Aim and objectives

This study investigated methods of developing music performance so as to enhance listeners’ perceived emotional experience to music. In particular, the study examined the effectiveness of developmental techniques relevant to practicing musicians.

Context

Performers have a crucial role as the link between music’s inherent emotional expression and the listener’s experience of those emotions (Juslin, 2001). As one of the primary reasons for participating in musical activities is the emotional experience they involve (Juslin and Zentner, 2002) it follows that it is of great importance that performers have the ability to enhance their audience’s emotional experience as much as possible. To date, most research on performance and emotion has focused on how performers can use specific musical ‘cues’ to communicate an intended emotion to their audience (Gabrielsson and Juslin, 2003, p.525). This research has been applied to successful teaching strategies so that there was an increase in the accuracy of listeners’ perception of the performers’ intended emotion (Juslin and Laukka, 2000). However, listeners’ correct identification of a specific emotion in music is only the first step in an experienced musician’s attempt to create an engaging musical performance. Performers are interested in audiences’ perception of their own emotional involvement in a performance, and it is possible for listeners to correctly identify the intended emotion of a work played by different performers but within that experience various degrees of emotional engagement. Musicians would benefit greatly from being able to have some control over this, and thus the discovery of effective methods for enhancing audiences’ perception of their emotional experience of music would be advantageous to music teachers and performers.
Methodology

After careful selection of an appropriate musical excerpt the researcher/performer prepared the extract from a work for solo cello (Britten, Solo ‘Cello Suite no. 3), recording five versions, a control and then after undertaking four methods of developing expression. The developmental methods were positive mood induction (discordant with the music) and negative mood induction (concordant with the music), repeated listening to a recording of a renowned cellist, and having a studio lesson with an experienced cellist. As acoustic analysis was to be undertaken, the recordings were dry recorded, with reverberation added when creating the stimuli for the perceptual analysis. To assess within subject consistency the five excerpts were repeated and randomly ordered so that participants listened to 10 excerpts in total. The expression, emotional communication and technical proficiency of the musical extracts were rated by 10 listeners who undertook the study individually, listening to the excerpts and answering the questionnaire under consistent conditions. Basic acoustic analysis for parameters such as tempo and dynamic range was also performed.

Results

Agreement in ratings given to the two rankings of each version was examined using differences-vs-means plots, and by calculating measurement error and intra-class correlation coefficients. Mean ranks and Kruskal-Wallis P values were used to test for differences between the conditions. Whilst listeners rated all performances highly, there was low inter- and intra-rater agreement. Over the two hearings participants showed great variation in their ratings of the same excerpt, so no condition consistently rated significantly differently from the others. No patterns in listeners’ reported emotional responses to the different excerpts were found.

Differences in tempo between the excerpts were measured simply by comparing the total length of the extracts, as beat number was of course constant. The timings ranged from 1.08 minutes for the dissonant (‘happy’) mood induction condition to 1.20 minutes for the ‘cd’ condition. Comparisons of the excerpts also indicated variations in dynamic range and phrase timing.

Key Contributions/Discussion

In this study the ‘real-life’ developmental techniques used had no measurable effect on the reported emotional responses of the listeners. The five performances differed in musical aspects such as tempo, dynamic range, and in the timing of phrases, so it is likely that the developmental techniques did influence the performances of the excerpt. That these actual differences did not result in any consistent relationship with listeners’ reported experience of emotion raises some interesting questions about the extent of the influence performers have over their audiences. There are numerous possible explanations for these findings, many of them methodological, and it must be noted that this was a very small study, so the results can really only suggest directions for further
research. That the participants heard the same piece of music 10 times in quick succession meant that many of them reported losing interest and finding that boredom dampened any emotional response they might have felt. Further investigation would need to measure listeners' responses after hearing the excerpts in a more realistic context with some separation, and would require many more participants so that any subtle effects are detected. However, the problem of the effect that the presentation of the excerpts had on listeners does actually add to the strongest conclusion that can be drawn from this research. The inconsistency of the participants’ ratings of the same excerpts, and the influence of their attitude toward the task, shows just how strong the influence of individual listener factors are on an audience’s experience of emotion in music performance. This has great implications for performers, and for those involved in the assessment of music performance.

**Key words**

Music performance, emotion, expression, developmental techniques.

**References**


