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PROCEEDINGS

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Blanka Bogunović and Sanela Nikolić
Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade



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Perception of the Idiosyncrasy in Performances of Debussy's *Syrinx* for Solo Flute

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Abstract

Interpretation of a musical piece and performance expression have been intriguing issues for numbers of authors. Guided by the thought that “performances create meaning in relation to other performances, and not just in relation to works” (Cook, 2013: 224), the aim of this research was to investigate the perception of the character of Claude Debussy's (1862–1918) *Syrinx* for solo flute (1913), during listening interpretations of three, world renowned, flutists (James Galway [1939], Emmanuel Pahud [1970], and Jean-Pierre Rampal [1922–2000]). We examined whether different performances can cause significantly different impressions about the same piece's character among listeners and which elements of musical interpretation (tempo, dynamics, timbre, vibrato, articulation) (do not) condition that. Besides determination (Likert scale 1–5) of these parameters in the questionnaire, participants – without insight into the score and any given information about the title, the author of the work, and performers – proposed their composition titles and program notes. The sample consisted of 103 participants, students of the Faculty of Music (Belgrade, Serbia) from different departments, levels, and years of study. The results indicate that differences among interpretations are statistically significant – for example: 1) during Pahud's interpretation, participants experienced *pastoral* character of the work to a greater degree than during Rampal's interpretation ($t[97] = 7.14, p < .001$), 2) Rampal's performance presented the *restless* character of the work on a larger scale than Galway's ($t[99] = -6.26, p < .001$) and Pahud's ($t[99] = -6.26, p < .001$), 3) regarding Galway's performance, students proposed titles that can be mostly classified into the category of *Nature* (35.5%). In comparison, the titles given during Pahud's (35.1%) and Rampal's (33%) performance can mostly be classified into the category of *Feelings*, whereby, in Pahud's case titles *Largely corresponding* to the content of the Pan myth, and –

therefore – the “program” of Debussy's work (34%), while, in the case of Rampal's interpretation titles mostly fall into the *Not corresponding* to the content of myth category (31.9%). All the elements of musical interpretation are related to the listeners' experience of the work's character(s). This research confirms the assumption of the idiosyncrasy of “musically expressive performance” (Zijl and Sloboda, 2010: 197) and the vital role of the performer in the triad *composer – performer – listener*.

Introduction

Performer's role, interpretation of a musical piece, and performance expression have been intriguing issues for numbers of authors. There is a question whether a performer is “only” an intermediary between the score and the listener, presenting the musical flow in a way that is the closest to the composer's ideas, or performer should – by inputting his own creative conception into the already present meaning of the work – become its co-creator. Jean-Jacques Nattiez believes that the performer can be “seen as playing an intermediary, but decisive role between the written score – the *trace* of composer's intentions – and the listener, and in this sense is the first to perceive the work, that is, to make a series of choices (underlined M. T.) on the basis of the composer's text” (Nattiez, 1982: 320). Choosing, or “giving prominence to some expressive rules over others is one example of the way in which expression can become idiosyncratic or personal to the performer [underlined M. T.]” (Lehmann, Sloboda, and Woody, 2007: 94).

The famous French flutist, Michel Debost, wrote: “Literally speaking, the word *interpre-*

tation has the meaning of *translation*, the performer or interpreter being the *vehicle* [underlined M. T.] between the silent signs on the page and their coming alive as sound and music. Interpretation is also a personal and variable experience, an image of the composer's soul, as seen through the prism of the interpreter's thoughts and emotions" (Debost, 2002: 113). Interpretation is, thus, characterized by both *internal* (for example, emotions or wanting to express something personal) and *external* (for example, musical style, the structure of the work or composer's intentions) factors (Juslin, 2003: 276). Juslin claims that "expression is largely what makes music performance worthwhile" (Juslin, 2003: 274).

This research was guided by Nicholas Cook's thought that "performances create meaning in relation to other performances, and not just in relation to works" (Cook, 2013: 224). Besides the mentioned two elements, we can also assume a third one – the possibility that the same performance of the specified piece can be experienced in a different way among different listeners.

Aims

The aim of this empirical research was to investigate the perception of the character of the same piece, Claude Debussy's (1862–1918) *Syrinx* for solo flute (1913), during listening interpretations of three, world renowned, flutists – James Galway (1939), Emmanuel Pahud (1970), and Jean-Pierre Rampal (1922–2000), respectively. Debussy's *Syrinx* is the capital (solo) flute work, based on "musical" myth about the god Pan and the nymph Syrinx, which is in the close relationship with origins of the flute – not only as the musical instrument *per se*, but also with its archetypal (pastoral and lyrical) sound identity.

