

Performance as theatre: How expert pianists participate in concert stage direction

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Disciplinary background A. Disciplinary background A. Statement of background in Music psychology

Audiences have a non-conscious dependence on sight to inform their interpretations of music performance (Friedrich & Reinhard, 2012). Non-verbal cues influence performance appraisal (Tsay, 2013) and audiences are swayed by their first impressions (Platz & Kopiez, 2013). Audiences favour performers who are attractive, make eye contact (Wapnick, Mazza, & Darrow, 2000), and are dressed appropriately (Urbaniak & Mitchell, 2021).

Disciplinary background B. Disciplinary background B. Statement of background in Music performance

In the 1840s, Liszt revolutionised the traditional concert stage with his performance magnetism. Liszt showed an uncanny insight into the audiovisual fusion for optimal performance (Robert Schumann, in Gooley, 2004, p. 47). Expert performers appear cognisant of the complex task of creating a musical spectacle. Consummate performers dress to impress (Griffiths, 2011), project physical performativity (Davidson, 2014), and guide their audiences through gesture (Doğantan-Dack, 2011).

Abstract

This study aims to discover how professional pianists utilise sight and sound for the concert stage.

Nine internationally-renowned pianists participated in semi-structured interviews about planning for the concert stage. They described their approach to performance, their preparation and their interpretation of the audience's experience. Responses were transcribed and coded thematically.

Expert performers exploited visual cues in their performances to construct a gestalt audiovisual experience for their audiences. They were active participants in choreographing nonverbal communication, stage demeanour and attire. Commanding the spotlight was essential to create the concert spectacle. For these performers, Liszt was the epitome of the performer-soloist who employed visual cues to enhance his performance. Liszt's performance manner provided a rubric for modern-day performance, and performers credited Liszt to their approach to stage entrance, demeanour and flair. Performers distilled elements of Lisztian showmanship and integrated them into a theatrical production to amplify their own performances.

It appears these experts had a tacit appreciation of nonverbal cues to optimise performance, and harnessed the power of sight intuitively. They understood audiences' visual preferences and biases, and acknowledged performativity was integral to their performance to augment the audience experience.

Interdisciplinary implications. For these expert performers, successful music performance was an audiovisual spectacle. They maximised sight to complement and enhance their musical prowess. Visualising the concert from the audience's perspective enabled them to think critically about the impact of sight on sound. Performers were adept at directing their audiences and stage-managed their concert demeanour to optimise the reception of their performance. They were able to articulate the

importance of sight in performance and crafted their performance accordingly. Future research studies will investigate how expert performers understand and combine nonverbal cues into performativity, and transform the stage.

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