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PERFORMANCE PRACTICE, PERCEPTION AND LIVE CONCERT EXPERIENCE: A COMPOSER-LED STUDY OF A MOZART ANNIVERSARY CONCERT.

Farhan Izzudin James Narte^{1*}

¹ Department of Creative Arts, School of Hospitality and Creative Arts, Management and Science University (MSU), University Drive, Off Persiaran Olahraga, Section 13, 40100 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.

 farhan_izzudin@msu.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-0171-1055>

*Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

This paper examines the relationship between performance practice, listener perception and the live concert experience in a 270th Mozart anniversary performance. The concert presented and organized by Dewan Philharmonik Petronas which to remembering the 270th Mozart birth. A qualitative method was used with composer led approach and reflective observation to identify how interpretive decisions shape audience engagement towards the concert. The indicators performance elements which including tempo and flexibility. These elements also include articulation, dynamic control and balancing of the entire ensemble. Breathing coordination are also considered in relation to perceived musical clarity including emotional response and real time listening conditions. The findings show that performance practice plays a central role in mediating not only the structural transparency of Mozart music but also the immediacy of the live concert experience. The connection of coordinated phrasing, express timing and controlled dynamics do contribute significantly to the listener engagement. Observations of audience behaviour suggests differences in attentiveness and engagement across demographic groups. This also highlighting how the performance elements with adaptation nuance contribute to both clarity and artistic impact. The paper argues that concert-based reflective analysis offers a valuable humanities method for understanding the relevance of Mozart's music in present-day performance contexts.

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Keyword:

Composer, Live, Concert, Mozart, Performers, Perception,
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Introduction

Performance practice plays an important role in shaping Western music is seen and understood in contemporary contexts. One classical composer whose music often associated with conventional formal transparency named Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. This shows how interpretive decisions from the performers significantly influence how these qualities are experienced by modern audiences (Bandy, 2023). However, less attention has been given to how live concert experience and contemporary performance affect listener perception even though Mozart's works remain widely performed. This happens particularly within non-Western cultural settings. Live performance can be understood as experiential events where audience engagement is shaped by immersive and memorable interactions (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) remains one of the most influential composers of the Western art music tradition. The harmonic syntax and expressive precision that are widely associated with his works has characterize the definition of Classical style (Rosen, 1997). Mozart's compositional in orchestral and chamber settings has given a clear texture of musical ideas. As a result, the way in which Mozart's works are playing a significant role in moulding how they are perceived by mainstream audiences.

Performing Mozart's repertoire can be enjoyable and challenging at the same time. His works require precision and technical adaptability to be able to deliver the full live Classical music performance to the audiences. This often-challenging performers to balance between technical playing approach with expressive nuance. At the compositional level, Mozart's use of harmonic balance, intuitive pitch organization and formal clarity do support musical language that is both elegant and structurally coherent (Rosen, 1997). Because of these, even small changes made by the performers can make a noticeable and significantly influence listener perception.

The 270th Mozart anniversary refers to a concert that celebrate the 270th anniversary of Mozart's birthday in 1756. This was presented by Dewan Philharmonik Petronas Kuala Lumpur which the concert provided an opportunity to observe how Mozart's repertoire was adapted into contemporary Malaysian concert setting. The performance was relevant to the study because it brought together an established Classical repertoire, live audience and a professional orchestral performance practice. This establishment allowing researcher to examine how interpretive decisions were experienced through direct listening.

In this study, performance practice is understood as the set of musical and embodied decisions made during performance, including tempo flexibility, articulation, phrasing, dynamics, ensemble balance and performer coordination. These performance decisions shape how

musical form, expressive details and individual instrumental lines are perceived by listeners. Listener perception, in turn, creates part of the live concert experience, as audiences encounter the music through real-time listening within the physical and social environment of the concert hall. The study therefore considers performance practice, listener perception and live concert experience as interconnected aspects of the same performance event rather than as separate phenomena.

This study examines a 270th Mozart anniversary concert as a case study to explore the relationship between performance practice, listener perception and the live concert experience. Rather than presenting a descriptive review, this paper also adopts a qualitative and composer-led approach just to analyse how interpretive elements can shape the musical visibility which are reflecting to the emotional response and audience engagement. The study is guided through the question whether contemporary performance practices influence listener perception and the live concert experience in a performance of Mozart's music. This study also supports to SDG 4 (Education Quality) by emphasizing the educational value of live concert observation in enhancing a critical listening, musical awareness and practical understand of a performance practice.