Monelle wrote that the instrument syrinx or *pan-pipes* is connected with the pastoral theme (Monelle, 2006: 208). It is worth mentioning that "the erotic power of the syrinx, its ability to seduce with its floating melody, constitutes a dominating theme in the works of Debussy"

(McQuinn, 2003: 126), such as the well-known *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1892–1894) with a prominent flute (Faun's/Pan's) solo.

Considering the clearly defined mythical, i. e. *pastoral* "program" of the work, we examined: 1) whether different "musically expressive performance[s]" (Zijl and Sloboda, 2010: 197) of the same Debussy's piece can cause significantly different impressions about its character among listeners, 2) which elements of musical interpretation (tempo, dynamics, timbre, vibrato, articulation) (do not) relate to these differences, and 3) potential differences in responses between those respondents who already knew the work in comparison to those who heard it for the first time during the research.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 103 participants (73 female and 30 male ones), students of the Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade (Serbia), from different departments (mostly from piano [32.4%], music pedagogy and music theory departments [29.4%]; only 7.8% participants were musicians who [used to] play flute), levels (bachelor [77.5%], M.A. [14.7%], and Ph.D. [7.8%]), and years (most of them were on the final year of bachelor studies [$n = 44$]). The majority of participants self-reported that they have listened to flute music, not on purpose, but thanks to the random opportunities ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.27$) giving the answers in the questionnaire by intuition, during the listening ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 0.89$), opposed to those participants who had already existing knowledge about Debussy's piece ($M = 1.62$, $SD = 1.19$).

Materials

Questionnaire. The three-part questionnaire with 18 (opened and closed type) questions was the only one measurement instrument during the research. After responding to the questions referring to the general variables (gender, age, department, level, and year of study), participants were asked to self-report their experi-

ence with playing the flute and listening to the flute music (5 questions). Then, without insight into the score and any given information about the title, the author of the work and performers, they approached to the listening assignments (9 questions), and, finally, pointed out how they made their answer decisions regarding previous questions (4 questions). The duration of the procedure was about thirty-five minutes.

Listening material. Interpretations of three recognized exponents of the French Flute School – James Galway, notably Irish flute virtuoso and former principal flutist in Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Emmanuel Pahud who is considered as the best flutist of the day, and Jean-Pierre Rampal, who as the former flute professor at the Paris Conservatoire and concert flutist contributed to the renewal of the flute’s “international popularity it had in the 18th century as a solo instrument” (Maclagan, 2009: 143) was quite an understandable choice. It was conditioned by the desire of the author to create the opportunity for participants to hear the performances of the renewed flutists, which are, at the same time, different in certain interpretational parameters. For the purpose of 1) avoiding even the implicit suggestions about potential differentiation in performances and 2) better concentration of respondents, exclusively audio examples of the live performances (Galway’s from 1989, Pahud’s from 2010, and Rampal’s from the 1957 year) were released.

Procedure

Characters and the elements of musical interpretation. During (or after) listening to the individual interpretations, participants evaluated the manifestation level (Likert scale 1–5 [1 = completely disagree and 5 = completely agree]) of each of the fifteen characters (*longing, enthusiastic, gracefully, melancholic, restless, gently, decisively, seriously, pastoral, zesty, playful, dreamy, passionately, mysteriously, lonely*) offered by the alphabetical order – according to the Serbian language – in the questionnaire. Namely, sixty characters of a wider range, extracted from the reference vocabularies of musical terms (Peričić, 2008; Тајчевић, 1997;

Despić, 2011) and Monelle’s book *The Musical Topic – Hunt, Military and Pastoral* (2006) were firstly grouped into five categories consisted of similar character adjectives. Then we reached for intersubjective verifiability of four independent assessors who reduced overall number to optimal, fifteen characters, through selection – according to their listening impressions about the Debussy’s work in the context of mentioned interpretations – of three paradigmatic characters from each category. We believed that this number is “optimal” because it cannot lead to participants’ fatigue during the research, while, on the other hand, leaves enough space for “subtle” differentiation within answers.

It is worth noting that *pastoral* character was not highlighted in the questionnaire in any way. Since “the pastoral world is full of love and melancholy” (Monelle, 2006: 196), such characters as *longing, gracefully, melancholic, gently, dreamy, mysteriously, and lonely* are also related to the content of the myth about Pan and Syrinx.

Subsequently, participants determined the relationship between the recognized degree of characters’ manifestation and the key elements/components of performance expression (Clarke, 2005: 24), such as tempo (as well as the rhythm and meter), dynamics, timbre, vibrato, and articulation (as well as accentuation).

