

Vicarious Cues in Portraying Emotion: Musicians' Self-Appraisal

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Abstract : This present study seeks to discover attitudinal commonalities and differences within a musician population relative to the communication of emotion via music. We hypothesized that instrument type, as well as age and gender, would bear significantly on musicians' opinions. A survey was administered to 178 participants; 152 were current music majors (mean age 20.3 years, 62 female) and 26 were adult participants in a community choir (mean age 54.0 years, 12 female). The adult participants were all vocalists, while student participants represented the full range of orchestral instruments. The students were grouped by degree program, (performance, music education, or other) and instrument type (voice, brass, woodwinds, strings, percussion). The survey asked 'How important are each of the following areas to you for portraying emotion in music?' Participants were asked to rate each of 15 items on a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 10 (very important). Participants were also instructed to leave blank any item that they did not understand. The 15 items were: dynamic contrast, overall volume, phrasing, facial expression, staging (placement), pitch accuracy, tempo changes, bodily movement, your mood, your attitude, vibrato, rubato, stage/room lighting, clothing type, and clothing color. Contrary to our hypothesis, there was no overall effect of gender or age, and neither did any single response item show a significant difference due to these subject parameters. Among the student participants, however, one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of degree program on the rated importance of four items: dynamic contrast, tempo changes, vibrato, and rubato. Significant effects of instrument type were found in the responses to eight items: facial expression, staging, body movement, vibrato, rubato, lighting, clothing type, and clothing color. Post hoc comparisons (Tukey) show that some variation follows from obvious differences between instrument types (e.g. string players are more concerned with vibrato than everyone but woodwind players; vocalists are significantly more concerned with facial expression than everyone but string players), but other differences could point to communal mindsets toward vicarious cues within instrument type. These mindsets could be global (e.g. brass players deeming body movement significantly less important than string players, being less often featured as soloists and appearing less often at the front of the stage) or local (e.g. string players being significantly more concerned than all other groups about both clothing color and type, perhaps due to the strongly-expressed opinions of specific teachers). Future work will attempt to identify the source of these self-appraisals, whether enculturated via explicit pedagogy, or whether absorbed from individuals' observations and performance experience.

Keywords : performance, vicarious cues, communication, emotion

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