
EVOLVING INSTRUMENTALIST – A CONTINUOUS TRAJECTORY

La evolución del instrumentista – una trayectoria continua

Rui Travasso (1) y José Alberto Gomes (2)

(1) *Centro de Investigação em Artes e Comunicação, Universidade Aberta, Olhão, Portugal.*
ruitravasso79@gmail.com

(2) *Universidade Católica Portuguesa, School of Arts, Research Center for the Science and Technology of the Arts, Porto, Portugal.* *jagomes@ucp.pt*

Abstract

This article proposes to identify the key milestones that influenced the instrumentalist performance, throughout the twentieth century until nowadays. In a certain moment of the western music history, excluding henceforth unwritten instrumental music, the instrumentalist needed to incorporate elements related with other arts and/or others disparate fields, which in some way come together on the performance, beyond the enlargement of his functions and instrumental musical techniques. This evolution has broken away from the traditional performance – the act of the musician taking the stage to reproduce a musical text – creating new multidisciplinary demands on performers. These new features became a requirement for the interpreters, as well as a source of creativity for composers and creators. As a consequence, the technical mastery of instruments and of musical theory, became insufficient due to the enlarged scope requirements of certain concepts and artistic creations.

Keywords

Performance, Instrumentalist, Multidisciplinarity, Music

Resumen

Este artículo propone identificar los hitos fundamentales que influenciaron la interpretación instrumental, desde el siglo XX hasta nuestros días. En algún momento de la historia de la música occidental, excluyendo la música instrumental no escrita de ahora en adelante, el instrumentista necesitó incorporar elementos relacionados con otras artes o campos, uniéndose en cierta forma en la interpretación, más allá de la expansión de sus funciones y técnicas instrumentales.

Esta evolución ha roto con la interpretación tradicional - el acto del músico salir al escenario a reproducir un texto musical - creando nuevas exigencias multidisciplinares en los ejecutantes.

Estas nuevas características se convirtieron en requisitos para los intérpretes, además de una fuente de creatividad para los compositores y creadores. Como consecuencia, el dominio técnico del instrumento y/o teoría musical pasó a ser insuficiente debido al amplio abanico de requisitos en ciertos conceptos y creaciones artísticas.

Palabras clave

Interpretación, Instrumentista, Multidisciplinarietà, Música

1. Introduction

This article synthetically presents major events that influenced the evolution of the instrumentalists' performance of written music in the Western tradition, excluding vocal interpreters. It will be presented key elements regarding this evolution, as well as their impact and consequences. This observation will contribute to an awareness regarding the broader scope of the inherent functions to this kind of performing art, and assert its contribution not only concerning performative matters, but also as a support for studies in music and instrumentalist education.

2. Musical Performance

2.1. The origin

The word *performance* was first linked to the theater and subsequently to performing arts. It comes from the Italian *per formare*, which means to give shape through a concept ^[1]. Since the creation of the musical notation by Guido d'Arezzo, the score – besides its commercial purposes – became a communication channel between composers and interpreters ^[2]. This interdisciplinary connection led to an increase of the technical complexity in the compositions, which distanced the performance from the composers. Thus, Paine (2017) ^[3] and Waters (2007) ^[4] identified the following components in musical performance: composers; interpreters; audience; notation; acoustic ecology/ ambience – every aspects that could influence those involved as well as the sound.