Composing the titles of the work. During or after listening, participants proposed their title for the piece they’ve heard based on their overall experience, regarding each performance in particular. Additionally, they wrote short program notes in accordance with the specified title. We would not explicate program notes on this occasion, due to the provided space for the proceeding text.

Data Processing

Statistical processing of the data was performed in the computer program SPSS Statistics, and the results were obtained by quantitative and qualitative data analyses, descriptive analysis, *t*-test, correlative data analysis, and analysis of variance for repeated measurements.

Results

Analysis of the Characters and the Elements of Musical Interpretation

The interpretation of James Galway mostly emphasizes the *pastoral* ($M = 3.53$, $SE = 0.12$) and *mysteriously* ($M = 3.52$, $SE = 0.12$) character of the work ($M = 3.53$, $SE = 0.12$), the interpretation of Pahud *mysteriously* ($M = 4.15$, $SE =$

0.09), *playful*, and *dreamy* ($M = 3.91$, $SE = 0.1$), *gently* ($M = 3.72$, $SE = 0.11$) as well as *pastoral* character ($M = 3.68$, $SE = 0.12$), whereas Ram-pal's interpretation created impression of *restless* ($M = 3.9$, $SE = 0.11$) and *decisively* character ($M = 3.71$, $SE = 0.12$) (Table 1). The results indicate that differences between interpretations are statistically significant in terms of, for example: (1) *pastoral* character – during Pahud's interpreta-

Table 1. Analysis of the characters.

	The first performance J. Galway	The second performance E. Pahud	The third performance J. P. Ram-pal	Comparison of the three performances (1 st vs 2 nd ; 1 st vs 3 rd ; 2 nd vs 3 rd)			Significance (overall)
	<i>M</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SE</i>)	1 st vs 2 nd	1 st vs 3 rd	2 nd vs 3 rd	
Longing	2.02 (0.1)	3.35 (0.12)	2.04 (0.09)	2 > 1*	1 > 3*	2 > 3*	$F(2,186) = 50.806$, $p < .001$
Enthusi- astic	2.02 (0.1)	1.91 (0.1)	2.98 (0.12)	n.s.	3 > 1*	3 > 2*	$F(2,190) = 40.408$, $p < .001$
Gracefully	2.18 (0.12)	2.51 (0.13)	2.17 (0.11)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	$F(2,188) = 3.453$, $p = .034$
Melan- cholic	2.98 (0.12)	3.57 (0.11)	2.21 (0.11)	2 > 1*	1 > 3*	2 > 3*	$F(2,186) = 64.118$, $p < .001$
Restless	2.95 (0.13)	2.23 (0.11)	3.9 (0.11)	1 > 2*	3 > 1*	3 > 2*	$F(2,194) = 71.082$, $p < .001$
Gently	2.8 (0.12)	3.72 (0.11)	1.93 (0.09)	2 > 1*	1 > 3*	2 > 3*	$F(2,190) = 101.280$, $p < .001$
Decisively	2.62 (0.12)	2.3 (0.11)	3.71 (0.12)	n.s.	3 > 1*	3 > 2*	$F(2,202) = 55.339$, $p < .001$
Seriously	2,67 (0.11)	2.56 (0.11)	3.06 (0.12)	n.s.	n.s.	3 > 2*	$F(2,188) = 7.224$, $p = .001$
Pastoral	3.53 (0.12)	3.68 (0.12)	2.69 (0.12)	n.s.	1 > 3*	2 > 3*	$F(2,192) = 29.490$, $p < .001$
Zestful	2.47 (0.12)	2.34 (0.12)	3.13 (0.12)	n.s.	3 > 1*	3 > 2*	$F(2,192) = 17.249$, $p < .001$
Playful	2.95 (0.12)	3.91 (0.1)	2.03 (0.1)	2 > 1*	1 > 3*	2 > 3*	$F(2,194) = 21.882$, $p < .001$
Dreamy	2.95 (0.12)	3.91 (0.1)	2.03 (0.1)	2 > 1*	1 > 3*	2 > 3*	$F(2,192) = 105.159$, $p < .001$
Passion- ately	2.51 (0.12)	2.53 (0.13)	2.66 (0.13)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	$F(2,186) = 0.535$, $p = .587$
Mysteri- ously	3.52 (0.12)	4.15 (0.09)	2.49 (0.12)	2 > 1*	1 > 3*	2 > 3*	$F(2,194) = 83.824$, $p < .001$
Lonely	3.21 (0.12)	3.6 (0.12)	2.2 (0.12)	n.s.	1 > 3*	2 > 3*	$F(2,196) = 52.392$, $p < .001$

tion, participants experienced *pastoral* character of the work to a greater degree than during Rampal's interpretation ($t[97] = 7.14, p < .001$) or (2) *restless* character – Rampal's performance presented *restless* character of the work on a larger scale than Galway's and Pahud's ($t[99] = -6.26, p < .001$).

