

APPRECIATION OF JAZZ AND OTHER GROOVE-BASED MUSIC AS A FUNCTION OF TEMPO

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Background

Tempo is one global property of music performance that affects the listener's experience. For example, fast tempi are often related to happiness and intensity, and slow tempi with sadness and solemnity. However, musicians' intuitions are sometimes that only one specific tempo is acceptable for a given piece of music. Such an optimal tempo may ultimately bear on basic perceptual aspects, for example event duration or density.

Aims

To show how music experience is affected by altering the tempo determined by the artist or producer.

Method

Stimuli were original recordings of ensemble music (jazz, ethnic, and "radio chart-style") and versions of these in which the tempo was altered by -10%, -5%, +5%, or +10% by means of DSP software, thus preserving the original pitch. Listeners rated 14 adjectives in response to each music example.

Results

As a function of tempo ratings of rapid and intensive decreased while ratings of calm decreased. Ratings associated with aesthetic or musical evaluation, such as good, groovy, and swinging were lower for decreased tempi but unchanged or insignificantly increased for increased tempi. The original or +5% tempo received the highest ratings for some combinations of adjectives and music examples.

Conclusions

The notion of optimal tempo found support for some music examples and by the fact that although tempo was linearly related to adjectives associated with speed, ratings of evaluative adjectives were not systematically higher for any altered tempo. The question remains whether optimal tempo is determined by the melody or other structural properties of the composition, the musical arrangement, or a specific pattern of performance variability.

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