

Excursions

Volume 1, Issue 1 (June 2010)



Anna Jordanous, "Empirical Approaches to Performance: Empirical Musicology II Conference, School of Music, University of Leeds, UK, 25-26 March 2010", *Excursions*, 1, 1 (June 2010), 152-157.

URL: <http://www.excursions-journal.org.uk/index.php/excursions/article/view/13>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any more substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

No warranty, express or implied, is given. Nor is any representation made that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date.

The publisher shall not be liable for any actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

**Empirical Approaches to Performance: Empirical Musicology II Conference,
School of Music, University of Leeds, UK, 25-26 March 2010**

empirical: "based on, concerned with, or verifiable by observation or experience rather than theory or pure logic : they provided considerable empirical evidence to support their argument."

musicology: "the study of music as an academic subject, as distinct from training in performance or composition; scholarly research into music."¹

In contrast to the traditional theoretical view of musicology, this interdisciplinary conference chose to emphasise the value of empirical approaches to music research, presenting a diverse range of different scientific and practical approaches to the study of musical performance. Focussing particularly on issues around music performance, this conference showcased research that borrowed knowledge and methodologies from a variety of academic disciplines.

Between them, the two invited keynote speakers, Eric Clarke (University of Oxford) and David Temperley (University of Rochester) represented the breadth of the spectrum of research that the conference covered. Speaking with the authority of one of two co-editors of the defining text in the field of empirical musicology, *Empirical Musicology*², Eric Clarke offered us a critical overview of the historical use of empirical methods in music research. Clarke's paper, "Studying Performance Empirically: Opportunities and Limitations", concluded by outlining the aims and themes of the AHRC Research Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice (CMPCP), a multi-institution collaboration he is currently

1 *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005).

2 *Empirical Musicology: Aims, Methods, Prospects*, ed. by Eric F. Clarke and Nicholas Cook (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004).

involved in³. He summarised how projects run by the CMPCP examine several aspects of creativity in the domain of musical performance, such as the distribution of creativity across several performers, and the practice of improvisation.

David Temperley brought to the conference podium the expertise on probabilistic methods of music analysis and computational approaches to music cognition that he demonstrated in *Music and Probability* and in *The Cognition of Basic Musical Structures*.⁴ In his paper “Studying Music Performance: A Probabilistic Approach”, Temperley proposed that there are two goals that particularly affect how musicians shape their performance: the first is to communicate a piece’s structure and the second is to control the flow of musical information during performance. After debating these two goals, Temperley then discussed how they could be incorporated in quantitative models of musical performance.

Making an educated guess, I believe I was one of very few participants who was not based in a music department, as would be expected for a musicology conference. However, several presenters came from multi-disciplinary research groups and collaborations; this was reflected in the high level of interdisciplinarity demonstrated in the talks.

Many methodologies and tools discussed were applied outside of their traditional domains in order to explore a wide range of different aspects of music. This was a consistent theme during the conference, as speakers outlined their thoughts and findings on what new technologies have to offer the music researcher. Elaine King presented one such example of cross-disciplinary collaboration in her collaborative paper “Motivations in University Music

³ See AHRC Research Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice, <http://www.cmpcp.ac.uk> for more details [accessed 14th May 2010].

⁴ David Temperley, *Music and Probability* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007) and David Temperley, *The Cognition of Basic Musical Structures* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

Student Performers”. King and her colleagues, Christopher Botton and Nigel Wright, used a statistical ordination technique borrowed from ecology and educational research (canonical ordination, software called CANOCO) to cluster together data from participant interviews. In this way, the researchers could statistically derive the main groups of motivations reported by students as they prepared for assessed performances, motivations which included the quest for personal achievement, (e.g. scoring highly in assessment), and the desire to please others, such as family members with certain expectations.

