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Role of the Body and its Movements in Expressive Performances

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Abstract

The theoretical base for this research is the psychology of music performance. Precisely, the relationship between the structures of the musical piece – movements of the body, gestures, mimics – the signified meaning – the expression (Popović Mladenović, Bogunović, & Perković, 2014). Also, the studies that were written by Jane Davidson and Jorge Salgado Correia (2002), and Davidson and Broughton (2016) related to coordination, collaboration and communication through the body movements during music performance, as well as the study by Davidson (2002), related to communicating through body movements in musical performance. The main aim is an extension of empirical researches in the field of psychology of music; accent on the role of the body and body movements during the expressive performance of the musical piece. The comparison of expressible kinesthetic communication was deducted from two performances of Chopin's work *Fantasie-Impromptu*, Op. 66, C# minor, through body movements, gestures, mimics and sounds produced during the performance. The two analyzed performances were from Dmitry Shishkin and Anastasia Huppmann. The facial mimics, forward-backward and left-right movements of the torso, the motions of the wrists/elbows, intensity of breathing, as well as the strategic implementation of these movements were analyzed in accordance with the challenges of pianist work in certain parts of the score. The intensity and types of movements between the respondents were compared; the obtained results were justified in the available theoretical background. In the interpretations of Chopin's *Fantasie-Impromptu*, the analyzed respondents implied the composer's intentions written in the score (dynamic, agogic) and interconnected the movements of the body with the music sheet. It has also been concluded: body movements are much more expressed by a male performer (even exaggerated), while in a female performer, the (un)conscious torso control occurred. Expression performance indicators (Davidson & Correia, 2002) with Shishkin and Huppmann vary by the intensity, but they are found in both performances. The movements' expressions differ, from time to time, between

the performers due to the individual experience of emotions at a given moment. All movements are unique to the individual performers and their expression represents an adequate response to the produced sound stimulus.

Introduction

Performers have the opportunity to express themselves in many creative ways in each branch of art. Musicians, as highly creative artists, express emotions through music pieces that they perform on their instruments (individually or in a group performance), but also through their voice and body movements. Performers' body movements make the audience aware to which extent the passion in the performer is inflamed while performing a particular piece of music, as each performance must propel the performer, both mentally and physically. At the same time, the analysis of musical performance from the perspective of body movements leaves the possibility for the use of interdisciplinarity as the performers' movements of the musical work can be viewed from the aspects of several other disciplines.

In scientific circles, the connection between body movement and the performance of musical works has been recognized long ago in the history of music (Davidson & Broughton, 2016). In the modern age, at the end of the third decade of the 20th century, various experiments were conducted (and published), aimed to demonstrate to which extent different performances of the same work could be executed if instrumentalists were given different instructions for performing (Clarke, 2002). In other words, from the time of avant-garde changes in music language: "The movement itself is part of performing as an audio-visual event and is the subject of investigation and debate" (Clarke, 2002: 67). However, some composers in the 20th

century strived to completely remove musicians from the live stage because "... in addition to their unbearable arrogance, they are completely unnecessary, except that their interpretations make the music intelligible to an audience not fortunate enough to be able to read the music in writing" (Doğantan-Duck, 2011: 245). Nevertheless, the performer is still a valid part of the musical process, from the composers' idea to the actual performance. Just before the end of the 20th century, musicology began to accept the movements of the musicians' body during a performance as a separate part in the history of music which could be explored.

In the 21st century, there have been studies that have dealt with the phenomenon of body movements during musical performances. One of the extensive studies – *Interdisciplinary Approach to Music: Listening, performing, composing* (Popović Mladenović, Bogunović, & Perković, 2014) – dealing with mostly contemporary music artists and pieces. Interdisciplinarity was viewed from the perspective of the psychology of music, that is, "expressive kinesthetic communication" in conjunction with (musical) analysis and non-verbal communication that is expressed with help of the body of the performer. Unfortunately, there are only a few research experiments regarding the role of performers' body movements from the perspective of music psychology in the Serbian musicology/psychology. The impetus for young scholars might be precisely the study of Serbian authors, given the clarity of presentation, thorough research and the significance of the achieved results.

Frederic Chopin's *Fantasia-Improptu*

The focus of the musical research does not have to be only about the work of contemporary authors, because the startup of musical performers on both mental and physical level can also be seen through the analysis of compositions from earlier music history. Therefore, the example for analysis in this paper will not be a modern work, but the basic setting from the perspective of the psychology of music is essentially the same. Compositions from the Roman-

tic period have always intrigued both performers and musicologists. Moreover, pieces from Slovenian authors (Davidson & Correia, 2002), including the work of Polish composer Frederic Chopin, are rightly declared as the most beautiful pieces from the past musical heritage.

Before the analysis itself, a distinction should be made in defining body movements in musical performers: the body movements required to play the instrument are not of the same importance as the uncontrolled body movements that each musician expresses while playing a particular piece (Davidson & Correia, 2002). Also, in the psychology of music, the danger that researchers can encounter is reflected in the fact that the movements of the performers' body should not have the highest priority if all other aspects of music and psychology have not been researched.

