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## EMOTIONAL COMMUNICATION IN MUSIC EDUCATION AND PERFORMANCE

This paper moves in a way just from the music of Komitas himself, as expression of a deep and heartfelt mysticism, a mysticism that I have always gathered, particularly during my stays in Armenia, in both popular and cultured musicians. Armenian music and performances are so emotional that it seems to me they produce perfect connection between body and soul, mind and heart. My thought particularly refers to Komitas's music.

I would like to start precisely from the emotional aspect of music performance and to analyse some recent studies in music education and performance, taken from the most significant contributions in this sense and particularly from the considerations on emotional communication made by Patrick Juslin and Roland Persson, of which this essay is a synthesis<sup>1</sup>.

To introduce the subject, I would like to start with a quotation by Francesco Geminiani (1687–1762), one of the most important violinists and composers of the eighteenth century. He said:

*“With regard to musical performances, experience has shown that the imagination of the hearer is in general so much at the*

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<sup>1</sup> **P. Juslin–R. Persson**, Emotional Communication, *The Science of Psychology in Music Performance*, OUP, 2002. See also **J. Boyd and H. George–Warren**, *Musicians in tune*, New York, Fireside, 1992. **R. H. Woody**, Learning expressivity in Music Performance, *JRME*, 14, 2000.

*disposal of the performer that by help of variation, intervals and modulation he may stamp what impression on the mind he pleases.”*<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the emotional impact of particularly expressive performers – for example Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714–1788), Niccolò Paganini (1782–1840) or even Jimi Hendrix (1942–1970) as well – has always been a source of great fascination, but what is the origin of their expressiveness? How is it achieved?

In fact, of all the subskills that make up music performance, the one associated with emotional communication are often considered the most elusive but at the same time they go exactly to the core of why people engage in musical behavior, either as performers or as listeners.

In studies about music performance the term “expression” has been used to refer to variation in timing, dynamics, timbre and pitch in such a way that differentiate a performance from another of the same music. But “expression” has also been used to refer to the emotional qualities of music as perceived by listeners.

Much has been written about “expression” in music, and a review of the literature, from antiquity to modern times, reveals a variety of ideas about what music is able to express,– beauty, motion, energy, tension, and so on. Now I would like to focus on “expression” of emotion, partly denying the role of the composer and focusing mainly on the role of the performer.

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<sup>2</sup> **Francesco Geminiani**, *A Treatise of Good Taste in the Art of Music*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1969 (first printed in London 1749). See also his *The Art of Playing on the Violin*. Oxford University Press, London, 1751.

The ancient Greeks argued that specific musical features were associated with specific emotions. This notion was elevated at a rational level during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the *doctrine of the affections*. Later that conception changed, and recent studies have investigated how the performers assign concepts and meaning to a piece of music while preparing it for performance. The studies confirm that performers conceive of performance in terms of emotions and moods and consider expressivity to be the one of the most important aspects of performance.

At the same time a number of studies suggest that expressive aspects of performance are neglected in music education. Teachers tend to spend more time and effort on technical aspects than on expressive and aesthetic aspects. As a result, students may come to focus on expressive aspects fairly late in their artistic development. Consequently, music educators have been encouraged to devote more attention to emotion and expression in music to avoid to grow up young musicians not able, from the beginning of their career, to induce an emotional experience in the listener.

The objective of this paper based on the contribution of Juslin & Persson is to illustrate how psychological research on emotional communication in music performance might contribute to the development of more efficient teaching strategies aimed at the expressive aspects of performance.

We can certainly say that emotions are difficult to define and measure. Yet most researchers would probably agree that emotions consist of many components: cognitive appraisal, subjective feeling, action tendency, and so on.

There are two types of approaches to dealing with emotions:

- According to the *categorical* approach, people experience emotions as categories that are distinct from one another.
- According to the *dimensional* approach, people focus instead on identifying emotions based only on two types, *valence* (positive or negative) and *activation* (high or low).

But now, what is emotional communication? We reserve this term for situations where the performer intends to communicate an emotion to the listener who however should understand the performer intention. So this approach implies that expression of emotions should be studied in an integrated fashion, in fact, accordingly, most studies use the procedure to ask the performer to play a piece to express various emotions chosen by the investigator and then the performances are judged by listeners to see whether they perceive the expression in accordance with the performer's intention. So, also the *perception* of course is at stake in this kind of studies.

The first question to face any researcher concerned with emotional communication in music is whether such communication is possible at all. A number of studies attempted to describe, or rather establish, a *code* that performers use to communicate emotions to listeners, and one of the main findings is that emotional expression in performance involve a sizable array of *cues*, cues in the sense of “pieces of information”. A summary of that code is shown below in Table 1.

