



Report on the Jahrestagung der Deutschen Gesellschaft fuer Musikpsychologie (DGM) Muenster, 10–12 September, 1993, trans. Richard Parncutt

Reinhard Kopiez



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Translated by Richard Parncutt
in collaboration with the author
parncutt@music.mcgill.ca

[1] The 1993 meeting of the DGM had the theme “Musikalische Entwicklung in der Lebenszeitperspektive” (a lifespan perspective on musical development). The theme was chosen in response to the recent trend in music psychology to investigate musical ability over the entire lifespan. Here is a brief summary of the various presentations.

[2] The opening talk was given by Maria Manturzevska (Warsaw, Poland), who reported a biographical long-term study of the musical careers of various Polish artists. Although the author comes from a psychometric tradition, this study employed mainly descriptive and qualitative methods (e.g., interviews). The age at which soloists, orchestral musicians, and instrumental teachers begin their early childhood lessons varies widely. In general, better players tend to have accumulated more total practice time during their lives, in agreement with the results of other, quantitative studies (some of which were reported at the same conference; a similar result was recently reported by John Sloboda in England).

[3] Ralph Krampe investigated the emergence of musical expertise. How does a musical expert become expert? He criticized certain preconceptions from older research on musical talent, such as the idea that the more talented need to practise less, learn more easily, or are more internally motivated than the less talented. His approach was to reject the ideologically-loaded concept of “talent” and replace it by “deliberate practice”, defined as follows: 1) Motoric practice is determined by a specific goal, and by the intention to improve skills. 2) The optimal duration of a single practice session is determined by the learner. 3) External conditions such as the search for a teacher will generally be overcome. The “deliberate practice” of a professional musician differs in these ways from the spare-time practice of a lay or hobby musician. Krampe looked at variations in the amount of time devoted to practice over the entire lifespan, taking data from several practice diaries that had been maintained for a long period. Addressing the theme of the conference, he then asked how differences between young and old experts might be explained. It appears that both younger and older experts need to devote a considerable amount of time to “deliberate practice” if they are to maintain their skills. Practice can thus become a considerable burden, especially for

older people. Experts generally accumulate more overall practice time in their lives than do lay musicians. Krampe concluded—in agreement with Sloboda, and others in the conference—that differences in ability depend primarily on differences in musical experience, not in-born talent.

[4] Ludwig Haesler investigated the developmental origin of emotional semantics in music, from a psychoanalytic viewpoint. He suggested that both non-verbal, affective aspects and quasi-linguistic or symbolic aspects of music have their origin in the preverbal phase of an infant's emotional experience.

[5] Renate Mueller advanced the thesis that young people develop aesthetically through the twin processes of self-socialization and self-professionalization. She supported her claim with reference to rap singers. A condition for the emergence of a style of music such as rap is the existence of so-called "education-free spaces" such as groups and gangs. Mueller presented a scenario of responsible media-users who develop their own cultural practices, and who often cannot easily be integrated into existing cultural theories. An important aspect of self-socialization is the presentation of one's identity to others. For this purpose, young people often become members of groups that are defined by their musical taste. Mueller suggested that people who are themselves musically socialized are consequently more tolerant toward other musical styles. Missing from Mueller's theory, however, was a clear articulation of the link between two different, simultaneous functions of spare-time activities: first, the creation of a pleasant situation for oneself, and second, the self-socializing function of spare-time activities. Another theoretical difficulty is the issue of whether and how individual self-socialization can be separated from the dynamics of a group.

[6] At the end of the first day, the Swiss violist Walter Fachndrich gave a fascinating concert, improvising non-thematic, minimalistic music based on minute timbral variations. The performance incorporated both traditional and novel bowing techniques, in combination with psychoacoustic effects.

[7] The second day began with a talk by Roland Hafen, who spoke on behalf of Hans-Guenther Bastian, Director of the recently founded Institut fuer Begabungsforschung in Paderborn. Hafen and Bastian believe that talent is inseparable from overall personal development, and should be researched from that viewpoint. The immediate aim of their research is to develop a new test of musical talent, and to apply their findings to the counselling of young, highly gifted musicians. The institute's research is based on the credo that "musical talent is multiple talent." A suitable research design should therefore account for many variables. This idea was supported by school psychologist Adam Kormann's insightful report on the social situation of talented children and their parents. Kormann looked specifically at special music classes held in Berlin primary schools.

