

‘ARMCHAIR CONDUCTING’ ANIMATIONS FOR MOZART AND SCHUBERT

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Background

Some people respond to music with an internalized gesture rather like a conducting shape. Such conducting does not control a performance; the case is instead the opposite, in that a (real or imagined) performance controls the conducting; hence the term ‘armchair conducting’. Gustav Becking (1928) closely studied such shapes, drawing them on paper as composer-specific “Becking Curves”. These curves on paper are, however, static; in earlier work I had implemented a computer animation of a conducting shape in an excerpt from Mozart’s Piano Sonata K576 III, matched to the sound of a recording by Walter Gieseking. Computing resources facilitating this approach have only recently become available.

Aims

The main aim is to contribute an animation of a conducting shape in an excerpt from Schubert’s Moment Musical No. 6, matched to the sound of a recording by Artur Schnabel. A second aim is to look into the problems arising in attempting to test the validity of such animations. A final and more subsidiary aim is to examine the “pulse matrix” proposed by Clynes (1983) in relation to (a) the recorded performance nuances and (b) the Becking curves.

Method

The video track of the animation was prepared with the Matlab(R) computer program by successive approximation to the temporal shaping of my physical gesture. The sound of the recorded performance was added as a separate track. The nuances present in the recorded performance were also measured and analysed.

Results

The animation seems generally successful. Testing the validity of such animations is difficult and will require further work. Clynes’s pulse matrix postulates are not confirmed by the present work.

Conclusions

Insights into composer-specific features of the musical beat have been obtained and demonstrated visually, now for two composers. Implications for music education are envisaged.