical technique will be presented to help better understand tempo relationships.

Eighteen recorded performances spanning 65 years were collected, including both "mainstream" and "historically informed" performances. Segments from each movement-long enough to be timed accurately, but short enough to eliminate repeats that were not always followed—were chosen for statistical analysis. The mean and standard deviation were calculated for all instances of each excerpt, which normalized the timings to comparable values, rather than absolute timings that provide no context or frame of reference with which to compare other excerpts. The normalized results were presented graphically.

The normalized results demonstrated clearly which performances were average, and which were extreme in tempo. Some chronological trends were present, though the philosophical divide between "mainstream" and "historically informed" performances was found to be more significant. These differences can be subjectively perceived (within certain limits—for more details on these issues see Epstein, 1995) as well as objectively quantified. The statistical analysis, therefore, provided one way of attaining objective information, and thus an alternative approach to the more intuitive technique of tempo assessment of recorded performance found in some writings in aesthetics and musicology.

Is There Only One Way of Being Expressive in Musical Performance? - Lessons from Listeners' Reactions to Performances of J. S. Bach's Music

Dorottya Fabian, Emery Schubert; University of New South Wales, Australia

Time: Fri 19 10.00 am, Stream: B

Proc. Page: 112-115

Venue: Burrows Lecture Theatre

This paper examines the relationship between musical features and the aesthetic experience of listeners in performance of J. S. Bach's compositions. The claims of historical performance practice scholarship are tested empirically in order to model the musical characteristics of baroque as opposed to romantic expressiveness. The results indicate that distinctly different interpretative means are needed to create expressivity in baroque versus romantic compositions. The data collected also assist in identifying the musical parameters that contribute to the success and stylishness of a performance.