The particular piece for analysis is *Fantasia-Improptu*, opus 66, in C# minor. This Chopin's piece was written for piano, in 1834, but it was published in 1855, after the composer's death (Hadden, 1903: 160). *Fantasia-Improptu* is one of Chopin's most famous and well-performed works, and it has a very wide space for analysis of body movements. The piece can be divided into sections according to the composer's tempo marks: *Allegro agitato* – *Largo /Moderato cantabile/* – *Presto*. Although the precise instructions on which agogic elements and tempo marks (dynamic shadings, *sotto voce*, *pesante*, *sf*, *rfz*), a pianist should pay attention to, are given by the composer, each performer has its own interpretation, because it should also be taken into consideration that "... they [performers] don't like learned people telling them what to do in a dictatorial language that threatens the artist's artistic freedom" (Rink, 2002: 41).

The analysis of the composition was directed from multiple angles of the psychology of musical performance. One angle of the body movements was described by Jane Davidson and Marie Broughton (2016). Namely, they came to the conclusion that, in the processes of music interpretation, the human body is crucial for communication and understanding. Davidson (2002) then interpreted different types of musical performances (vocal, pianist performances)

and presented the results that could be compared with interpretations of Chopin's piece. Also, the observation and analysis of the movements of the face and body by the performers of *Fantasia-Improptu* rely heavily on the aforementioned study of the embodied meaning of Serbian musicological and psychological experts.

Aims

The best way to start is with the question: how can a bodily interpretation of the score contribute to a communication process involving the body as a certain "screen" of the performer's emotions and psycho-physical state? (Popović Mladenović et al., 2016). If it is known that there is a difference between the body movements required to play the instrument and the uncontrolled body and facial movements, some similarities, as well as some differences, can be observed in the contemporary performances of Chopin's romantic fantasy.

The physical moment of performing this work requires a large dose of pianist concentration since the left and right hand play different rhythmic patterns (the left-hand plays sextuplets and the right-hand semiquavers) in a fast tempo. Then, frequent changes of pace (if the first part is not repeated – as it is indicated before – there are four major tempo marks, from very slow to very fast tempo) require from the performer some physical and mental readiness to play the fantasy parts at an adequate speed, which was determined by the composer. Due to the melodies played in both right and left hand, the instrumentalist must count on subtle oscillations of the tempo during the performance of the piece (*rubato* playing), as well as on the great technical sophistication due to the complexity of the musical material. All of the above elements can put the performers in a position to conduct the work expressively, in their own way.

One should not forget the fact that *Fantasia-Improptu* has been analyzed in this text through the interpretation of live performances. Both performances were staged in front of an audience, which undoubtedly leaves a different impression than the atmosphere of recording in a studio. The tension is greater, and the forms of

stage fright that accompany public performance could be accounted for. There is also a greater need for theatricals in both performers. To answer the question stated above – the bodily interpretation of the score can greatly enhance the impression of the piece, largely through social interaction with the audience. Listening alone (or studio recording) of *Fantasia-Improptu* cannot evoke the exact same amount of body/face movements.

Method

Two performances of Chopin's fantasy will be compared, whose recordings can be found on YouTube (and their links in the list of references at the end of this paper). Female player is Anastasia Huppmann (today she is 31 years old, recording was published on April 9, 2016, duration of the piece itself is 5'26") and the male performer is Dmitri Shishkin (today he is 28 years old, recording was published on October 16, 2015, duration of the piece itself is 5'16"). The choice of these two pianists was made due to the temporal closeness of their performances, the similar geographical origin of the performers (Russian) and the fact that gender differences can intriguingly contribute to the research. The facial mimics, forward-backward and left-right movements of the torso, the motions of the wrists/elbows, intensity of breathing, as well as the strategic implementation of these movements were analyzed in accordance with the challenges of pianist work in certain parts of the score. The intensity and types of movements between the respondents were compared; the obtained results were justified in the available theoretical background. In the interpretations of Chopin's *Fantasia-Improptu*, the analyzed respondents implied the compositor's intentions written in the score (dynamic, agogic) and interconnected the movements of the body with the music sheet.

Results of the Analyses

Facial mimicry following the most technically demanding parts of the fantasy (from bar 5, when the playing process begins with both hands of the player and each hand has a differ-

ent rhythmic pattern, as well as part of the score entitled Presto, from bar 83) can adequately evoke the technical complexity of the performance. The forms of expression on the faces of the two performers are: raising and lowering eyebrows, making astonished facial expressions by raising eyebrows, (slight) mouth opening, but also slightly pressed lips to express concentration when playing technically demanding parts of the composition, semi-opened eyes.

