

Expectation during Improvisation: The Way It Influences the Musical Dialogue

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Abstract : Improvisation is a fundamental form of musical practice and an increasing amount of literature shows a particular interest on the consequences it might have in different kinds of social contexts. A relevant aspect of the musical experience is the ability to create expectations, which reflects a basic strategy of the human mind, an intentional movement toward the future which is based on previous experiences. Musical Expectation - an unconscious tendency to project forward in time, to predict future sound events and the ongoing of a musical experience - can be regarded as a process that strongly influences the listeners' emotional and affective response to music, as well as their social and aesthetic experience. While improvising, composers, interpreters and listeners generate and exchange expectations, thus creating a dynamic dialogue and meaningful relationships. The aim of this paper is to investigate how expectation contributes to the creation of such a dialogue during the unfolding of the musical experience and to what extent it influences the meaning music acquires during the performance. The difference between the ability to create expectations and the anticipation of the future ongoing of music will be questioned. Does it influence in different ways the meaning of music and the kind of dialogical relationship established between musicians and between performers and audience? Such questions will be investigated with reference to recent research in music cognition and the analysis of a particular case: a free jazz performance during which musicians improvise and/or change the location of the sound source. The present paper is an attempt to provide new insights for investigating and understanding the cognitive mechanisms underlying improvisation as a musical and social practice. They contribute to the creation of a model that we can find in many others social practices in which people have to build meaningful relationships and responses to environmental stimuli.

Keywords : anticipation, expectation, improvisation, meaning, musical dialogue

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