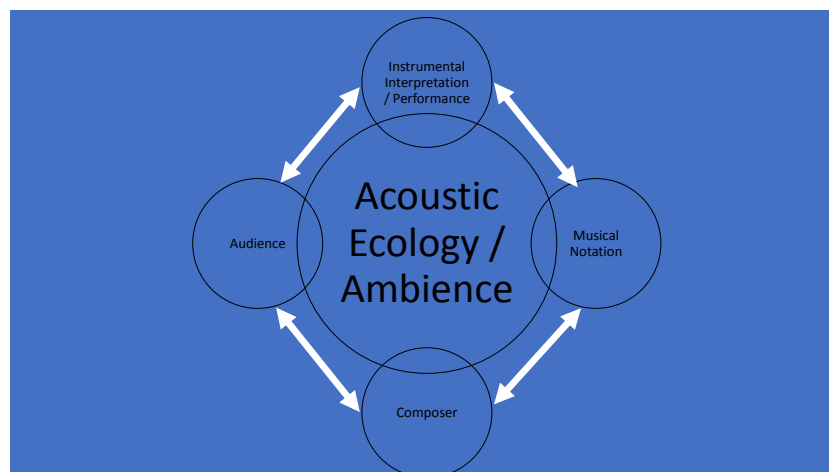


Figure 1 – Performance

2.2. Disruption events

A list of key events, which added new features to the instrumentalist performance, is hereby presented, as well as their impact on its evolution. This is not a closed list, as other entries could also be considered.

- Erik Satie (1893) - *Vexations*, which it has written in the score the following instruction: “ In order to play this motif 840 times in succession, it would be advisable to prepare oneself beforehand, in the deepest silence, through serious immobility” (Kohlmetz, Kopiez e Altemmuller, 2003:174), it was one page of music notation transformed in 28 hours of musical performance, testing the physical and psychological limits of the interpreter, and even inducing a state of trance during the performance ^[5].

- Igor Stravinsky (1918) - has linked the music to text and dance with his work *L’Histoire du Soldat*. In this piece, musicians should coordinate their interpretation with the actor – regarding the text and the acting - and dancers. This piece was composed under an interdisciplinary relation between Stravinsky and the writer Charles Ramuz. In short, this was a piece who was born through interdisciplinarity, and it demands that same interdisciplinarity in its performance ^[6].

- John Cage (late 1930s and throughout the 1940s) - began to remove the instrumental interpretation as a key role for a musician to accomplish the performance. The score was transformed into a processual form. The musician becomes an agent who serves a process that produces the performance, and this gave rise to a balance between the visual component and the sound component ^[7].