Torso, swinging back and forth and left to right, is a body movement that is, in most cases, related to the musical pieces of the romantic era (due to the emotional reaction to the ‘infatuation’ of the romantic melodies). However, the sudden and abrupt movement of getting up and re-sitting on the piano chair may be uncontrolled by the performer (Dmitry Shishkin’s case), due to the overstatement of the forte dynamic of certain chords in his left hand. However, this movement brings too much focus to the performance itself (when it comes to performing works from the early Romantic period), making it overemphasized movement for expressing the loud dynamics. It is the same case with the closeness of the male performers’ head and keyboard. This way of performing gives the impression that Dmitri is very aware of the environment and playing in public, and that with his performance he wants to give the audience his own impression of Chopin’s work.

Theatricality in **wrist movements** (Davidson, 2002) is more pronounced in the male performer, while the female performer, Anastasia Huppmann, expresses more **elbow** movements. Moreover, Anastasia minimizes the upper body moves and favors movements of the arms. In other words, she favors motions that are most common for pianists and for which she may have a bigger control regarding the exaggeration of emotionality, due to her concentration on performing itself.

Although the dynamic range in fantasy is quite wide (from *ppp* to *ff*), neither of the performers had the need to emphasize dynamics with the intensity of their **breathing**. Namely, the breathing of both performers is not completely even, but it is not accentuated by each audible sound of inhalation or exhalation.

Free (or uncontrolled) pianist **leg movements** are largely prevented, especially when we consider the fact that pianists use their legs to play (left and/or right) pedals on the piano. Consequently, the (involuntary) twitching of the leg muscles in the performance of Chopin’s work should not be regarded as a fully relevant movement of the performer’s body. Jane Davidson (2002: 147) agrees with this opinion, referring to the ‘center of gravity’ of pianists’ movement, considering the fact that the performer’s hips are the most important part of the body from which the movements’ production begins. The upper body moves from the hips, and the distribution of body movements is closely linked to the back, head and arms, while the performers’ legs are somewhat static, and they are not the primary source of body movements that significantly contributes to the analysis.

In the processes of creating, communicating, and understanding musical performance, Davidson (2002: 146–147) has, in the course of performing, come to the conclusion, based on the observation of several pianists: circular and body-swinging movements are indicators of expressive performance. Also, fluctuations in expressiveness indicators benefit the movements that can be seen when performing *Fantasia-Impromptu*: the specific lifting and lowering of hands and arms whose character varies from lavish circular motions to small joint rotations; movements of the shoulders and moving the head back and forth. Both Dmitri and Anastasia use these movements as eclectic examples of expressive rendition of a composition.

It is important to emphasize that certain gestures occur to all performers strategically, always in the same places in the score, and act as a strong link between the physical production of expression and their analogous sound effects. However, with certain performers, there are variations in the expression of the type of gestures in the same places in the score. For example, in the part of *poco a poco più tranquillo* (b. 129 in *Fantasia-Impromptu* score), although it is known that a valid tempo mark in the mentioned bars is the fastest possible (Presto) and the performer is asked to gradually calm down the speed and intensity of playing, the way of

interpreting the body movements when pianist is calming down can be expressed in numerous ways. It is interesting to note that the two performers completely differently perceive and reflect the leading melody in the left-hand section, as a moment of tension in the piece. Specifically, Anastasia plays with her eyes closed and acts as if she is listening with infatuation to what she is performing (bringing the head down, letting her hair fall over her face while raising her eyebrows). Dmitri also (most of the time) does not look at the keyboard to what he is playing, but he does not close his eyes. He directs his gaze upwards, towards the ceiling, only occasionally casting his eyes on his left hand.

Conclusion

Through expressive body movements, the performers of the analyzed Chopin work had the opportunity to connect (or communicate) with the audience that listened to their performance. In other words: “The musician’s body is not just the tool for producing exquisite musical sound. The performer’s musical thoughts and feelings are embodied in the holistic sense; transformed into a multimodal display in order to express and communicate with others” (Davidson & Broughton, 2016: 575). By playing *Fantasie-Improptu*, the performers re-created the work in a certain way, embodying it through communication with the environment through-out visual (face and body movements) and auditory (listening) level. It is the audience who understands the work by watching and listening to public performance. Also, the appearance of the performers (clothing suitable for public performance), the ways of coordinating the body of Shishkin and Huppmann during their playing in their own way, and adequate treatment of the audience by bowing after the performance, all led to communication with the audience and provided a valid response to the composer’s idea how to treat the music material.

Relying on the relations of the structures of the musical work – body movements, gestures, mimics – embodied meaning – expression, the following conclusions can be made: Chopin’s work *Fantasie-Improptu* would not be com-

plete if one ignored live performance and body movements/gestures/mimics because the body is not just a “mechanical source of input and output” (Davidson & Correia, 2002: 575). In Davidson’s (2002) words, “. . . musical performance is a highly expressive and abstracted activity which emanates from a grounded bodily origin” (p. 150). The meaning of movements that performers produce is inseparable from the score, although interpretations of movements at times differ among performers due to the individual experience of emotions at a given moment. The embodied meaning in Chopin’s fantasy is inextricably linked to the interpretation of the score and there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ explication. All made movements are specific to individual performers and, in certain situations, their expression represents an adequate response to the auditory stimulus performed by the pianists.

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