Literature Review

Mozart Repertoire and Performance Practice

Mozart's repertoire is obviously relatable to the study of performance practice because it has an interpretation that involves more than just accurately producing the notes contained in the score. Musical scores do seem complex, but it is just some sort of a code that crowded with motion (Bandy, 2023). The similarity and differences between notation and its execution remains an important consideration in Mozart performance. The *Cambridge Companion to Mozart* (Keefe, 2003) notes that performance practice in Mozart's music involves questions concerning tempo, character, articulation, phrasing and the relationship between notation and performance.

This indicates that performers play an active role in shaping the musical result through performance decisions. In detail, articulation and phrasing can influence how melodic ideas and musical arrangements are perceived by listeners and audiences. Such considerations are relevant to the present study because the concert observations focused on tempo flexibility, articulation, phrasing, dynamics, ensemble balance and breathing coordination.

Live Concert Environment

The live concert environment adds another dimension to musical perception. Wald-Fuhrmann et al. (2021) stated that music listening takes place within a certain situation and that the classical concert can be understood as a specific context or "frame" that shapes the aesthetic experience (Greyson, 2005). Observing a performance in the concert hall provides information that may not be available through recordings alone.

This is particularly relevant to the present study, as the researcher's close seating position enabled observation of physical and audible aspects of performance, including breathing coordination among musicians, alongside the resulting listening experience.

Methods

This study utilized a qualitative observational and practice-based reflective methodology that are widely used in artistic research (Borgdorff, 2012). Data were collected through concert attendance, field notes, reflective listening and observation of audience behaviours. The primary source of observation was the researcher direct attendance at the concert. Attention was given to performance elements including tempo flexibility, articulation, phrasing, dynamics, ensemble balance, breathing coordination and visible coordination among performers, as well as observable audience behaviour. The researcher then organized these observations thematically according to performance practice, listener perception, audience observation and composer reflection. Interpretation was based on the researcher's experience as a composer, performer and music educator with the reflective analysis focusing on how observed performance practices were perceived. This approach follows the reflective and practice-based orientation of artistic research (Borgdorff, 2012). The researcher's role as a composer, performer and music educator basically supported the analytical perspective that allows a technical consideration of performance practices and their perceptual effects.

The concert was held on 27 January 2026 at Dewan Philharmonik Petronas, Kuala Lumpur, featuring the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra led by concertmaster Peter Danis, with Jebat Arjuna Kee Jia Liang on viola. Seating in close proximity to the stage enabled the researcher in detailed listening, including the perception of ensemble balance and embodied performance elements such as breathing.



Figure 1: Mozart's 270th Birthday Anniversary Flyers.

Source: Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra

Performance Practice Analysis

Tempo and Structural Clarity

Tempo throughout the performance was flexible and aligned with the stylistic demands of each repertoire. Clear distinctions between *Adagio* and *Allegro* sections allowed formal characteristics to emerge naturally. The consistent use of rubato contributed expressive nuance while maintaining structural coherence, supporting the perception of form and thematic development (Bandy, 2023).

The ensemble consistently maintained the sense of stability in the rhythm throughout the performance even with a minimal use of percussion. This suggests that a professional level of internal practice among the musicians that are particularly in sustaining tempo without reliance on percussive guide. The concertmaster named Peter Danis spectacularly played a massive role in guiding the ensemble just by using clear physical gestures to shape entries, phrasing and overall coordination while also playing his violin at the same time. The physical gestures perhaps adding to a sense of communication among the players (Davidson, 2017). This evident of leadership contributed to the cohesion of the performance and supported the ensemble's temporal precision.

Articulation, Phrasing and Breath Control

Articulation was executed with clear and consistent. Phrasing remained stylistically consistent which showcasing the transparency within the musical texture. String's players have specifically demonstrated smooth bowing control that includes smooth bow changes and carefully managed bow distribution. The use of subtle sliding between notes enhanced phrases and musical notation helps the performances to sounds more natural.

Musical lines performed in a coherent with a deliberate manner simultaneously making the phrasing more consistent. Phrasing in every ending were performed in precision cadence in which the performance becomes a clear adaptable approach among performers. This level of control indicates the transparency within the musical texture which allows individual lines to be clearly perceived while maintaining overall structural balance. The articulation was transparent and the phrasing did contribute significantly to the listener's ability to follow the development and the whole musical progression.

Aspects such as the musician's breathing were audibly perceptible and appeared coordinated with the phrasing. This help shaping the phrasing and also the dynamic control from a close listening position. Emotional responses to music are closely linked to performance cues such as timing, articulation and dynamic variation (Juslin, 2003). These breath cues contributed to a sense of natural flow. This flow embodied musical expression by enhancing listener engagement and reflecting broader understandings of musical perception as an embodied experience (Schyff et al., 2022).

