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Performance and Analysis

An empirical research on the interactions between analysts and performers

ABSTRACT

Background

In the last 50 years, the relationships between analysis and performance have been discussed in many essays: for example, by Cone 1968, Berry 1989, Burkhart 1983, Kamien 1983, Larson 1983, Dunsby 1989, Cook 1999, Schenker 2000, Butt 2002, Parncutt–McPherson 2002, Rink 1995 and 2002, Kopp 2014. In Italy, these relationships have been considered thank to some workshops and studies proposed by *Gruppo Analisi e Teoria Musicale*, the Italian society of analysis and theory of music: for example, see Troncon 1999, Pozzi 1999 and 2006, Sacchetti 1999, Sanguinetti 1999, Canazza–De Poli–Roda 2011, Baroni–Bordin–Sacco 2012, Dalmonte 2014. The analysis of performance can normally take into account two different methods and aims: an analysis of the score useful for a performance (for example Schmalfeldt 1985, Schachter 1994, Rink 2007) and an analysis of the performance itself, which is often carried out with the support of technological means (Barolsky 2007, Dalmonte 2002, Lowe 2011).

A form of empirical research with the aim of investigating the possible interactions between an expert of theory and analysis and a professional performer has not so far been developed. The nature of this interaction is the focus of the present proposal. It was conceived by *Gruppo Analisi e Teoria Musicale* which launched a call for participation in Italian Conservatories and Universities.

The project was accepted by *Associazione per la Ricerca Artistica e Musicale in Italia* (an association for musical and artistic research) and involved 8 pairs of participants: 21 musicologists and musicians from 10 Conservatories (Bologna, Cagliari, Como, Castelfranco Veneto, Ferrara, Genoa, Novara, Pescara, Turin, Trento), 4 Universities (of Calabria, Venice, Bologna, and Graz in Austria) and 2 other institutions (Teatro Comunale and Fondazione Liszt in Bologna).

Aims and repertoire studied

The project has the intent of deepening the knowledge of the interactions between an expert of theory and analysis and a professional performer not from psychological or social points of view but in order to catch the most relevant and effective modalities of communication between the members of

the pair. For this reason we requested a specific working method based on recording not only music performances, but also the discussions between the participants in the various phases of their relationships. The repertoire studied, obviously, was drawn from Western music whose scores must be performed; the chosen pieces were the following:

— Niccolò Paganini, *Capriccio VI*, for violin

— Robert Schumann, *Papillons* op. 2, for piano

— Fryderyk Chopin, *Nocturne* op. 27 n. 1, for piano

— Franz Liszt, *Aux cyprès de la Villa d'Este – Threnodie*, from *Années de pèlerinage. Troisième année*, for piano

— Claude Debussy, *L'Isle joyeuse*, for piano

— Arnold Schönberg, *Sechs kleine Klavierstücke* Op. 19, for piano

— Olivier Messiaen, *Le nombre léger* and *Instants défunts* from *Huit Préludes* (1928–1929), for piano

— Bruno Maderna, *Aquarelles* from *Liriche su Verlaine* for soprano voice and piano (1946–1947).

Methods

The research was conducted applying an investigative method with many characteristics of scientific procedures. These characteristics were consistent with their definitions made by the *Frascati Manual* (Proposed Standard Practice for Surveys on Research and Experimental Development): more precisely, this method involved a plurality of subjects, was articulated in autonomous phases which were demonstrable and verifiable, used replicable procedures, controllable variables and specific surrounding conditions.

Our protocol was previously communicated to the participants, together with the definitions of the research project and with a large bibliography. The protocol was based on the following 6 phases:

1. Formation of pairs of analysts and performers (in every pair the performers could be more than one). Every pair chose a musical piece on which participants decided to work.

2. Collection of the surrounding conditions: the participants were requested to fill in an initial questionnaire aimed at collecting their experiences, their competences, and their availability to exchange information.

3. Collection of the first products: the expert of theory and analysis made an analysis of the chosen piece and the performer made a recording of its performance respectively.

Each member of the pair worked independently from the other member, without any communication between them. However, they communicated their results to the organizers of the research.

4. Discussions: the two members contacted each other and discussed and compared their “readings” of the text, in order to improve, if possible, their performance and their analysis. They recorded their discussions and made a written synthesis of them, to be given to the organizers.

5. Last activities of the pairs: after the comparisons and the discussions, the members of the pair decided the final version of the analysis and of the performance. Their results were given to the organizers.

6. Analysis of the data: a group of experts, chosen by the organizers, received the documents of the groups; the performances, the analyses, and the documents of their discussions were analysed with the aim of obtaining a global and final result of the various aspects of the research.

Implications

The implications of our research can be resumed by the following 3 points:

a) it is essentially based on an empirical approach and not only on analytical procedures. Probably its results can not be automatically extended to the whole situation in Italy or in Europe, but they can be considered representative of some significant shared tendencies;

b) while, in common practice, musicology and performance are the product of the work of a single person, in the present occasion the results are the product of a dialogue and of a discussion, of the comparison between two points of view, different in their experience and ways of thinking;

c) performance is often considered the fruit of mere intuition and not of a deep and explicit thinking, and analysis is considered an abstract exercise far from ‘the sounds’ and ‘music itself’. An experience like this can overcome incomprehension and suggest possible corrections to such distrusts.

Keywords

Performance, analysis, listening, analytical methodologies, empirical research.

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