

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CONDUCTOR AND AUDIENCE: SOUNDPAINTING

Saziņa starp diriģentu un auditoriju: skaņkrāsošana

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Abstract. *Today, in the traditional musical performances, performers play notes and make music according to conductor's instructions. This is a usual situation for all. Especially concerts which we went to as an audience, when we have pieces down pat or recognize, it leads us to think less. Thus, it also ensures that we engage in an event of a single-sided audience.*

Soundpainting is the multidisciplinary live composing sign language for Musicians, Dancers, Actors and Visual Artists created by Walter Thompson in Woodstock, New York 1974. Presently (2015) the language comprises more than 1500 gestures that are signed by the Soundpainter to indicate the type of the material desired by the performers. The creation of the composition is realized through the parameters of each set of signed gestures.

The Soundpainter (the composer) standing in front (usually) of the group communicates a series of signs using hand and body gestures indicating specific and/or aleatoric material to be performed by the group. The Soundpainter develops the responses of the performers, molding and shaping them into the composition then signs another series of gestures, a phrase, and continues on this process of composing the piece.

Soundpainting is a useful tool to create dialogue between not only Soundpainter and performers but also soundpainter and audience. Soundpainters' signs gesture to community and at the same time he can sign gestures to audience and then they respond in sound. Then Soundpainter determines the next instruction based on the response. By this way Soundpainting brings audience into the active component of the performance as communicate among Soundpainter, performers and audience. This research is a qualitative study and data was obtained by literature review.

Keywords: *Audience, communication, music performance, soundpainting.*

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, where today's human beings race against the time, we see that the concert audiences do not prefer the long term concerts too much or by getting bored during the concerts they leave the hall in the middle of the piece. Cage explains this situation as follows: "a general explanation for this behaviour could be as: audience/listener getting sentimental about the property of time when they become the sides who listen/watch instead of the ones who determine the time and they want the opposite side to do it as they expected (including the small surprises in it). In fact, when it is possible, it makes them forget the element of time or creates exterritorial virtual times" (Fırıncioğlu, 2011: 72).

When we consider the underlying causes of this approach, we come out with several reasons. We can state some of them as: life is gradually speeding up, as a result, people doesn't want to spend such a long time like three hours and the concert where the audience is getting bored with the familiar works and the absence of the reason which leads them to think.

Classical music with deep-rooted traditions have been transforming into a commodity and creating a market for capitalism in recent years. Previously, a composer's piece used to be recorded, but now records have been made and tours are organized for introducing a soloist to the world. However, the composer whose piece has being played stays in the background. The large part of the annual concert programmes consists of the old composers, while the contemporary composers have been given a restricted place because they entail a risk.

In that case, the concert audience encounters a familiar, known programme when they come to the concert. Now, the concert sections, which they have listened/watched before many

times do not lead them to think about something new or do not draw their attention. The audience who have not encountered a new material are getting bored, sleepy and sometimes leave the concert hall.

With their experimental studies in recent years, modern composers like John Cage have enabled the music to emerge in different places and tones by breaking the usual perception of the music. Cage mentions that he has tried to direct the listeners/audience to rethink about this matter, showing that there is an alternative approach by not meeting the usual expectations in a concert environment.

In the classical music, especially composers like Igor Stravinski and Adnan Saygun, have gone to the way of finding solutions to the problem of alienation in music by drawing attention always to the contradictions and the problems of the social life within its aesthetic structure of the music.

Modernist composers like A. Schonberg, A. Berg and A. Webern have realized this alienation problem in music and wanted to explain it with an expressive description within their music. “This kind of music as enables itself to be listened by the audience who have become accustomed to the rhythm of the modern-day community life, aimed to change its perspective to the external reality and the world, distorted and limited with their perceptions which they had and acquired through under the influence of dominant culture, and with their social life” (Oskay, 1982: 81).

A number of studies carried out in recent years have been breaking the invisible wall between the performer and the audience and minimizing the alienation problem to some extent. The concerts in which the audience finds a section from their own lives or becomes a part of the performance, ensure that the audience is both physically and mentally participated in these concerts.

Beside this, there are also different beliefs and prejudices about whether the one has talent in music or not. For example, some people have certain judgements and beliefs about having a bad singing voice or not having natural talent for playing an instrument. Suzuki expresses his thoughts about the talent as follows: “Talent is not accident of birth. In today’s society, many people seem to have the idea that if one is born without talent, there is nothing he can do about it; they simply resign themselves to what they consider to be their ‘fate’. Consequently, they go through life without living it to the full or ever knowing life’s true joy. This is the man’s greatest tragedy. (Suzuki, 2010: i).

In the solution of all the problems mentioned above, the performances, which will make interaction between the performer and the audience and will communicate with them, are going to play a big role. One example of these performances, trying to be expressed, is Soundpainting.