During Galway's interpretation, listeners have recognized the timbre of the sound and vibrato ($M = 4.29, SE = 0.07$) as elements of interpretation, which are on a larger scale related to their experience of chosen musical characters. In the case of Pahud's performance, there is the connection of dynamics and specific characters ($M = 4.47, SE = 0.08$), while in the case of Rampal's playing we can see the relationship between articulation (and accentuation) and specific characters ($M = 3.98, SE = 0.1$). However, almost all of the arithmetic means are higher than 3.5 (Table 2). Therefore, we can conclude that every parameter of interpretation is notably related to the listeners' experience of the work's character(s).

Results of correlative data analysis showed that timbre and vibrato are correlated with *longing* ($r = .352, p < .001$) and *passionately* ($r = .265,$

$p = .009$) characters, while articulation with *enthusiastic* ($r = .286, p = .004$), *zestful* ($r = .281, p = .005$), and *playful* ($r = .263, p = .008$) characters during the first performance. Dynamics showed to be significantly correlated with *gently* ($r = .313, p = .001$), *pastoral* ($r = .367, p = .000$), and *mysteriously* ($r = .265, p = .008$), articulation with *decisively* ($r = .271, p = .006$), while tempo with *pastoral* character ($r = .307, p = .002$) during the second performance. Tempo is significantly related to *decisively* ($r = .262, p = .008$) and *playful* ($r = .316, p = .001$) characters, and articulation with *playful* character ($r = .261, p = .009$) during the third performance.

Analysis of the Piece's Titles Suggested by the Listeners

Since students gave various titles to the Debussy's work, during the data processing, they were classified in two ways:

1. considering the content of the title itself (five categories):
 - A. *Pastoral* titles which include references to the idyllic, mythical nature, shepherds or mythical beings – *The Nymph; A Day in a Village; Pastoral; The*

Table 2. Analysis of the elements of interpretation.

The elements of interpretation	The first performance J. Galway	The second performance E. Pahud	The third performance J. P. Rampal	Comparison of the three performances			Significance (overall)
	M (SE)	M (SE)	M (SE)	1 st vs 2 nd	1 st vs 3 rd	2 nd vs 3 rd	
Tempo	3.46 (0.09)	3.99 (0.1)	3.88 (0.12)	2 > 1*	n.s.	n.s.	$F(2,196) = 10.866, p < .001$
Dynamics	3.52 (0.1)	4.47 (0.08)	3.48 (0.11)	2 > 1*	n.s.	2 > 3*	$F(2,198) = 38.257, p < .001$
Timbre and Vibrato	4.29 (0.07)	4.06 (0.09)	3.5 (0.12)	n.s.	1 > 3*	2 > 3*	$F(2,198) = 20.223, p < .001$
Articulation	3.59 (0.1)	3.74 (0.1)	3.98 (0.1)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	$F(2,196) = 6.305, p = .002$

Dance of the Forest Fairy for Solo Flute; Awakening of Nature; Awakening of the Confused Shepherd; Idyll, etc.;

- B. *Nature* titles refer to the nature in the broad sense, including natural phenomena, animals, and the general atmosphere of/in nature – *Meadow in a Spring; The Forest Brook; A Day in a Forest; The Turbulent Sea; A Foggy Day; The Morning; Autumn; The Swan; Nature; Winter, etc.;*
- C. *Feelings* titles indicate the description of conditions and moods – *Love Longing; Daydreaming; Agony; Hopelessness; Expectation; Decision; Mysterious Melancholy; Nostalgia; Falling in Love, etc.;*
- D. *Actions* titles – *Chasing; Rushing; The Flight; Wanderings; Hunting; Music Playing on the Balcony, etc.;*
- E. *Distant (creative) associations* titles are without specific program conception and relation with the Debussy's composition, refereeing mostly to the remote landscapes, cities or countries – *Nocturno; Etude; Picture; Without Program Associations; Industry; Living in the Forests of America; Chinese Warrior; Japanese Well, etc.*
2. considering the relationship of the given title with the content of the myth about Pan and Syrinx (four categories):
- A. *Not corresponding* to the content of the myth titles – *Sunday Afternoon in Chinatown for Solo Flute; Asian Express; Underwater City; The Devil's dance; Nights in Siberia; A Mystery in London, etc.;*
- B. *Distant (creative) associations* titles regarding the content of the myth – *The Secret; A Day in a Village; Awakening; The Brook; Nights in the Desert; Mountain; The Storm; The Turbulent Sea, etc.;*
- C. *Closer (creative) associations* titles regarding the content of the myth – *The Dance of the Forest Fairy for Solo Flute; Meadow in a Spring; Chasing; The Night in the Woods; Nostalgia; Expectation, etc.;*

