Situation related factors of music performance assessment

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The latest research in music psychology has discovered that music performance assessment is susceptible to a series of factors that, ironically, have nothing to do with the performer himself, but with the context where the evaluative process takes place.

An illustrative example is offered by Martin Bergee (2006) who validated a theoretical model of extra musical influences in music performance assessment by analyzing more than 7000 scores obtained by performers in American national music festivals during 2002-2004. This model proved that, if evaluated in the afternoon, a solo instrumentalist coming from a large metropolitan institution which offers a large amount of money for including the performer in the contest has significant more chances on having success.

This study to synthesis these psychological situation related factors that were previously researched in literature.

1. The measurement strategy

Research, artistic and educational practice of music performance has revealed a general controversy related to music performance assessment strategies and instruments, showing that there isn't a consensus between musicians concerning the use of either segmented or global evaluation.

Global evaluation reflects the situation where judges assign an overall rank or score that reflected their overall impressions from their personally selected implicit or explicit criteria (Wrigley, 2005). Segmented evaluations on the other hand involve explicit and clearly defined criteria that have usually formed a criterion-based rating scale of specific and valued musical constructs, such as ratings of intonation, articulation and tempo.

A relatively recent study (Stanley et al., 2002) has identified that university music teachers have different opinions related to the use of segment assessment of music performance. O qualitative analysis of their interviews has revealed that, while some of them consider the segmented scale as a useful instrument in focusing on the important aspects of the performance and in offering a more objective feed-back to students, others see the criterion based scale as a way to narrow the wide perspective on the complexity of music performance.

The first researchers who approached music performance evaluation (Fiske, 1975, 1977, 1983; Burnsed, Hikle & King, 1985; Burnsed & King, 1987 *apud* Forbes 1994) have discovered that inter-judge reliability is higher in the case of global assessment. Moreover, the high correlations obtained between

each scale factor and the general score have raised the problem of the redundancy of using the segmented scales. This fact determined Fiske to suggest: "Juries members should give only one global mark for one music performance. It is better for them to focus their attention in making not more than one decision per performance, considering the short time they have for assessing the music performers. Acting this way will lower the chances of error." (Fiske, 1975 *apud* Forbes, 1994, p. 12).

Many other researchers share Fiske's opinion and exposed certain advantages of using global assessment of music performances. Among those is ecological validity by "maintaining the interference in the musical process to a minimum" (Thompson & Williamon, 2003, p.25). In addition, Mills (1991 *apud* Thompson & Williamon, 2003) explained that segmented scales have also a general score which, being just a mathematical function of the items, doesn't reflect a real overall image of the performance.

Moreover, there are many present studies (Ryan & Costa-Giomi, 2004; Wapnik et al, 2000; Thompson et al, 2007; Geringer et al, 2009) which adopted the global evaluation due to reasons related to simplifying the research methodology.

The most up-to-date scientific frameworks have questioned the methodological relevance of the studies which insist on the superiority of global evaluation and have proved the possibility to utilize valid and reliable segmented scales (Bergee, 2003; Geringer et al 2009; Zdinski & Barnes, 2002). Therefore, the multidimensional approach of music performance is more and more at hand.

By using standard instruments music performance evaluation becomes a more objective and fair process and this is why in recent times there have been intense interdisciplinary efforts to develop segmented scales that provide evidence for increased validity and reliability.

The research space includes music performance assessment scales applicable either to all classical instruments (Thompson & Williamon, 2003; Haroutounian, 2007; Burrack, 2002), either to an instrumental group – for example the ***Woodwind Brass Solo Evaluation Form*** (Saunders & Holahan, 1997 *apud* Hewitt 2007) or the ***String Performance Rating Scale*** (Zdzinski & Barnes, 2002) – either to single musical instrument.

The interjudge reliability coefficient differs from one scale to another, but there are scales with really high standard qualities. The following paragraphs describe some of the most frequently utilized and well known scales.

