

SPA-174

Evaluations of Vocal Ensembles Are Associated with Performers' Expressive Movement

Diego D. T. Pinto
Northwestern University, United States

Steven J. Morrison
Northwestern University, United States

Abstract

Background. Movement by individual instrumental and vocal performers influences listeners' perceptions of specific musical parameters as well as broad evaluations of expressivity and musicality. Expressive movement has been associated with more positive performance evaluations, although less consistent results have been reported among vocal groups where, in some cases, more negative evaluations were given to performances that included expressive movement. Such results may not be independent of preferred performance practices for specific music genres or listeners' experience as performers.

Aims. The purpose of this study was to further investigate the relationship between expressive body movement and listeners' evaluations of vocal ensemble performance. We sought to answer whether and how expressive movement or the lack thereof influence performance ratings among listeners with varied music backgrounds.

Methods. Participants ($N=266$) were solicited using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), and were adults (age 22-75 yrs, $M=39.66$, $SD=11.52$) living in the U.S who demonstrated varied levels of music experience (Goldsmith MSI general scale, max score = 126, median = 73.5, $IQR=53-88$). Using a Qualtrics online survey, participants used a 6-point Likert-type scale to rate performances of vocal quartets on expressiveness, accuracy, and preference. Stimuli consisted of excerpts of an SATB quartet performing four renaissance madrigals under one audio and three video movement conditions—*no movement*, *upper-body movement*, and *full-body movement*—resulting in twelve different audiovisual combinations. Identical high-quality audio performances were used for each condition. Participants first listened to the four songs in audio-only format, then watched an audiovisual performance of each under one of the three movement conditions.

Results. Using within-subjects ANOVA, we identified significant differences among ratings of expressiveness, accuracy, and preference. Audio excerpts were judged to be less accurate and less preferred, while *full-body movement* video performances were most preferred. *No movement* video performances were rated as least expressive. There was no interaction between movement condition and participants' music experience in any category.

Conclusion and Implication. Among these unfamiliar vocal music performances the inclusion of visual information was generally preferred over audio alone. However, the absence of expressive movement in the video condition resulted in the perception of a less expressive performance. These findings suggest that a lack of expressive movement in vocal performances could compromise listeners' perceptions of expressive singing. Singers and choir directors might consider the display of expressiveness through movement a vital part of their preparation.