Soundpainting is a multidisciplinary simultaneously live composing sign language. Soundpainting is created by Walter Thompson, a composer from New York, for the musicians, dancers, actors, poets and visual artists working in the medium of structured improvisation. At present, Soundpainting language comprises more than 1500 gestures (Thompson, 2006: 2).

Soundpainter (composer) who usually stands in front of the group, using hand and body movements, refers to the specific or/and aleatoric materials to be performed by the group. Soundpainter develops the performer’s response, forms and shapes them according to the content of the composition, then determines another set of signs and phrases, and the piece continues on its process of composition.

The gestures of Soundpainting language are composed by using syntax rules of – Who, What, How and When. There are many types of gestures; some can point a specific material to be performed, while others can point certain styles, types, harmony features, aleatoric concepts and improvisation.

Soundpainter, in order to create a composition as the way he wants, makes his/her composition during using the gestures. Soundpainter sometimes knows and sometimes does not know what to get from the performers; it depends on the specificity and changing parameters. Soundpainter makes the composition on what is happening in the moment of performance; that

happening thing can be expected or unexpected. What is required to reach a high level of fluency in Soundpainting is the ability of making compositions ‘in the moment’ (Thompson, 2016: 2).

Although the soundpainter and the conductor are seen as the people who manage a community at first glance, there are significant differences between them. Duby tells his views on the role of the conductor (as we know) as follows: “As Van Leeuwen claims: “The symphony orchestra thus celebrates and enacts discipline and control, the fragmentation of work into specialized functions, in short, the work values of the industrial age.” In this view, the role of the conductor can be seen as analogous to that of a foreman directing the workers (members of the orchestra) in the creation of a product (the music) designed by the owner (the composer) for the consumption of the audience. The kind of „discipline and control” to which van Leeuwen refers may also be addressed via the metaphor of music as a journey through time, in which case the conductor is in charge of the ship, so to speak” (Duby, 2009: 12).

Soundpainter controlling the soundpainter community takes on a different role from the conductor. Soundpainter unlike the conductor tries to introduce a product which has not been designed yet. This product’s manufacturing process is directly related to the performers who will establish a dialogue as well as the soundpainters. The draft of the composition is drawn by the soundpainter. Beginning from the soundpainter’s showing the gestures to the community, performers can directly influence the process of the composition with the responses they have given. Unlike the performers in the symphony orchestra, a performer in the community of the soundpainting exhibits his ability of improvisation and creativity (Bilgin, 2016: 13).

One soundpainting composition starts with pointing to the community by performing the syntax of soundpainter respectively. Soundpainting starts with a set of simple signs depicting the music concepts such as volume, tempo, pitch and duration. Once the ensemble has mastered these musical building blocks, the Soundpainter introduces progressively more complex signals encompassing such notions as genre or style, key, memory, and more. Under the guidance of an expert Soundpainter, the performers interpret progressively more complex combinations of signs resulting in a fluid and flexible performance. In a given Soundpainting event, the result may incorporate sections of previously prepared music as well as free improvisation (Duby, 2007: 3).

In other words, the Soundpainter acts as a catalyst for creation, in a process that is not restricted to representation, prior structural models or formal requirements. In Soundpainting, musicians and dancers are directed through a variety of gesture types in an interactive and collaborative manner; in some performances the audience is part of the performance. The active combination of different media is central to this process. At the heart of Soundpainting lies a hypothesis that performers across disciplines are able to, and should, create a dialogue (Minors, 2012: 87).

We can see that nearly all physical explanations of the first level soundpainting gestures easily explain what the desired material is. For example, like soundpainter’s taking the index fingers of both hands on either sides of his mouth and making his lips like whistling when he wants the whistle or his bringing both hands up to the breast and opening them through the edges to point the *Long Tone* or when he wants everyone’s participation, his showing both hands top over his head by creating a round.

Many times in my concerts in which I have performed as a soundpainter, I turn the audience somewhere in the middle of the performance and with a simple gesture I get them to participate into the performance. They easily response the gestures in the first or second attempt even though they haven’t learnt how to respond the gestures before. Even if they don’t know the exact meaning of the gestures, they become familiar with these gestures as they have seen them during the performance.

At this point, the real communication between the soundpainter and the audience starts. Soundpainter starts treating the listeners just as the performers standing in front of him and pulls them into the performance and makes them a part of it. The audience who gets positive reinforcement from the soundpainter makes an effort akin to the performer’s to display a performance.

The audience respond the gestures pointed by the soundpainter to them first shyly, but then more courageously. The soundpainter gives direction to the responds of the audience sometimes by continuing them, sometimes by modifying, and sometimes by playing with the dynamics of the music.