Table 1

Emotion	Cue Utilization	Activity, Valence
Happyness	fast tempo, small tempo variability, staccato articulation, high sound level, bright timbre, fast tone attack etc.	high, positive
Sadness	very slow tempo, legato articulation, small articulation variability, low sound level, dull timbre, slow tone attack etc.	low, negative
Anger	high sound level, sharp timbre, fast tempo, staccato articulation, abrupt tone attack etc.	high, negative
Tenderness	slow tempo, slow tone attack, low sound level, legato articulation, soft timbre etc.	low, positive
Fear	staccato articulation, very slow sound level, fast tempo, irregular vibrato, pauses between phrases etc.	moderate, negative

The expressive cues shown in Table 1 include tempo, sound level, timing, intonation, articulation, timbre, vibrato, and so on.

Another important question is whether music performers have any insight regarding their own cue utilization. The researchers seem generally agreed that performers are not entirely conscious of how they use the cues listed in Table 1. However, there are large individual differences among performers in this regard. Some performers seem to imagine themselves being in the emotional state that their performance is intended to express and just let things happen. For example, the Russian violist Yuri Bashmet says, “*indentify with the emotions and the notes, fearful as they are, will look after themselves.*”

Other performers take a more analytical approach, explicitly pondering how to vary different cues. But to the extent that cues are used *implicitly*, this presents a problem for the teaching of expression, which relies mainly on verbal instructions.

Let us now try to analyse some hypotheses on the origin of the communication in terms of an acoustical code that exists between performer and listener. Arguably, the code reflects contributions from both nature and nurture.

A first factor is that music performers communicate emotions to listeners by using the same acoustic code as is used in vocal expression, for example sadness involves slow speech rate, low voice intensity, etc.; and in fact similar acoustic cues are used to express sadness in music performance and the studies show that these are cross-cultural similarities. Thus there seems to exist an innate code for acoustical communication of emotion, which could explain why emotional expression is often regarded by music teacher as instinctive, forgetting, in my personal opinion, that music is in turn a code in its own, which needs a bridge between itself and the emotions it describes, so an explicit reference to the communication of emotions in musical training is needed, otherwise, as I said, the technical aspect prevails.

The second factor that governs emotional expression in performance, according to these studies, is social learning or specific memories, a lifelong process that begins between mother and infant. When mothers talk to their infants, for example, if they want to calm their infant, they reduce the speed and the intensity of their speech and talk with slowly falling pitch contours, instead if mothers want to express disapproval toward some unfavorable

activity of the infant, they employ brief, sharp and staccato-like contours.

Table 2: Description of the code

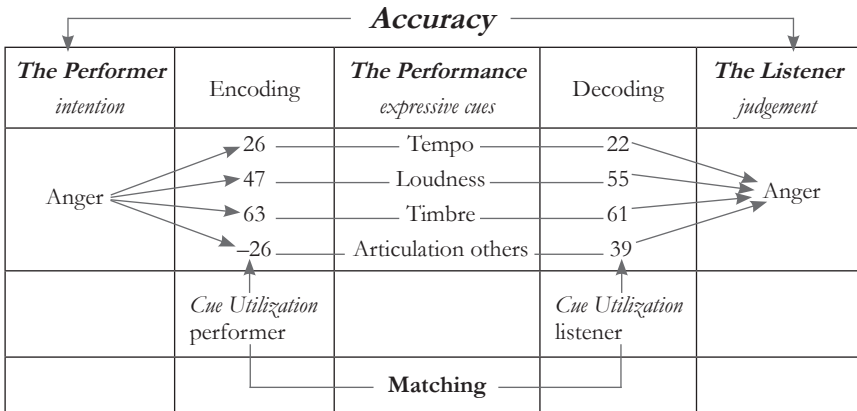


Table 2 illustrates how performers encode or express emotions by means of a set of cues (like variations of tempo, sound level, timbre etc.) that are probabilistic or, let's say, uncertain and partly redundant. The emotions are decoded or recognized by listeners who use these same cues to infer the expression. The cues are probabilistic in the sense they are not perfectly reliable indicators of the intended expression. So, in Table 2, *accuracy* refers to the correlation between the performer's intention and the listener's judgement. *Matching* refers to the degree of similarity between the performer's and the listener's cue utilization. For successful communication to occur, the performer's cue utilization must be as similar as possible to the listener's cue utilization.

Now we can understand which application can be done in music education, the question is: can emotional expression be learned? Many teachers view expression as something that cannot be taught. This view probably stems from certain myths about artistic expression. One such myth is that expression is entirely subjective and passive in its genesis and has nothing to do with understanding. In a way emotional expressiveness in music is sometimes hard to describe in words, making it somewhat elusive to both research and teaching practice. Furthermore, it is probably true that expressive skills to some extent reflect the emotional sensitivity of the performer but this does not imply that it is impossible to learn expressive skills through training.

A number of studies that have addressed this issue have demonstrated that expressive skills can be improved by training. For the sake of clarity, I have grouped these studies on learning strategies regarding musical expression and communication, into two groups: **Traditional strategies** and **Alternative approaches**.

### **The first group**

Traditional strategies for teaching expression.

