Title: Exploring the perceptual effects of performers’ interpretations

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Background in Performance Analysis and Perception
Empirical studies of performance attributes such as tempo variations, dynamics (Palmer, Repp 1997, 1999) and even physical gestures (Wanderley) posit that structural emphases can be measured from these aural and visual streams. Recording continuous perceptual responses from audience judges on tasks such as shaping perceived phrasing and tension (Vines) provides insight into the communicative function of these performances and allows the exploration of relationships between performance parameters and their “communicative” outcomes.

Background in Philosophy
To perform a piece of music is to present and portray the patterns of that piece of music (Walton). Also, to hear and understand a piece of music is said to hear the performance as sound patterns under certain descriptions (e.g. Kivy, Scruton). The nature and extent to which performers may actually articulate such patterns is unclear. Empirical studies in this field may help clarify questions such as the artistic value of the performer’s contribution in performing a musical work and the comparability of different performances (performative interpretations) of the same piece. Also, it may help shed light on the audience’s attitude towards performances and the idea that audiences attribute patterning intentions to the performer when valuing his or her performance.

Aims
Proceeding from results that audiences can detect phrasing structures accurately (Vines, MacRitchie et al.), it is interesting to view the extent and limits of these communications. This study aims to examine whether a performer’s unique interpretation can be conveyed to the point where it changes how the listener “hears” a piece, extending the work of (Spiro). Compositions which provide several interpretative avenues for performers are used.

Main contribution
Method: In a preliminary pilot study of this question, three performances each of Chopin’s B Flat minor sonata finale, and Chopin’s Prelude in E minor are played aurally to audience judges, all who have a high level of musical training. These judges are asked to continuously indicate phrasing using a slider. This study examines the effects across participants for the one performer and also across performances and how these relate to measured aural features such as tempo and dynamics.
Results: Results from the one performance across all participants show a range of responses indicating that there is not an ‘agreed’ interpretation across judges. However, these responses change slightly across performances of the same piece. Overall tempo appears to effect the rate of phrasing boundary responses in the finale, however, this does not translate across to performances of the prelude.

Conclusions: This study would benefit from further musical examples and a larger range of participants as is planned, however, these preliminary results show that despite that the act of listening to music can be personal and dependent on a number of a priori factors, different interpretations can have an effect on how we hear phrasing.

Implications
Implications are evident in performance pedagogy; being able to understand the effect performers can have on audiences, how audiences respond in comparing performances and potentially redefining the role and artistic value of performers in music making.

References
Biography: Jennifer MacRitchie
Jennifer MacRitchie is a postdoctoral researcher in performance science at the Conservatorio della Svizzera Italiana, Lugano, Switzerland. Her main fields of research lie in performance analysis, the connection between movement and sound and the consequent effects of these in the perception of musical features. She gained her PhD at the Music and Science Research Group, Glasgow University (2011) and an M.Eng in Electronics with Music, Glasgow University (2006). Jennifer also performs regularly on both piano and viola.
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Biography: Hubert Eiholzer
Hubert Eiholzer is vice director and head of the research department of the university school of music at the Conservatorio della Svizzera Italiana, Lugano, Switzerland. In the past ten years of working at this institution, he has been essential in the school's transformation to a university school and has created, among other things, the research department focusing on research in music directed at musical production, performance and teaching. He has taught courses in music history, music theory and music philosophy, supervised students’ BA and MA dissertations and has been involved in a variety of ways in the department's research projects. He has a licences lettres (1983, philosophy) and diploma in instrumental music teaching (1984, piano) and a doctorate in philosophy (1994, music aesthetics).
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