

Talking about tango. A qualitative study of musical interaction from the Second Person perspective in a tango duo.

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Background

Tango is the result of a complex mix of forms of production of classical and popular music; antagonistic formats are presented that range from structured practice in typical orchestras or improvisational practice environments such as the accompaniment of singers. In particular tango duets are very intimate contexts of musical production and interaction that combine these contexts of musical practice that is suitable for the study of the interaction between performers.

In this paper, interaction is approached from the Second Person (2P) Perspective of mental attribution (Pérez and Gomila, 2021), a theoretical framework that focuses on the problem of interaction between individuals, including the emotional involvement and the direct attributions of intentionality present in human communication. Specifically, 2P interactions are those that occur in situations in which two human beings meet face to face, body to body, get emotional, and understand and perceive each other through intentional actions (Gomila, 2002). We posit that the communication between tango performers is mediated by this type of low-level interactions (intentional actions), which are essential for the expressive-musical construction of a tango piece. In order to make meaning within the normative framework of the practice of tango, the processes of composition, performance and improvisation of a tango duo must be collaborative and co-created.

Aims

To explore the features of second-person interactions and their implications in the musical practice of tango.

Method

An exploratory study was conducted on the basis of an open conversation that took place between the two tango musicians after the recording of the musical material (one of them being the participant-researcher). A script with questions and / or comments was prepared in order to frame the open dialogue for data collection. Two types of qualitative discourse analysis were carried out: (i) identification of the musical themes addressed through thematic analysis and (ii) content analysis of fragments that contained 2P attributions. 2P indicators were identified, and 2P general descriptive categories of musical interactions were derived.

Results

Three indicators related to musical interaction and 2P were identified. The indicator “feeling the other as the performance unfolds in time” is linked to the sensory experience of the temporal unfolding of each other’s intentional actions during music performance. Musicians speak about the feeling of arriving before the attack of the other. The indicator “perceiving the other in the sound we play” implies not only perceiving the temporal organization of successive sounds, but also becoming aware of the dynamic, timbre and articulatory profiles produced in the performance. Finally, the indicator “perceiving the other's style while interacting” accounts for the ways in which shared expressive goals are co-constructed within the normative practice of tango style.

The indicators described above were then re-interpreted on the basis of their links with the musical problems identified in the thematic analysis. Three categories emerged that synthesize and describe 2P attributions: i) The category “get along with mutual intentions in time” refers to the management of temporality dependent on the reciprocal attributions of each other’s intentions through direct perception. The musical themes that are named describe, for example, the temporal and rhythmic regulation between the melody and the accompaniment and the selected tempo, among others; ii) The category “knowing ourselves in the music we perform” describes the perception of the other's musical actions as meaningful or expressive in the context of music rehearsal. It is based on the awareness of the sonic music environment as the communicative medium where the musical actions of each other take place; and iii) The category “to build the practice of tango together” is rooted in the cultural normativity of the practice of tango. It is the framework in which certain ways of performing, arranging, and communicating become viable in reference to certain types of tango style adopted, as to build a shared stylistic goal.

Conclusions

The study of expressive communication between tango musicians from the 2P perspective brings novel opportunities to understand how musicians relate to each others and how their musical experience is linked in practice. In a duo performance, where musicians reciprocally modify their states and intentions based on their mental attributions, the elaboration of musical goals is accomplished through the activation of those basic primary modes of expressive communication. The activation and development of such interactive expressive modes are embedded in the cultural normativity of the practice of tango.

References

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