

The Role of Musical Hearing and Attention in Musical Performance

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Abstract

This article discusses methods for developing musical hearing, memory, and sensory perception in instrumental performance.

Keywords: Culture, art, decision, reform, instrumental performance, ear for music, attention, intuition, perception, memory.

Introduction

The education of young performers begins with the selection process, during which several factors are required from teachers at children's music and arts schools. The first and most important factor is the ability to hear music. Developing young generations' musical hearing is a central task in musical arts, which physiologically involves the ability of hearing organs to perceive sound vibrations. Sounds travel through the external ear, passing the auditory nerves, and reaching the auditory analyzers in the brain—a complex neural system. Analyzers help perceive sounds based on their pitch or volume and the type of instrument producing the sound. For instance, string instruments like violins, violas, and wind instruments cause stronger vibrations in the brain's auditory regions.¹

As previously mentioned, musical hearing detects pitch, intensity, timbre, and duration. There are three types of musical hearing: absolute, relative, and internal.

- **Absolute hearing** refers to the ability to identify the absolute pitch of musical sounds without comparison to a tuning fork. Renowned composers such as Mozart, Liszt, Beethoven, and Scriabin successfully utilized this skill.²

- **Relative hearing**, also known as interval hearing, is the ability to recognize and produce the pitch relationships of intervals, melodies, and chords. To detect or play a note or chord, a person must have a clear reference to at least one sound. With practice, individuals can use tools such as a tuning fork (a U-shaped metal instrument producing a fixed pitch)³ to develop relative hearing.

¹ Б.М.Теплов. Способности и одаренность // Учен, записки Гос. НИИ психологии. Т. 2. М., 1941.

² Петрушин В.И. Музыкальная психология. М., 1997

³ Musiqa ensiklopediyasi 2-T

• **Internal hearing** is the ability to imagine the entire structure of music mentally or perceive it through reading notation. This ability is developed primarily through solfeggio lessons, where more emphasis is placed on tonal perception than interval recognition. Hungarian composer and educator Zoltán Kodály created a relative tonal system to develop this ability, using unique symbols and syllables to train the perception of tonality.

The ability to perceive single-voiced melodies is naturally more developed among vocalists and instrumentalists playing string and wind instruments. Piano educators recommend vocalizing pieces or slowing down performance to enhance musical awareness. Russian composer Rimsky-Korsakov vividly described his auditory experience in terms of colors: “For me, the key of A major represents youth and spring, not the icy or barren early spring but the one covered with blooming lilacs and green meadows. This spring shines in crimson and gold hues of a glowing sunrise.”

Attention in Music

The second criterion for selecting young performers is attention. According to Rauf G‘afurovich Qodirov, professor of the Uzbekistan State Conservatory and musicologist, attention is one of the most crucial components of the learning process. It enables focus on a single activity at a given time, an essential aspect of all types of musical performance, especially in ensemble settings. In ensemble performances, attention ensures synchronization between soloists and accompanists, as well as with the conductor’s hand gestures and cues.

For example, Mozart could calmly compose music even in noisy environments. Polish pianist and composer Josef Hofmann once remarked that concentration is the "first letter in the alphabet of success."⁴ Russian composer Nikolai Medtner emphasized the importance of effective practice methods, noting that proper concentration reduces physical strain and helps musicians avoid fatigue. Hofmann added, “Work becomes fruitful only when intellectual attention is entirely focused.”

Musicians often stress the importance of self-analysis in developing attention. For example, during lessons, instructors guide students on how to refine finger positioning and application techniques while playing an instrument. Teachers often advise students to repeatedly practice complex passages slowly and with focused attention, sometimes in front of a mirror. Although tedious, such rigorous exercises ultimately lead to success if done with diligence.

Sensory Perception in Music

Sensory perception is a fundamental psychological process of understanding objects and phenomena through sensory organs. It plays a crucial role in the art of music, particularly auditory, tactile, and rhythmic perception. Auditory perception forms the foundation for developing internal hearing and musical ear skills.

Our sensory responses are adaptable; prolonged exposure to loud sounds, for instance, can dull the ability to detect subtle variations in softer dynamics. After a period of silence, even moderate sound levels may seem loud. Composer Chopin rarely played loudly but masterfully utilized dynamics such as *piano*, *pianissimo*, and *mezzo-forte* in his works, achieving unparalleled expressiveness.

⁴ Петрушин В.И. Музыкальная психология. М., 1997

According to pedagogy professor Valentin Ivanovich Petrushin, perception involves the immediate influence of objects or phenomena on sensory organs, which then form a comprehensive mental image. Unlike sensation, which perceives isolated aspects of an object, perception involves understanding its entirety. For instance, when listening to a musical piece, we don't isolate its melody, rhythm, timbre, or harmony; rather, we perceive it holistically. Musical perception depends on musical ability, knowledge, and skills.

Memory in Music Performance

Playing music from memory significantly enhances a performer's creative possibilities. Memory involves retaining, recalling, and reproducing experiences while also being prone to forgetting. Musicians often need to memorize large compositions, which requires calm, deliberate focus. Musicologist A.D. Alekseev defines musical memory as a combination of auditory, motor, logical, visual, and other types of memory. Pianist S.I. Savshinsky adds that "a pianist's memory is complex," involving auditory, visual, and motor components.

Many musicians mistakenly rely on repetitive practice to memorize pieces, which places excessive strain on motor memory. French pianist Marguerite Long criticized this approach as inefficient and time-consuming. Instead, systematic and meaningful practice in slow tempo yields better results. Mozart described his ability to absorb music as akin to admiring a masterpiece portrait: perceiving it all at once rather than in fragments.⁵

Conclusion

All types of musical abilities—hearing, attention, perception, and memory—are interconnected and essential in musical performance. These skills enrich performers' professional training, enabling them to feel rhythm, grasp melody, and integrate musical elements fully. Developing these abilities requires consistent effort and careful guidance from skilled teachers. By tailoring instruction to young performers' interests and leveraging the teacher-student tradition, educators can inspire and unlock students' full potential.

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⁵ R.G'.Qodirov "Musiqa psixologiyasi" O'zDK "Musiqa" nashriyoti 2005 y

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