

Reconceptualising Tertiary Contemporary Music Performance Assessment

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Abstract

Contemporary music performances are typically assessed by criteria such as Musicianship, Accuracy, Technique, Professionalism and Contribution. These measures continue to be used despite low discrimination between them and specific items on the assessment schedules (Thompson & Williamon, 2003). In addition, there is a lack of objective evidence that assessment is truly comprehensive. Greater transparency in domain definition and comprehensiveness may aid understanding of the rubric, and lead to better assessment. This study investigated whether popular-music performance assessment criteria are supported by a multidimensional scaling analysis (MDS). What might an MDS analysis contribute to confidence in the validity of these common measures of music performance? Performance students and tutors at an Aotearoa New Zealand tertiary music institute participated in focus-group sessions where they answered structured questionnaires. These provided descriptors of musical efforts that contribute to successful music shows. These descriptors of performance were then mapped using a mixed-method process with concept mapping (Coxon, 1999; Trochim & Kane, 2005), and card sorting via novel use of web-based user experience (UX) platform OptimalSort (Paea & Baird, 2018). The MDS analysis of the descriptor item set, and comparison of emergent clusters with typical rubric, revealed alternative constructs underlying the language of music performance assessment. Results suggest that the incumbent measures confound important dimensions. The importance of collaborative interaction in the development of musical skill is suggested by our analysis, and this is supported by findings in the literature (Green, 2008; Schiavio et al., 2020). The more comprehensive and detailed description of music performance constructs provided by this MDS approach may illuminate music performance studies and lead to greater understanding of how assessment may best benefit learning.

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