In 1973, Harold Abeles created and validated the ***Clarinet Performance Rating Scale, CPRS***) by analyzing o series of essays written by instrumental music teachers from Maryland University where they described "auditory characteristics of clarinet performance" (Abeles, 1973, p.247). The qualitative analysis of the essays established 54 items that were consequently attached to other 40 items previously taken from Hosmer's theoretical model (Hosmer,

1949 *apud* Wrigley, 2005). The 94 items were pre-tested and included into the factorial analysis that revealed the presence of 6 factors: interpretation, intonation, rhythmical continuity, tempo, articulation and tone. By adding a five points Likert marking scheme, the final form of the scale consisted of 30 items, with 5 items for each factor. Alpha Cronbach coefficient of 0.90 showed high internal reliability. The construct validity of the scale was sustained by the similarity with the sexta-factorial structure of music performance, also present in the initial theoretical model of Hosmer.

In 1989, Martin Bergee conceived the ***Euphonium-Tuba Performance rating Scale, ETPRS*** by content analysis of three information sources: essays written by prominent performers, comments of adjudicators on music performance and research articles from literature. The 112 initial items, that came down to only 27 items in the final version, were included in a 5 point Likert scale and developed a five factor perspective of music performance, as follows: interpretation / musical effect, tone / intonation, rhythm / tempo, technique and rhythm / intensity. The 0.94 interjudge reliability coefficient and obtaining 0.50 for the criterion validity proved to important standard qualities that allowed the use of this scale for all brass instruments (Wrigley, 2005).

Therefore, in 1993 Bergee modified the scale and created the ***Brass Performance Rating Scale, BPRS*** that, after calculating the reliability coefficients, revealed 4 factors of music performance: interpretation / musical effect, tone / intonation, technique and rhythm / tempo. By obtaining 0.83 for internal consistency confirms the efficiency of the scale (Bergee, 2003).

For the percussion instruments, the most well-known scale belongs to J.P. Nichols who validated it in 1991 as the ***Snare Drum Rating Scale, SDRS***. The final version includes 18 items equally distributed in 3 factors: technique / rhythm, interpretation and tone. The superior statistic parameters (0.91 for intra-judge reliability, 0.69 for inter-judge reliability and 0.79 for criterion validity) determined the use of this scale in many researches (Bergee, 2003).

In 2002, with the intention to solve the deficiencies of older assessment instruments for string music performance, Stephen Zdzinski and Gail Barnes have validated the ***String Performance Rating Scale, SPRS.*** The authors pursued the established steps in developing the instrument and obtained a valid (0.87) and reliable (0.93) scale. The 28 items are distributed in 5 factors: interpretation / musical effect, articulation / tone, intonation, rhythm / tempo and vibrato (Zdzinski & Barnes, 2002).

In conclusion, we confidently state that the research road to music performance is open to obtaining relevant results, considering the fact that future experimental efforts can rely on the use of objective and efficient assessment scales.

2. Music performance presentation format

The artistic and research fields have showed that the way music performance is presented in front of adjudicators may significantly influence the evaluation scores. Most of evaluative contexts use music performance in its live version, but this strategy is often accompanied by a series of errors that have been frequently studied in educational literature.

Recording the music performances could eliminate some of these errors. Radocy (1989 *apud* Forbes 1994) revealed that recordings can be played for several times, in different successions and this will reduce the contrast effect and the order effect. Also, in their audio version recordings will eliminate all the errors associated with the visual aspect of performers.

The controversy related with presenting music performance in its strictly audio or audio-visual version determined musical institutions to adopt diverse practices when evaluating soloists competing for jobs in philharmonics, operas etc. These practices may include performing behind a curtain so that the soloist can not be seen by evaluators or recording the performance and playing it in front of the jury, in a strictly audio version.

This kind of situation stirred music psychology researchers' curiosity. Subsequently, they put together certain experiments and discovered that the music performance presentation format may determine significant differences in rating the same performance. Thus Gillespie (1997) realized an experiment where a group of violinists and violists were filmed while performing and were later rated for their vibrato execution, in an audio-visual presentation of their performance. After 6 months, the same performances were rated by the same evaluators, this time in the audio only version. Statistical analysis showed that these professional performers were rated significantly lower in the audio only condition, for their vibrato stability.

