

# TEMPO CHANGE AND INTERPRETATION PREFERENCE

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## Background

Classical music is interpreted in different tempi. In all interpretation there is tempo variation. These tempo variations are an important aspect to bring the music come to life. Are these tempo nuances dependant on the basic tempo? If tempo in a performance is changed, will the tempo nuances scale proportionally, or will such a manipulated performance sound “wrong”? This test was made to see how manipulated performances were assessed compared to the originals.

## Aims

In this experiment we tested if and how the preference for interpretations changes when tempo in the performances was changed. Subjects were asked to identify which performances were manipulated in tempo, and also to make a rating of different performances, both original and manipulated.

## Method

10 professional musicians participated. They heard five pieces of classical music on CD (piano and orchestral), each in six interpretations. Half of these interpretations were manipulated in tempo, the tempo manipulations being either 20% faster

or 20% slower than the original. All tempos were within the tempo range normally heard in performances. The participants were asked to decide which performances were manipulated, to describe the performances (optional), to rate each performance (1-10) and finally rank each of the six performances of each piece.

## Results

The identifying of the manipulated versions, were not much better than random guessing (55% correct). However, in ranking and rating, the original interpretations in most cases scored better than the manipulated versions.

## Conclusions

The results are somewhat ambiguous. On one hand the identification of manipulated performances showed a low level of accuracy. On the other hand, four of the five performances ranked on top were original performances, and average ranking and rating was in general better for originals than for the manipulated versions. In 14 of the interpretations where both the original and a manipulated version was included, ten of the originals were regarded best, only four of the manipulations scored better than the original.