The know how of musical performance

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The musician's skill falls under the category of practical knowledge or "know how". But "know how" comes in a number of species. In some cases, one aims at the result directly and cannot bring to consciousness the steps or calculations involved in bringing it off. In others, the target action can be reduced to a sequence or process that can be retrieved by consciousness even if it is not before the mind as the action is performed. A central concern in Jonathan Dunsby's book, as I see it, is the mapping of where the boundary between these two kinds of the musician's "know how" fall and, following on from that, how much of what the musician does can be explained and analysed in terms of steps, algorithms, rules, and the like. I attempt to develop and clarify these issues. In addition, I suggest that our understanding of musicianship would benefit from a sociological, not solely a psychological, perspective, as well as from comparison with the values and practices of music-making in other cultures and contexts other than those of live performance.

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