#### ***1. Aural modeling strategy***

In this strategy the teacher's performance provides a model of what is desired from the student, and the student is usually required to learn by imitating the teacher on the instrument or using the voice. So, modeling is useful but it has some limitations and one is that the student is required to pick up the relevant aspects of the model. But it may be quite difficult for a student to know what to listen and how to represent it in terms of specific skills, in fact

masterful performances are so compact and seamless that it's difficult to observe the subskills that support a fluent production.

## ***2. Experiential strategies***

In this case the use of metaphors is part of such strategies to focus the emotional qualities of the performance. Although metaphors can be effective, there are some problems with them. One problem is that metaphors depend on the performer's personal experience with words and images. Since different performers have different experiences, metaphors are often ambiguous.

## ***3. Feeling the emotions strategy***

This last teaching strategy is to focus on the performer's felt emotions, trusting that these emotions will naturally translate into appropriate sound properties. Felt emotion, however, is no guarantee that the emotion will be successfully conveyed to listeners, nor it is necessary to feel the emotion in order to communicate successfully.

### ***The second group***

Alternative approaches to teaching emotional communication

One fairly straightforward way of taking advantage of performance research, would be to teach the code description shown in Table 1. This description could be used as a springboard for exploring different interpretations and reflecting on what makes for a stunning or luckluster performance of a specific piece of music. But going beyond that maybe the ultimate goal should be to provide performers with the tools they need to develop their own personal expression. Knowledge about relationships between expressive cues and their emotional effects will help performers to

reliably achieve desired listener responses. On that regard, as in the visual arts, a performer may need to know the underlying principles and conventions in order to know how to vary them in an aesthetically pleasing manner.

So, according to the alternative approaches, theory of emotional communication could usefully be taught to music students, based on the framework discussed earlier.

Recall that emotional communication in music performance involves a number of acoustic cues that are used by both performers and listeners. Both expression and recognition of emotions are made by integrating these cues. Such integration requires knowledge about the relationships among performers, cues, and listeners. Then the notion of cognitive feedback is to allow the performer to compare a model of his/her cue utilization to an optimal model of cue utilization. This is, of course, a fundamental feature of feedback as such.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the issue of cognitive feedback has also been appropriately investigated in the course of these studies. This investigation, unlike the eminently theoretical part presented so far, has a practical and applicative character with case studies and a significant variety of concrete and “on the field” experiences.

## Abstract

In order to communicate emotions to listeners, performers use a number of musical parameters simultaneously.

In accordance with the most recent publications in the didactic–performance field, and specifically by Juslin and Persson, we propose here the results of research on emotional expression in music, which can indeed be organised according to a theoretical framework that describes the communicative process. Traditional strategies for teaching expression (metaphors, aural modelling, felt emotion) are here subjected to careful analysis and we conclude that these strategies rarely provide informative feedback to the performer.

Thus, a new approach to teaching expression is outlined and its effectiveness is evaluated with the aim of providing performers with the necessary tools to develop their own personal expression.

**Keywords:** emotional communication, music education, performance field, teaching strategies.

Մարկո Մինա (Իփրայիա)

## ՀՈՒՋԱԿԱՆ ՓՈԽՀԱՄԱԳՈՐԾԱԿՑՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ԵՐԱԺՇՏԱԿԱՆ ԿՐԹՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՄԵՋ ԵՎ ԿԱՏԱՐՈՂԱԿԱՆ ԱՐՎԵՍՏՈՒՄ

### Ամփոփում

Ունկնդիրներին հույզեր հաղորդելու նպատակով կատարողներն օգտագործում են մի շարք երաժշտական պարամետրեր միաժամանակ:

Հաշվի առնելով դիդակտիկ-կատարողական ոլորտի վերջին հրապարակումները (Զասլին և Պերսոն)<sup>1</sup> հոդվածում ներկայացնում ենք երաժշտության մեջ հուզական արտահայտչականության վերաբերյալ մեր հետազոտության արդյունքները, որոնք իսկապես կարող են ձևակերպվել ըստ այն տեսական շրջանակի, որը վերաբերում է հաղորդակցման՝ փոխհամագործակցության գործընթացին: Հոդվածում մանրակրկիտ վերլուծության են ենթարկվում դասավանդման ավանդական ռազմավարությունները (փոխաբերություններ, լսողական մոդելավորում, զգացմունքային հույզեր), ապա եզրակացնում ենք, որ այդ ռազմավարությունները հազվադեպ են տեղեկատվական հիմք տալիս կատարողին:

Այսպիսով, դասավանդման արտահայտման նոր մոտեցում է ուրվագծվում, և դրա արդյունավետությունը գնահատվում է՝ նպատակ ունենալով կատարողներին տրամադրել անհրաժեշտ այնպիսի գործիքակազմ, որոնցով նրանք կգարգացնեն իրենց անձնական արտահայտումը:

**Հիմնաբառեր՝** զգացմունքային հաղորդակցություն, երաժշտական կրթություն, կատարողական ոլորտ, դասավանդման ռազմավարություններ: