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Performance rules in academic and traditional music

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Background in music perception

Performance rules indicate small systematic deviations of time, pitch/ f_0 , loudness/SPL, etc., applied in musical performance to make it come “alive”, i.e., different from the mechanically precise score. For instance, nomenclature and classification of performance rules has been developed in KTH, Stockholm (Friberg et al, 2006). For the present study, the rules inégales, melodic intonation, and high sharp are the most topical.

Background in ethnomusicology

There is significant number of ethnomusicological studies dealing with acoustical measurements of timing, intonation, and musical scales in traditional musics. As a result of some studies, kinds of direct or indirect performance rules could be envisaged. For instance, Alexeyev (1986) notes “wandering” tones characteristic of a certain stage of mode development. A manifestation of time performance rules is observed or could be extracted from the analysis of Estonian folk music (Ross and Lehiste, 2001). Pitch performance rules are traced in Lithuanian traditional singing (Ambrazevičius & Wiśniewska, 2008).

Aims

We aim to collate examples of rules in Lithuanian traditional and Western academic musical performances and to discuss their similarities and differences.

Main contribution

The sample consisted of 40 recordings of Lithuanian traditional vocal performances, 10 from each of the four main musical dialects. All of them were typical solo performances, presented by accepted representatives of the traditions. Additionally, the data from a previous study (Ambrazevičius & Wiśniewska, 2008) were included. Timing and pitches of the performances (evaluated from $\log f_0$ tracks) were obtained with the help of software Praat.

Generalization of the results led to the conclusion that manifestations of the rules *inégaies*, leading tone (a type of melodic intonation), and ascending/descending sequences (probably, a type of high sharp) are common in the Lithuanian traditional singing examined. The findings were compared to the cases of the rules in academic music discovered earlier by other authors. Different versions of *inégaies* in the traditional singing were registered. Interestingly, the internal division of beat (e.g., LS or SL; different ratios) reveals distinct tendencies in different musical dialects. Therefore, the types of *inégaies* could serve as differential markers of the traditions. Apparently this is related to the rhythm of the spoken dialects.

The vocal performance intonation rules in one of the musical dialects (Suvalkija) revealed earlier were verified in the present study employing examples from other dialects. Similarly to the case of violin intonation in academic performance (the semitone between leading tone and tonic is narrowed; Fyk, 1994), the corresponding 'neutral' second in the traditional singing is also narrowed. Although the intervals differ (minor second / 'neutral' second), the tendencies of 'gravitation' of the leading tone by the anchor tone are the same in academic and traditional cases. Additionally, slight sharpening is characteristic of ascending sequences, whereas flattening tends to appear in descending sequences of the traditional performances examined; this could have common perceptual roots with the rule high sharp.

Implications

The performance rules (at least for the examined cases) can be considered as universals in music perception. They could help explain certain phenomena in disparate music cultures, as well as contribute to cross-cultural studies.

A comprehensive account of the phenomena of musical performance (its aspects of pitch and time) requires expertise in both the humanities (music analysis, ethnomusicology) and the sciences (music psychology, acoustics, statistics).

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Biography of Rytis Ambrazevičius

Rytis Ambrazevičius has a degree in physics from Vilnius University and he received his Ph.D. from the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. He is a Prof. at the Kaunas University of Technology and Assoc. Prof. at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. His research interests include music and speech acoustics, ethnomusicology, and music cognition. He has authored or co-authored ca 50 papers and books, and ca 400 entries for the Lithuanian Encyclopedia of Music. Member of ESEM and ESCOM. He is also active as a folk and folkrock musician.

Biography of Robertas Budrys

Robertas Budrys has a degree in musicology from the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. His research interests include music cognition, especially tonal hierarchies and other features of musical scales that can be studied with the aid of psychological experiments and acoustical analysis.

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Irena Višnevskā has a degree in musicology from the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre; she is currently a doctoral student at Institute of Arts, Polish Academy of Sciences. Her research interests include ethnomusicology, especially traditional music of the Polish minority in Lithuania and the study of stylistic features of traditional singing through acoustical analysis. She is also active as a folk singer.