- D. *Largely corresponding* to the content of the myth titles – *The Nymph; The Sad Song of a Lonely Shepherd for Solo Flute; Pastoral; Love Longing; Loneliness; Awakening of Nature; Daydreaming, etc.*

Regarding the first performance, students proposed titles that can be mostly classified within the *Nature* category (35.5%). In comparison, the titles given during the second (35.1%) and the third (33%) performance can mostly be classified into the category of *Feelings* (Table 3), whereby the titles that were given due to the Pahud's performance *Largely corresponding* to the content of the Pan myth and – therefore – the “program” of Debussy's work (34%), while, in the case of Rampal's interpretation titles mostly fall into the *Not corresponding* to the content of myth category (31.9%), and in the case of Galway's interpretation in the category *Closer associations* (39.8%) (Table 4).

Table 3. Titles description in relation to the content itself.

Categories	The first performance J. Galway	The second performance E. Pahud	The third performance J. P. Rampal
Pastoral	21.5%	16%	4.4%
Nature	35.5%	29.8%	24.2%
Feelings	25.8%	35.1%	33%
Action	5.4%	8.5%	17.6%
Distant associations	11.8%	10.6%	20.9%

There is a noticeable difference between:

1. the first (21.5%) and the third performance (4.4%) concerning the category *Pastoral*;
2. the second (10.6%) and the third (31.9%) interpretation regarding the category *Not corresponding*;
3. the first (28%), the second (34%), and the third (8.8%) interpretation due to the *Largely corresponding* (to the content of the myth category) category (Table 4).

Table 4. Titles description in relation to the content of the myth.

Categories	The first performance J. Galway	The second performance E. Pahud	The third performance J. P. Rampal
Not corresponding	11.8%	10.6%	31.9%
Distant associations	20.4%	29.8%	30.8%
Closer associations	39.8%	25.5%	28.6%
Largely corresponding	28%	34%	8.8%

Conclusion

This research confirms the assumption of the idiosyncrasy of musical interpretation and the vital role of the performer in the triad *composer – performer – listener*. We recognized that all parameters of the interpretation (or “individual expressive acts” [Lehmann, Sloboda, and Woody, 2007: 89]) are related to the listeners’ experience of the work’s character(s). The metaphorical plan of the perception indicates that Galway’s and Pahud’s interpretations were similarly perceived, and in close relationship with the “program” of the piece by Claude Debussy, while, in relation to the Rampal’s interpretation respondents gave the title associations which mostly didn’t correspond to the program of the work and myth, referring to the cities, machines, movement, action, etc., thanks to his treatment of dynamics, articulation, more intense vibrato and the choice of a faster tempo. Since there is no metronomic mark in terms of the speed of the unit at the beginning of the Debussy’s work, nor for the character, but “only” the determinant *Très modéré*, differences between the performances are noticeable in the domain of tempo. Rampal’s performance lasts two minutes (Claude Debussy, *Syrinx*, Jean-Pierre Rampal [YouTube video]), Galway’s about two and a half minutes (*Syrinx*: Claude Debussy. James Gal-

way in Concert with Phillip Moll at Harewood House, 1989. [YouTube video]), while Pahud’s interpretation lasts about three minutes (Debussy: *Syrinx* for solo flute, Emmanuel Pahud [YouTube video]). Gabriellsson and Lindström pointed out that “among factors [which are] affecting emotional expression in music, tempo is usually considered the most important” (Gabriellsson and Lindström, 2010: 383).

We must have in mind that the recording of Rampal’s performance was heard from the record, and we can assume that the “noise” from the record’s sound could associate the respondents to the noise of the city. Juslin states that many factors may influence the music expression, such as the instrument or the performance context (Juslin, 2003: 277).

There are sporadically statistically significant differences between those respondents who already knew the Debussy’s work and those who didn’t – they can be observed through correlation analysis but cannot be theoretically explained.

In the end, we can open a question about whether the results have been different if the order of listening performances were randomized in some groups of participants.

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