

EXPRESSIVENESS IN MUSICAL PERFORMANCE: COMPARISON OF NOVICE AND EXPERT-LISTENER PERSPECTIVES

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Background

As part of our ongoing research into the perception of baroque performance practice, we investigated the relationship between expert and novice baroque music listeners. There are conflicting theories which have important implications on baroque performance practice and pedagogy. One of these is that experts are the holders of performance knowledge and should guide novices. This suggests that novice listeners will have more varied and less informed views about performance practice. The definition of an expert listener in this study is one who regularly or frequently listens to baroque music, whether as a baroque performer specialisation, or as a non-performing listener, or both.

Aims

To test the hypothesis that expert baroque listeners are more consistent and accurate in their responses to baroque music than novice listeners and to compare the aesthetic judgements of novices with those of experts.

Method

30 experts and 30 novices in baroque music listening made aesthetic responses to several excerpts from J. S. Bach's compositions. For each piece at least two versions were rated.

We estimated reliability of judgement by asking listeners to identify the musical parameters of each performance with respect to articulation, rhythm and phrasing.

Results

Results will be discussed in relation to the findings of the experiment that is underway at the time of writing. Our pilot study with a much smaller sample size suggests that experts tend to agree on the musical parameter ratings more so than do novices. However, there was little difference in aesthetic judgements between the two groups: Both novices and experts agree on which performances were expressive in a baroque style.

Conclusions

Our pilot study result supports hypothesis 1. Our main study will determine with more detail the reliability of this finding. If supported, it would provide evidence to the view that in the study of baroque music, as probably in other styles too, a much greater authority and experimental efficiency can be obtained by employing the services of experienced listeners. The reliability of this finding, and whether large samples of novices could be used as a substitute for these experts remains to be seen.