A Canadian study (Wapnick et al, 2004) revealed the importance of music performance presentation format on evaluation scores on a research realized 18 professional piano players of different nationalities who participated in an international piano performance contest[1]. The audio only recordings were evaluated by 95 musicians and the audio-visual ones were evaluated by 132 musicians. One of the main discoveries was that performances in the audio-visual format received higher rates than the performances in the audio only format. This confirms previous findings (Wapnick et al, 1998; Wapnick et al, 2000) which showed the tendency of adjudicators to over-evaluate performances presented audio-visually. Furthermore, it was discovered that evaluators who are also piano players were not affected by the presentation format and rated audio only and audio-visual piano performances in similar manner. Unlike these professional musicians, evaluators with little experience in piano performing

[1] ***Eleventh Van Cliburn International Piano Competition***, 25 May-10 June 2001, Fort Worth, Texas;

have rated audio-visual performances higher than audio only performances (Wapnick et al, 2004).

Ryan and Costa-Giomi (2004) have shown that music performance presentation format influences not only rating variability, but also interjudge reliability. As a result, on a study performed on pianists, interjudge reliability was lower in the audio condition than in audio-visual condition. The findings were explained by the fact that audio-visual recordings offer more information on music performance and create the opportunity for performers to express their musical intentions more obviously. This situation will always result in obtaining higher consensus between adjudicators.

In conclusion, although the research space related to the influence of music performance presentation format on music performance obtained ratings stands at the beginning of experimental exploration, the results researchers revealed so far draw the attention to its importance for the evaluation process. Inherently, the differences between ratings may raise the question if the measurement of audio-visual music performance does not include other evaluation criteria than the measurement of audio only performances.

3. Evaluators' musical experience

It is expected that experienced musicians to differ from non-musicians in regarding to the way they evaluate music performance. Related to this idea, Winter (1993) drew attention on the importance of previous evaluative experience of adjudicators and the training they make prior the evaluation process.

Kinney (2009) has proved that interjudge reliability in higher in the case of experienced musicians, probably due to their common knowledge about music performance that they acquired during university studies.

Another main aspect is represented by the fact that non-musicians tend to be more affected than professional musicians by the physical characteristics of performers, during the evaluation process of music performance (Ryan et al, 2006). A closer look on this aspect revealed that not only the general experience in music is relevant, but also the musical specialization of adjudicators impacts the ratings on music performance. Therefore, when adjudicators rate the performances of the same instrument they specialized in tend to offer higher scores (Wapnick et al, 2004). Also, when pianists evaluated other pianists, undergraduates rated the same performances lower than graduates (Wapnick et al, 2004, 2005). Authors associated these findings with the tendency, often seen among students, to be hypercritical in appreciating other performers.

The experience in playing a certain instrument may result in the embracing of a more severe attitude when evaluating music performance, considering the fact that this experience offers the chance of knowing, at a higher level, the technical opportunities of the instrument (Thompson & Williamon, 2003). The same researchers have also shown that university

professors, when asked to evaluate instruments other than the one they specialized in, tend to carry out this task with difficulty. This situation doesn't seem to be available beginners (Hewitt & Smith, 2004; Hewitt, 2007). In this case, music specialty of teachers didn't influence the ratings given to gymnasium music students for their instrumental performance.

4. The duration of music performance audition

National and international music performance contests usually practice the audition of the complete musical pieces. This state of affairs often results in using a lot of effort for the evaluative process. Although it very time consuming, this kind of practice has developed probably due the evaluators' intention in being more accurate and objective. For example, the 2005 "Arthur Rubinstein" International Piano Contest, has asked the participants to perform to recitals of 100 minutes, a chamber composition of half an hour and two concerts of at least 50 minutes. As a result, the participants spent almost 3 hours performing in front of the jury (Wapnick et al, 2005).

Recent studies (Geringer et al, 2009; Wapnick et al, 2005; Thompson et al, 2007) have shown that listening to music performance for a longer period of time doesn't change the evaluation scores and becomes redundant in some situations.