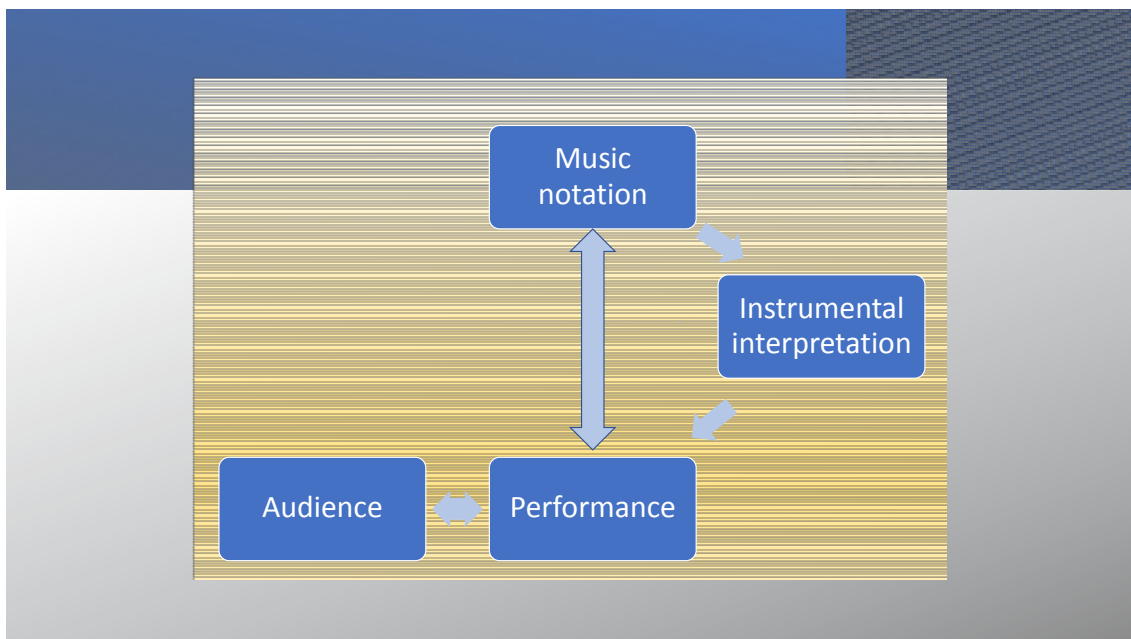


Figure 2 – New features

- Fluxus (artistic movement born in 1962) - is also relevant in this study as it shifted the focus from the end product to the process. Here, the artists aimed to merge art and life and their focus was to shape experiences. The interdisciplinarity between different arts was largely explored and it was a breakthrough for other artistic paths. Regarding the instrumentalist performance, the technical control from the instrument were practically nullified to the detriment of procedural motivations ^[8].
- Luciano Berio (1966) - the *Sequenza V* for trombone solo is also an example of a multidisciplinary work. Here, the trombonist's score, beside the music, contains precise instructions about which clothes to wear and several theatrical indications ^[9].
- Helmut Lachenmann (1968) - inspired by the *Musique Concrète*, developed the *Musique Concrète Instrumentale*, which has its first piece *TemA* in 1968. This concept is based on the sound transmission generated by using the instruments has utensils/objects through its mechanical part ^[10].
- Stockhausen (1975) - with his work *Harlekin* for clarinet solo, introduced the dance as a requirement for the musician. The composer himself describes the work as being for a dancing clarinetist ^[11].
- The technological evolution has enabled projects such as *Feedback Cello* ^[12], which uses technology as an extension of the traditional instrument. Another example is the interdisciplinarity generated by electroacoustic mixes, where the interpreter has little flexibility regarding the interpretation because he is playing with a previously made recording. The software *score follower* allows the instrumentalist a higher level of flexibility. However, it demands greater perfection regarding the sound articulation in order to deliver a better performance ^[13].

3. Conclusion

In the last century, musical performance suffered an evolution towards the multidisciplinary. The requirements of new musical concepts, techniques and technologies, forced the instrumentalists to acquire new techniques and extramusical skills, as we can observe in Figure 3.

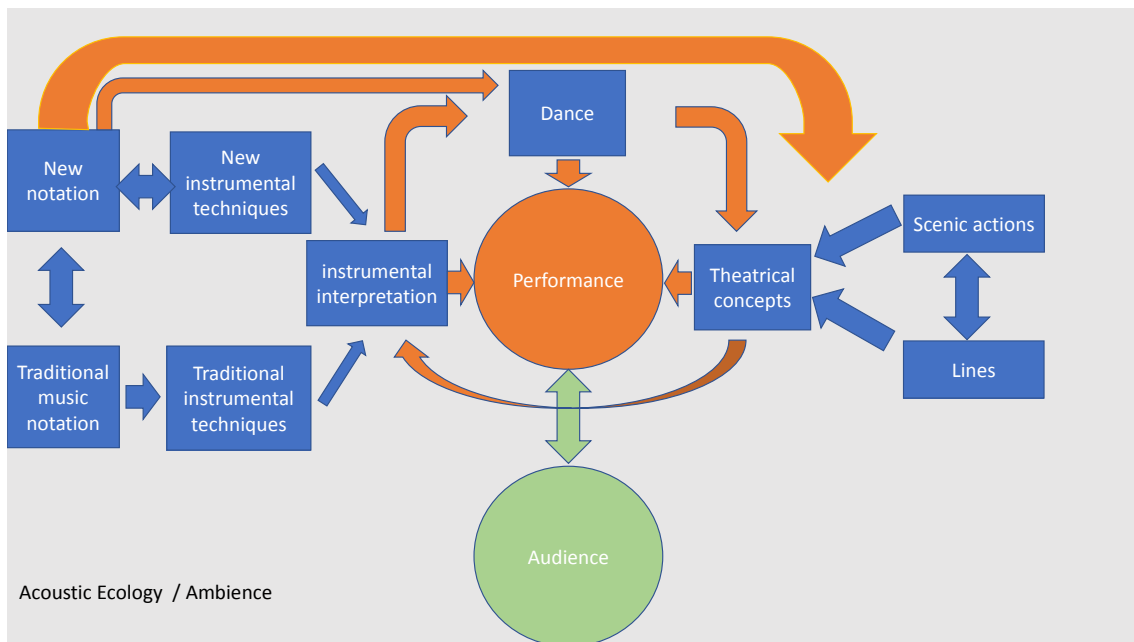


Figure 3 - New performance

All these new aspects are connected with an evolution linked to the *Knowing* – practical knowledge – and not to *Knowledge* – theoretical knowledge – because all of these new achievements are triggered by the creativity and the performance of the instrumentalist ^[14].

