

PREFERRED TEMPI OF IMAGINED COMPOSITIONS

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Background

Until now it has not been clear whether or not the acquisition of a special motor-program by playing a composition is a prerequisite for giving a precise idea of an appropriate tempo.

Aims

The aim of the experimental study was to find out whether musically trained persons have stable tempo preferences of well-known compositions even without having played these compositions and without listening to them while determining the preferred tempo.

Method

The scores of 8 well-known compositions for keyboard instruments by J.S. Bach and W.A. Mozart were presented to 3 different groups of subjects: a) subjects who had played these compositions, b) subjects who had not played them, and c) subjects who could not play them. Subjects were asked to imagine these compositions and to adjust an electronic metronome to that tempo of the beat which seemed to be the most appropriate. The display of the metronome was hidden. Subjects had to do this task 5 times on different days. Two measures of dispersion were used: the quotient "MM max / MM min" and the quotient "MM 4th session / MM 5th session".

Results

The intrapersonal dispersion of the preferred tempi was different for the 3 groups, with those subjects who had played the compositions showing the lowest dispersion and those who could not play them showing the highest dispersion. However, differences between those who had played the compositions and those who had not played them were not significant. Differences of dispersion obviously became smaller in the course of the experiment with low dispersion between the fourth and fifth values. Preferred tempi of the three groups differed significantly only with very few compositions.

Conclusions

Playing a composition does not seem to be a prerequisite for stable tempo preferences, at least with well known compositions. However, the acquisition of special motor-programs contributes to specifying tempo preferences.