The communication between the soundpainter and the audience becomes more evident and effective with the realization of the audience that the language of the soundpainting is improvisational. While some gestures in soundpainting language provide specific results for the soundpainter, the others will create some surprising responses. In this case, the soundpainter might not know what the performer will response. Here in such cases, the audience's realization of the gestures which will result in surprise consequences becomes a factor shaping the dialogue. Gestures in soundpainting sign language like *Scanning* and *Point to Point* (soundpainter's pointing a performer with a forefinger to make him to produce any sound) are open to the surprising results unless specifically a situation stated.

Soundpainter, who is prepared to the surprising results and by changing or modifying these responses, directing them to the listeners, can continue or terminate the communication. The participation of the audience to the performance and their energy can determine the duration and the quality of this communication.

Although the soundpainter has the position as a composer who gives all the instructions in a soundpainting performance, the responses which performers will give to the gestures provide a possible dialogue between them and the audience.

“Reason, in describing the location of meaning in the context of improvised music, considers the moment of performance from a socioculturally sited vantage point when she states (2004: 73): Unlike musics invested in providing the listener with a completed version of a musical score or text in performance, improvisation provides an opportunity to engage with an expansive musical environment during the performance, wherein the nature of the text is open and subject to the energy of “vibe” of the audience. In many cases, this vibe is powerful enough to affect and direct many of the parameters of an improvisation, such as how long to play a particular phrase or motif and whether to play loud or soft, fast or slow” (Duby, 2006: 4-16).

Method

Model of the research. This is a descriptive study and gathered data are acquired via literature review. “Descriptive researches aim at explaining the interaction between situations, considering the relations between current incidents and conditions” (Kaptan, 1989: 75).

The purpose and importance of research. This research aims to indicate that Soundpainting performance is a performing art with audience/listener interaction and to reveal how this interaction turns into communication. This study is one of the rare studies on the performance aspect of Soundpainting sign language. Therefore, it is important due to its contributions to the field.

Results

In today's music understanding where the music industry transforms the performer into a commodity, we can talk about the alienation problem between the music itself and the music listeners who came to the concert halls. In fact, this situation unintentionally leads the listeners away from the music, which has the classical values and is prepared laboriously, and also endangers the music's own future.

The main reasons of this situation can be considered as the repetitions of the usual works in the concert programs and not promoting new music enough to the music listener. As one of the most constructive solutions for this problem, we could think of the works in which the audience contributes to the performance actively. One of the best examples of this situation is soundpainting.

From the findings obtained, we observe that the audience also could be interactively part of the performance due to the nature of the Soundpainting performance. Soundpainter in the position of the conductor of the performance/concert, in reply to the gestures he has pointed to the ensemble, makes both the performers and the concert audience be part of the performance and also creates a dialogue between them by reusing the responses which he has received from both performers and also the audience.

Kopsavilkums. Mūsdienās koncertos muzikanti spēlē notis un muzicē pēc diriģenta norādījumiem. Tas ir ierastais formāts. Kā arī tas nodrošina to, ka mēs esam tikai daļēji iesaistīta publika. Skaņkrāsošana ir multidisciplināra zīmju valoda starp muzikantiem, dejotājiem, aktieriem, ko ir izdomājis Valters Tomsons 1974. gada Vudstokā, Ņujorkā. Pašlaik šai valodai ir vairāk nekā 1500 žestu, kas norāda mākslinieku vēlamā materiālu. Priekšnesuma radīšana tiek veikta pateicoties katra žesta parametriem. Skaņkrāsotājs (komponists), kurš parasti atrodas cilvēku grupas priekšā, izmantojot rokas un ķermeni, sazinās ar žestiem, kas norāda nepieciešamo kustību, kuru cilvēku grupai ir jāveic. Skaņkrāsotājs attīsta mākslinieku atbildes, apvienojot tās mākslasdarbā, tad atkal parāda žestus un tādā veidā turpinās mākslasdarba izveidi. Skaņkrāsošana ir lietderīga, lai izveidotu sapratni ne tikai starp skaņkrāsotāju un māksliniekiem, bet gan arī starp skaņkrāsotāju un skatītājiem. Skaņkrāsotājs rāda žestus māksliniekiem un tajā pašā laikā arī rāda žestus skatītājiem, kuri ar skaņas palīdzību atbild skaņkrāsotājam. Pēc tam skaņkrāsotājs nolemj tālāko darbību pēc sniegtajām atsauksmēm. Tādā veidā skaņkrāsošana iesaista skatītājus uzstāšanās laikā, tādā veidā sazinoties ar skaņkrāsotāju, māksliniekiem un skatītājiem. Šis pētījums ir kvalitatīvs, un informācija tika iegūta ar literatūras palīdzību.

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