Geringer and collaborators (2009) draw the attention to the big number of performers that participate annually to American violin contests (between 100 and 200) participants in a single contest) and to the loss of considerable evaluative resources for this process. Alternatively, they suggested to cut out the time for listening to music performance up to one minute for each performer, considering the very high correlations (over 0.90) between ratings given after one minute of audition and ratings given after listening the complete piece.

Another study (Thompson et al, 2007) has investigated the time evaluators needed to rated one of Bach's *Prelude*. Researchers were also interested in how ratings vary along audition time. Results have shown that the first evaluative decision appears after 15-20 seconds of audition. Between the first and the last decision, ratings vary significantly, with the tendency of rating higher towards the final score. Even so, the final rating is given after no more than one minute of audition.

A synthetic approach of the duration of time needed to rate music performance revealed that most studies use the interval from one to three minutes and most researchers tend to ask evaluators to rate music performance in less than one minute (Wapnick et al, 2005).

5. The presence of accompaniment

The evaluation criteria influenced by the presence of accompaniment are related to intonation (Madsen et al, 1991 *apud* Brittin, 2002), expression, rhythmical accuracy and dynamics (Geringer & Madsen, 1998). Madsen,

Geringer & Heller (1991) have revealed the tendency of musicians to rate music performances higher for intonation when they evaluated an accompanied vocal soloist (soprano / tenor) or string player (violin / cello). Two years later (Madsen et al, 1993 *apud* Brittin, 2002) they repeated the research and focused on tone quality. The results have shown no significant impact of accompaniment on music performance ratings. Also, by performing with accompaniment, instrumentalists get higher scores for expression, rhythmical accuracy and dynamics (Geringer & Madsen, 1998). The authors have explained the findings by the fact that the presence of accompaniment may distract evaluators' attention from the soloist performance by adding another element into the attention field.

Brittin (2002) suggested that in educational context, the presence of accompaniment may bring a series of advantages by offering certain models for tone, technique, phrasing, and dynamics and by encouraging soloists' musicality. When played digitally, the accompaniment my help the soloist in maintaining a steady tempo.

6. The chosen repertoire and jury's familiarity with it

In the space of classical music performance, an American research (Wapnick et al, 2004) proved that a certain chosen repertoire may have significant effects on the evaluative process. Authors have recorded professional pianists who participated in an international music contest. The resulted recordings (of around 18 minutes long) included 8 fragments of classical compositions (Haydn and Beethoven) and 8 fragments of Russian music from the early period of the twentieth century (Rachmaninoff and Prokofiev). The 227 evaluators rated the repertoire from the romantic period higher than the repertoire from the classical period and this phenomenon was more significant in the audio only condition. The researchers explained the findings through the greater virtuosity required by the two Russian composers that create different expectations from evaluators.

A recent study (Kinney, 2009) has shown that evaluators' familiarity with the performed repertoire raises interjudge reliability on both technical and expressive dimensions of music performance.

7. The visual characteristics of performers

The idea that visual characteristics may have significant impact on one's appreciation by others was repeatedly proven in experimental situations. In many human activities people tend to make decisions based on visual impression created by an object, phenomenon, person or situation.

This is why we may expect a way somebody presents himself visually to influence others evaluations of his abilities. Different studies have shown that physical appeal of people raise their chances in being admitted to college (Shahani et al, 1993 *apud* Wapnick et al, 1998) or in getting o job (Cann et al,

1981 *apud* Wapnick et al, 1998). In general, attractive people are perceived as being more intelligent and more socially competent (Eagly et al, 1991 *apud* Griffiths, 2009). Also, teachers who work with gymnasium and primary school students have lower academic expectancies from less attractive students (Adams, 1978 *apud* Wapnick et al, 1998).

In the musical field, the visual characteristics of performers have an important impact on music performance assessment. The most frequently studied variables associated with performers' visual aspect are gender, race, dress, appeal, and stage behavior.