[8] Klaus-Ernst Behne reported some first results of a long-term study on the development of musical experience among young people. He aims to explore changes in the subjective experience of music between the ages of 10 and 16 years. So far, the study has only been running for one year. A preliminary result is that, at age 12, children have already learned to use music in a specific way. For example, they can use music as a source of comfort. However, early musical preferences are seldom stable, and vary particularly strongly in the case of art music. A further finding is that any salient response to music (e.g., "music always makes me sad") tends to result in a strong overall interest in music.

[9] Gertrud Orff, a music therapist, spoke on the musical development of children with various disabilities. Photos from her therapy sessions demonstrated long-term, positive behavioral changes in depressed children. The following talk by Guenter Adler was devoted to the musical development of adults. By means of structured interviews, he investigated adults' motivation to learn a musical instrument. A content analysis based on categories from motivation theory revealed a very complex structure of reasons for beginning music lessons in later life. However, the strongly individual nature of the data made it hard to reach any general conclusions.

[10] In his presentation on social functions of musical performance in the area of human relationships, Heiner Gembris emphasized that musical development is still largely a "terra incognita." He investigated the extent to which musical interests affect attractiveness, by analyzing personal interviews and the personal columns of newspapers, and referring to previous research on attractiveness. He concluded that similar musical tastes attract. Moreover, the communicative function of music is more important for lay musicians than is the quality of the performance. Music can often catalyze further development of an individual, for example, in situations of personal crisis.

[11] The last two papers that afternoon were by Guenther Roetter (Muenster) and Soeren Nielzen (Lund, Sweden). Roetter discussed the influence of age on professional musicians' perception of time. In contrast to existing theories that assume either positive or negative deviations in time perception with increasing age, his experimental study demonstrated a more precise estimation of time intervals by older people. Nielzen investigated the effect of various psychological illnesses on the judgment of musical emotions. Depending on the nature of their illness, his patients ascribed different meanings to both short musical pieces and to single noises lasting less than one second.

[12] The evening presentation on the second day was held by the psychoanalyst Harm Willms. He spoke on the power of music over people, illustrating his remarks with examples from poetry and from the visual arts. The idea of musical support for the unification of two people (e.g., Orpheus und Euridice) is a very old one. In Shakespeare, we encounter the idea that music can heal insanity. Music frees people from powerlessness in the face of nature or their own feelings, bringing them from a state of fear or ecstasy back to the human level. In Thomas Mann's "Zauberberg," music is again a means of uniting with a loved one.

[13] The third and final day of the meeting was devoted to research reports on topics other than the main theme of the conference. Andreas Lehmann (Tallahassee, USA) addressed the subject of sight-reading. In contrast to older research methods, he selected a group of pianists of a uniform standard. He simulated a real playing situation by giving subjects a melody, asking them to play a piano accompaniment at the same time and at a constant speed. Research on expert performance explains why experienced piano accompanists are better sight-readers than young students: Sightreading skill is related to the total time spent sight-reading over the entire lifespan. Sightreading skill may thus be relatively independent of general musical talent.

[14] Joerg Langner presented a computer model that explains musical hearing in terms of psychoacoustic measures of tension. He has developed software based on theories of constructivism and connectionism. The program learns musical structures, and models auditory expectations via rules of self- organization.

[15] Peter Linzenkirchner presented research on stage fright, based on observations of young participants in a well-known German music competition ("Jugend musiziert"). Surprisingly, no effect of habituation was found, suggesting that stage fright may be a permanent burden to most musicians—regardless of the duration of their performance experience. However, the effect of stage fright on performance standard is only weakly negative; and personality may have a considerable effect.

[16] The generally high standard of the research reports and the discussions, combined with the spacious atmosphere of the castle in which the conference took place, ensured the success of the event.

[17] Those interested in the activities of the DGM should contact Prof. Dr. Heiner Gembris, Musikwissenschaftliches Seminar, Universitaet Muenster, D-48149 Muenster, Germany.

Reinhard Kopiez
Technische Universitaet Berlin
Institut fuer Musikwissenschaft
Sekretariat H 63
D-10623 Berlin Germany
kopi0134@mailszrz.zrz.tu-berlin.de

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