Keynote Talk

“Human Music Retrieval: Noting Time”

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Abstract

“The unhappy fate of music...to fade away as soon as it is born.” - Leonardo Da Vinci

“The notes don’t seem to go with what I’m hearing.” - Paul McCartney

These two quotes are a prompt for further inquiry: Why does music notation, the common conduit for human music retrieval, often become problematic, even irrelevant, even for those who may be identified as "gifted?" I will argue that the problem arises because we do not distinguish between our familiar units of description, the notes shown in a score, and the intuitive, contextual units of perception that we attend to in making sense of the music all around us.

Notations transform the continuousness of music as it disappears in time, into symbols that refer consistently to events as stable, measurable, properties disengaged from context and function. Notational systems bring with them much more than pitches and rhythms: “…they transmit a whole way of thinking about music.” How can we respond to the utility of notational invariance while still being responsive and responsible to the unique context and function of events as they unfold in the passing present?

I will follow a group of 10 year old children as they transform their action knowledge, seamlessly guiding their hearing and playing, into noted “things” that hold still to be looked at and upon which to reflect: What’s a “thing?”

“A thing as grasped is itself abstracted from any context. A thing endures for us, temporally, by virtue of abstraction from changes-of-context.” - John Rahn

Biography

Jeanne Bamberger is Professor of Music emerita at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where she teaches music theory and music cognition. She is also currently Visiting Professor of Education at UC-Berkeley. Her research is interdisciplinary: integrating music theory and practice, modes of representation, and recent approaches to cognitive development, she focuses on close analysis of children and adults in moments of spontaneous learning. Professor Bamberger, was a student of Artur Schnabel and Roger Sessions, performed extensively in the US and Europe as piano soloist and in chamber music ensembles. She attended Columbia University and the University of California at Berkeley receiving degrees in philosophy and music theory. Her most recent books include The mind behind the musical ear, and Developing musical intuitions: A project based introduction to making and understanding music.