Wapnick and collaborators (1998, 2000) have revealed the tendency of adjudicators (men and women equally) to overrate male violinists. Furthermore, attractive performers have received higher ratings than non-attractive ones. Also male attractive performers were rated higher than female attractive performers. So, there is a powerful effect of gender and appeal on music performance assessment. Researchers have discovered that the higher ratings of attractive performers are present not only in the audio-visual condition, but also in the audio only condition. The authors tried to explain the results by suggesting that attractive people benefit from more encouraging social interaction and educational opportunities.

By contrast, Ryan and Costa-Giomi (2004) have suggested that appeal affects men and women in a different manner. Therefore, attractive women and unattractive men received the highest ratings, according to their experimental results. The physical characteristics had the biggest impact on good and very good pianists and were not significant in the case of medium and unprepared performers.

The same researchers have discovered that gender is also relevant for music performance assessment. When asked to appreciate professional male pianists, men evaluators rated attractive performers lower, while female evaluators behaved in opposite manner. The results have been confirmed in a subsequent study (Ryan et al, 2006) where men underrated both attractive and well dressed performers while women overrated these categories. The authors noticed the difficulty in explaining these findings and the probability that the two genders might have different perspectives of what means to be attractive.

There is also a race influence on music performance assessment. Elliot's study (1995/1996 *apud* Thompson & Williamon, 2003) has shown that Afro-American performers were rated lower than Caucasian performers. In another research (McCray, 1993 *apud* Bermingham, 2000) caught an effect of race even on musical preferences; accordingly, evaluators tend to prefer music performers of the same race; this phenomenon is more obvious in the case of Afro-American evaluators.

Regarding performer's stage outfits, a recent study (Griffiths, 2009) showed that it is necessary for the performers dress to match the music style. A sample of 33 musicians rated one female violinist performing in a club short

strapless dress, or in long concert dress, or in a sporty outfit of blue-jeans and T-shirt. Evaluators weren't aware of the fact that the musical background was identical in all three cases. The results have shown that the performer was rated higher when wearing the concert dress. The statistical data was explained by the fact that the club dress (which obtained the lowest scores) tend to distract evaluators' attention from the music performance to other physical characteristics that lower concentration. Also, performer's movement comfort in bigger when wearing the concert dress and this improves instrumentalist opportunities to express his or her musical intentions. Finally, the concert dress acts like a prototype of the successful performer because it is most common on prestigious stages.

The movement amplitude of the performer constitutes another factor that influences music performance assessment. Playing an instrument involves movement anyway. Movement also helps performers to express psychological states which the performer can be more or less aware of. Literature showed that movement was associated with the expressive abilities of the performer. Davidson (1994 *apud* Juchniewicz, 2008) suggested that visual clues are more relevant the audio information in expressing performers' musical intentions.

Juchniewicz (2008) asked 112 musicians to measure the musical level of a pianist who played the same musical fragment in three conditions: "no-movement" condition (the situation where he made only the minimum necessary movements), only face and head movement condition and whole body movement condition. Evaluators didn't know that all three conditions included the same audio musical performance. The researchers noticed that the three conditions resulted in different ratings. The performer was considered better as the movement was bigger. Even so, Davidson (2007) suggested that not all big movements are expressive, but only the ones that are in harmony with the music performed. To raise the expressive level of music performance, Seitz (2005) created the "Dalcroze" method of improving the rhythmical abilities by movement training. The exercises he approached develop the coordination between hands, voice, legs and body.

In conclusion, the visual characteristics of the performer impact music performance assessment and this information may be utilized by musicians in order to improve their musical career.

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Abstract

Music performance assessment of constitutes a complex activity that is influenced by a series of psychological factors which may result in obtaining a certain artistic quality. Most of them are associated with performer's individual characteristics that refer to the interaction between musical aptitude and musical training. Recently, studies in literature showed that obtaining a certain musical level is conditioned by a series of external factors like: assessment strategy, music performance presentation format, adjudicators' musical experience, audition timing, the presence of accompaniment, the repertoire and adjudicators' familiarity with it and the visual characteristics of performers. The present study aims to illustrate a synthetic view of these factors.