In this way, we can identify the following aspects, which have amplified the concept of performance in music:

- Exploration of the interpreter's physical condition;
- Exploration of the interpreter's psychic capacity;
- Different kinds of sound and verbal notation;
- New instrumental techniques;
- Multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity with other areas (dance, theater, among other);
- Flexibility regarding the interpretation and articulation with other performing agents (human or technological);

We can conclude that, triggered by the mentioned milestones, among others, the instrumental performance has changed, especially in the last 50 years, adapting, connecting and creating new artistic modalities. Because the most part of these are new features in the performance, we can inherently conclude that, the educational offer for instrumentalists is always one step behind the incorporation of new techniques, forcing the instrumentalist to have to develop and acquire skills in an autonomous way and through his own artistic practice. With these facts in mind, this article can be further explored in the future through musical education and musical performance research.

References

- Serrão, M. (2011). *Influências da Performance na Música Entre 1970 e 90 em Portugal*: Jorge Peixinho, Clotilde Rosa, Eduardo Sérgio. Universidade Nova de Lisboa.
- Magnusson, T. (2019). Sonic Writing, technologies of material, symbolic & signal inscriptions. In Boomsbury Academic. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Paine, G. (2017). Acoustic Ecology 2.0. *Contemporary Music Review*, 36(3), 171–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2017.1395136>
- Waters, S. (2007). Performance Ecosystems: Ecological approaches to musical interaction. EMS: Electroacoustic Contemporary Music Studies Network, 1–20. http://www.ems-network.org/IMG/pdf_WatersEMS07.pdf <http://webuser.fh-furtwangen.de/~friedm/PerformEcosystems.pdf>
- Kohlmetz, C., Kopiez, R., & Atenmüller, E. (2003). Stability of Motor Programs During a State of Meditation: Electrocortical Activity in a Pianist Playing “Vexations” by Erik Satie Continuously for 28 Hours. *Psychology of Music*, 31(2), 173–186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735603031002293>
- Zak, R. A. (1985). “L’Histoire du soldat”: Approaching the Musical Text. *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 18(4), 101–107. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24778812>
- LaBelle, B. (2006). Background Noise Perspectives On Sound Art. *Continuum*.
- Friedman, K. (2012). Freedom? Nothingness? Time? Fluxus and the Laboratory of Ideas. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 29(7–8), 372–398. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276412465440>
- Hubner, F. (2010). Entering The Stage - Musicians As Performers In Contemporary Music Theatre. *New Sound*, 36, 63–74.
- Ribeiro, G., & Ferraz, S. (2017). Música concreta instrumental e direcionalidade na peça-estudo para piano de Helmut Lachenmann. *Revista Vórtex*, 5(1), 1–22.
- Hansen, N. C., & Academy, R. (2011). Luciano Berio’s “Sequenza V” analyzed along the lines of four analytical dimensions proposed by the composer. *Journal of Music and Meaning*, 9, 1–22. http://pure.au.dk/portal/files/51408986/2011_01_03_revised_and_formatted_paper_for_upload_hansen_2011_.pdf
- Eldridge, A., & Kiefer, C. (2019). The Self-resonating Feedback Cello: Interfacing gestural and generative processes in improvised performance. *Proceeding of New Interfaces for Musical Expression*, 25–29.
- Miranda, P. A., & Barreiro, D. L. (2011). Performer e meios eletrônicos: Aspectos da interatividade na música eletroacústica mista. *Horizonte Científico*, 5(2), 1–26. <http://www.seer.ufu.br/index.php/horizontecientifico/article/view/8127>
- Huber, A., Ingrisch, D., Kaufmann, T., Kretz, J., Schroder, G., & Zembylas, T. (Eds.). (2021). *Knowing In Performing - Artistic Research in Music and the Performing Arts*. Verlag, Bielefeld. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839452875>