Mark Doffman detailed his work on non-verbal communication between musicians during improvised performance. His presentation, “Codes and Codas: Jazz Musicians’ Real Time Construction of Endings in Performance”, focussed specifically on how different groups of jazz musicians negotiate during performance in order to end the improvisation in an appropriate way. Analysis of video footage examined the communicative behaviours being employed by experienced and amateur musicians, identifying the musical co-ordination that was taking place. Doffman pointed out the analogies between this communicative behaviour and behaviour used during spoken conversations, before going on to speak about how the gestural behaviour of the musicians was influenced by the cultural traditions and semi-structured models of performance underlying these musical scenarios.

Some authors presented work that had implications outside of musical performance as well as within the conference theme. For example, a beautifully presented talk from Tal-Chen Rabinowitch, written with Ian Cross and Pamela Burnard and entitled “Musical Interaction and Empathic Growth in Children” described a longitudinal study observing musical interaction in groups of children, alongside their emotional empathic development. To evaluate the children's emotional empathy, three different measures were used as a test battery. Of these three measures, two came from existing research practice and the third was

devised for this study. Rabinowitch concluded that there was a significant link between increased musical interaction amongst children and increased empathic development.

My own presentation, “Defining Creativity in Musical Improvisation”, considered how we can derive a definition of creativity in musical improvisation such that the definition accurately reflects our general intuitions of this concept. In this work, empirical methods borrowed from linguistics were applied to the language used in several discussions of the general nature of creativity. The results of this analysis supplied a list of words that are statistically more likely to be used in such discussions, e.g. innovation, openness, divergent. These words were then used in a survey, to prompt detailed and wide-ranging comments from a range of musicians and non-musicians about their perceptions of improvisation and how creativity is manifested in this domain.

Organised by Luke Windsor, Karen Burland and Elaine King (on behalf of SEMPRES, a society promoting research into music psychology and music education), this conference attracted international participants as well as a large proportion of UK-based researchers. The presentations were on the whole of a good academic standard, with excellent keynote presentations and such a variety of research presented that it was easy to find an angle of interest in most talks.

The review process for the conference was relatively light. No critical feedback on abstracts was passed on to authors and looking at the programme, perhaps one or two abstracts could have been revised a little more rigorously. However, the proverbial saying “those who live in glass houses should not throw stones” may be applicable here, as I personally took advantage of this flexibility to revise my abstract and title a week before the conference. It was also slightly unfortunate that the conference coincided with the Leeds

International Jazz Conference⁵. A number of participants from each conference expressed a desire to have been able to attend both events, but clashes in timing meant this was impractical. These minor issues however cast only a small shadow on what was otherwise an excellently organised, friendly, academically useful and thought-provoking conference.

⁵ The organisers explained that they only became aware of the clash of dates at a late stage in organisation.

Bibliography

- Clarke, Eric, “Studying Performance Empirically: Opportunities and Limitations” in *Proceedings of the Empirical Musicology II Conference* (Leeds, UK: School of Music, University of Leeds, 2010)
- Clarke, Eric F. and Nicholas Cook, eds., *Empirical Musicology: Aims, Methods, Prospects* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004)
- Doffman, Mark, “Codes and Codas: Jazz Musicians’ Real Time Construction of Endings in Performance” in *Proceedings of the Empirical Musicology II Conference* (Leeds, UK: School of Music, University of Leeds, 2010)
- Jordanous, Anna, “Defining Creativity in Musical Improvisation in *Proceedings of the Empirical Musicology II Conference* (Leeds, UK: School of Music, University of Leeds, 2010)
- King, Elaine, Christopher Botton and Nigel Wright, “Motivations in University Music Student Performers” in *Proceedings of the Empirical Musicology II Conference* (Leeds, UK: School of Music, University of Leeds, 2010)
- Rabinowitch, Tal-Chen, Ian Cross and Pamela Burnard, “Musical Interaction and Empathic Growth in Children” in *Proceedings of the Empirical Musicology II Conference* (Leeds, UK: School of Music, University of Leeds, 2010)
- Temperley, David, *Music and Probability* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007)
- *The Cognition of Basic Musical Structures* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001)
- “Studying Music Performance: A Probabilistic Approach” in *Proceedings of the Empirical Musicology II Conference* (Leeds, UK: School of Music, University of Leeds, 2010)