Proceedings of the American Musicological Society
Southwest Chapter
Fall 2017

Saturday, October 7, 2017, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas

This issue is dedicated to Dr. Sheryl Murphy-Manley

Microtiming at the Beginning of Beethoven's Piano Sonata op. 2 No. 1, I

Nico Schüler

Texas State University

nico.schuler@txstate.edu

Abstract

One of the most common ways of conveying expression in music is via timing. As "microtiming" we understand the subtle changes in timing (tone durations) not called for in the score. Even simple rhythms are not 'perfectly' performed as prescribed by the score, but nevertheless musicians base their performances often on scores. But how much do musicians in their performances deviate from the score-prescribed tone durations? This poster will present a comparative analysis of seven performances by well-known pianists (Barenboim, Brendel, Goode, Hungerford, Kempff, Pollini, and Schiff) of the beginning of the first movement of Beethoven's piano sonata op. 2 No. 1 as well as its analytical method. The author used the freeware Sonic Visualiser with the VAMP Plugin "Note Onset Detector" (v2.0) as well as the freeware Audacity. The analytical approach resulted in an accuracy of +/- 0.01 seconds in the detection of note onsets. Goals of the analysis were to answer the following questions: How uniform or uneven is the pulse beat in the interpretations of different pianists, and is there a relationship to the tempo? Are notes falling on main beats held longer than other notes? Are short note values interpreted evenly or unevenly? If notes are held longer, are other notes played shorter to keep the pulse? How long are arpeggios? How are embellishments performed? Do or how do the performers slow the tempo at cadence points? The answers to such questions are of great importance not only for the understanding of performance practice, but also for the development of automatic performance systems, as they provide information on the underlying sound and sound interpretation of a "human" / "musical" interpretation.