Dynamics and Ensemble Balance

Dynamic contrasts were effectively noticeable with strong forte passages balanced by controlled pianissimo sections. These dynamics element shaped emotional pacing while remaining stylistic appropriate. Expressive elements such as dynamics and timing play a crucial role in shaping musical communication and listener response (Bremmer & Nijs, 2022). Ensemble balance was consistently maintained during the performance with clear distinction between melodic and accompanying roles. No instrumental voices were obscured therefore contributing significantly to the perception of clarity and cohesion.

Listener Perception

From the perspective of a trained listener and composer, the performance was perceived as nothing but a clear and balanced performances. Musical arrangements were easily followed, allowing for continuous engagement with the melodic ideas in more natural perception. This

unsaturated sound so obvious due to how clear the individual instrumental lines that able to enhance awareness of orchestration and texture. Emotional responses to music are closely linked to performance cues such as timing, articulation and dynamic variation (Juslin, 2003).

The emotional response to the performance was characterized by a sense of astonishment and heightened engagement. One of the reason people engage with music is through the effect of emotional experience (Lindblom, 2009). Unexpected moment of listening emerged from the transparency of the entire ensemble. The interpretive decisions significantly shaped the perceptual experience. Rather than determined solely by the score, these observations support the view that the musical meaning is mediated through the performance (Taruskin, 2005).

Audience Observation

Generally, the audience engagement was typical with sustained silence and attention. Instances of audible participation were noticed including an audience softly humming along with the melody. There is a few concert etiquettes to be considered while attending a Classical performance and one of it is humming while watching the musical performances. This can momentarily disrupt the listening experience. A notable observation was the younger audience members in presence although there is no formal demographic data were collected. This observation suggests that Mozart's music able to attract audiences across different age groups within the contemporary Malaysian concert setting.

In addition to situational factors, broader contextual influences may also shape audience engagement. In contemporary contexts, heightened stress levels have been shown to affect individuals' ability to fully engage in experiential environments, including live cultural events (Zailani et al., 2021). This may partially explain variations in attentiveness and behavioural responses observed during the performance.

Composer Reflection and Pedagogical Implications

From a compositional perspective, the symphonic approach to structure and orchestration stood out prominently. The effective distribution of musical material allowed individual instrumental lines to remain distinct while contributing to a cohesive whole. These strategies provide valuable insights for contemporary composition, particularly in achieving the distinction between instruments and balance. While the performance did not alter the fundamental understanding of classical definition, it reshaped perceptions of classical music audiences. The presence of a younger audience challenges common assumptions and highlights the ongoing cultural relevance of canonical repertoire.

In contemporary contexts, increasing emphasis on digital and online modes of engagement has reshaped how individuals' access and interact with content, including music (Mohamad, N, 2022). Within this landscape, live concert experiences offer a contrasting form of engagement that emphasizes focused listening and embodied interaction. These insights hold direct implications for both compositional practice and music education, informing approaches to teaching, audience engagement and performance awareness.

Listening to the performance with characterized by clarity and strong ensemble cohesion in positive experience of listening able to contribute to a sense of satisfaction as a listener. This aligns with previous findings that satisfaction can influence an individual's intention to revisit

or re-engage with similar experiences (Mohamad, N & Zailani, 2024). In another words, a satisfying concert experience may encourage audiences to attend future performances and develop a deeper appreciation for the repertoire.

These performance practices help to shape how the musical material was perceived during the live performance. Flexible tempo supported the perception of formal development within the performance. As for the technical aspects such as clear articulation with the coordinated phrasing strengthened by controlled dynamics and balanced instrumental contributed to the distinction between musical lines. These observations formed the basis for considering how performance decisions influenced the researcher's listening experience and engagement with the concert.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that contemporary performance practices which includes tempo flexibility, articulation, ensemble balance and phrasing. This plays a central role in shaping listener perception and the live concert experience. Through qualitative observation and reflective analysis, the paper highlights how performative decisions mediate the orchestral texture, emotional engagement and audience reception. Overall, this study shows that reflective concert observation able to provide a valuable understanding of musical and audiences perception in contemporary performances contexts. The researcher was amazed by the young demographic of the audience that can prove that Classical music remains relevant in all era. The observations suggest that these performance practices contributed to the researcher's perception of musical clarity and the overall live concert experience. Future suggestion is to encourage more younger audiences or student to attend this type of concert so they able to understand not just the musical elements, but also the etiquette in music performances.

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