Musical Gestures as an Interface of Cultural Identity in Musical Performance: Western Embodiment of Karnatic Music

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Abstract (250 words)
Insights about the embodied nature of music cognition consider how the bodily engagement is determinant in musical performance. Accordingly, musical gestures consists in the articulation of the performer’s subjectivity showing aspects of the explicit and tacit dimension of the signification process that constitutes musical interpretation. However, can the bodily gestures express the musical meanings embedded in the score? Can gestures be considered as the interface of the performers’ cultural identity? With the aim of studying gestures as an interface of intentions expressing musical and cultural meanings, I set up a “Performative Experiment” as case study to empirically investigate the music gestures involved in my performance practice of a Western piano work based on Karnatic music from South India - 72 Etudes Karnatiques by the French composer J. Charpentier (1933). I explored the hypothesis that musical gestures interface the performer’s expressive musical intentions and embodied musical skills acquired through his creative and deliberate practice linked to his own cultural background (enculturation) and other cultural environmental context (acculturation). By combining my subjective experience as a performer (= the top-down analysis) with the objective measurement and computational analysis of my bodily expressions (= the bottom-up analysis) acquired through the motion capture system, I objectified my bodily expressions into a “body image” in order to look at my performance from an outsider’s perspective through the lens of empirical data. This approach provided to study how musical gestures are vehicles of musical meanings also in terms of subjective intentions and expressions determined by different cultural and practical experiences.

Key words:
Biography

Born in Italy and living in Brussels, Giusy Caruso is a professional concert pianist and artist researcher graduated cum laude in Piano and in Philosophy. Rewarded by important institutions, she carries on her concert activity throughout Europe, Asia and America though working as a PhD researcher at IPEM - Department of Musicology, Art, Music Performance and Theatre Studies at the University of Ghent in affiliation with the KASK - School of Arts of Ghent, Royal Conservatory. Her artistic research project involves an investigation on her piano performance practice of the 72 *Etudes Karnatiques pour piano* by Jacques Charpentier (1933) while embracing the sphere of embodied music cognition, specifically the correlation between intentionality and musical gestures. Since 2011, she has been holding conference-concerts on her artistic research in many Universities and Institutions. Her last article, *Le patrimoine musical indien dans le répertoire français contemporain pour piano de Olivier Messiaen et Jacques Charpentier*, was published on « Les Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme » (November 2015).

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