

# Konsten att uppväcka känslor: 1700-talsmusik för flöjt och cembalo

Maria Bania, flute, Tilman Skowroneck, harpsichord.

*Since a musician cannot move others unless he too is moved, he must of necessity be able to transport himself into all of the affections that he wants to arouse in his listeners. ... In languishing, sad passages, he becomes languishing and sad. You see and hear it in him. The same thing occurs in the case of forceful, light or other kinds of ideas; there, too, he transports himself into these affections. He barely calms one before arousing the next, and thus he constantly alternates between the passions.*

(Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, part 1 (Berlin, 1753), p.122, transl. Robin Blanton.)

Music has a capacity to affect us emotionally, and we often listen to music because we want to get moved. In this concert-performance, we continued our investigations into how emotions can be reinforced in the interactions between the sounding music, the players and the listeners in a musical performance. The concert-performance was a part of the ongoing research project “Rhetorical and Romantic affective strategies in musical performance”, funded by the Swedish Research Council. It had a twofold purpose: firstly, to present to the audience some of our research findings, both through playing the music in the way we did, and through a verbal presentation, and secondly, to further explore how the affective practices that we study can play out in a public concert-performance.

The aesthetic views on music and the role of musical performances have changed over time. In mid-eighteenth-century Germany, the perhaps most important task of a musical performance was to move the listeners into feeling identifiable passions that could be intersubjectively experienced and communicated.<sup>1</sup> This conception affected the players’ as well as the listeners’ behavior and practice. Performing musicians and composers (often the same person) were supposed to arouse the music’s affections in themselves in order to evoke them in the audience (as were actors, poets, orators, dancers and playwrights).<sup>2</sup> In the eighteenth-century sensibility-culture, physical responses to musical experiences were lauded as signs of social connectedness, sensibility and moral status.<sup>3</sup> Scholars such as Isabella Van Elferen (2007) have discussed the role of the display of collective affections in public concert in the sentimental culture and the various performative layers of a concert, using Erika Fischer-Lichte’s approach to performance and performativity.

In 2019 we performed a laboratory re-enactment of the mid-eighteenth-century affective performing practice, including four listeners that had practiced in advance to re-enact the corresponding listening behavior and mindset. In the concert-performance “Konsten att uppväcka känslor: 1700-talsmusik för flöjt och cembalo”, we built on our experiences from the 2019 re-enactment and also from other re-enactments and experiments conducted over the last three years. These experiences were valuable both for setting up the concert-

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<sup>1</sup> Bania&Skowroneck, 2020, p. 194, 197–8.

<sup>2</sup> Bania&Skowroneck, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Bania&Skowroneck, p. 197.

performance and when performing.<sup>4</sup> This time we wanted to explore how much of the historical affective practices we would be able to re-enact while playing a full program in an advertised public concert as opposed to an academic or laboratory setting, and to further explore how these affective practice can interact with other aspects and actants of a contemporary performance. We aimed at creating a space for a musical experience enhanced by the interaction between the sounding music, the player's enactment of the affections of the music, the venue and the listeners' engagement. From our previous exercises and experiments we had pinpointed some of the difficulties involved in this undertaking. We could therefore better arrange a setting for the performance that supported the affective experience for the audience. One of the outcomes of the laboratory re-enactment had been our realization that the agency of the venue – the salon at Gunnebo castle outside Gothenburg – is able to amplify our possibilities of experiencing and communicating the emotional content of the music. Therefore, we chose to do this concert in the Gunnebo salon as well, to benefit again from the agency of that venue for our artistic purpose.

For this concert-performance, we had chosen music by composers that were connected to the intellectual and musical milieu in Berlin in the mid-eighteenth century, who had written about the affective practice that we re-enacted, or had close musical and personal connections to the musicians who had. These were among the most esteemed composers of their time, including J.S and C.P.E Bach, and the music chosen is technically and musically highly demanding to play. The music was composed to arouse definable and varying affections in the listeners, in accordance with the aesthetics of the period. It clearly exposes its affective content, sometimes constantly shifting, sometimes remaining in the same affective state for a longer section. As a method of preparation, we carefully decided which affections we experienced that the music embodied, for each motif, section or bar, and notated those in our music. Since C.P.E. Bach writes that you see and hear the affections in the player, we also worked with mirrors and video-recordings.

In the concert-performance, we re-enacted the affective performing practice of the period of arousing the affections of the music in our own bodies, in order to evoke them in the listeners. Our aim was to create a space together with the listeners where the emotions embodied in the music were intersubjectively shared and experienced. The performance included extended spoken program comments about what we aimed at re-enacting, the listening culture of the eighteenth century, the eighteenth-century musicians' affective practices and what today's psychological research tells us about emotional contagion and the relation between physical reactions of emotions and emotional experiences. Thus we invited the listeners to take part in the performance through re-enacting the listening behavior and practices of the mid-eighteenth-century musical culture. The listeners' participation was further supported by the lighting (daylight, with no spotlight on the players, just a small lamp for the music on the harpsichord), the placement of the players and the listeners (separate chairs for the listeners in curved lines) and the beauty of the venue with its proportions, decorations, sculptures, and mirrors.

Luckily, the concert-performance could take place despite the ongoing pandemic. A video showing the players is attached. The video is of the complete program apart from the performance of an Adagio for solo harpsichord by C.P.E. Bach, during which the fire alarm in the castle went off.

This concert-performance improved our understanding of the physicality of the affective practice of musicians in mid- eighteenth-century musical culture. One of our learning outcomes was that it is possible to change one's mindset as a player, and actively evoke the shifting emotions experienced from the music in oneself during an entire public

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<sup>4</sup> For an example, see Bania&Skowroneck, 2020.

concert. This can result in an intensified interaction with the concert audience, and with the music's affections. This practice has, as we see it, potential to support an active participation by the audience. Another result was that when focusing on arousing the various emotions in one's body as a player, the performer's tools, such as dynamics, articulation and agogic variations are pushed into the background and acquire a secondary role as inhabited tools. The sounding music and its affective potential come to the forefront, and the essence of the performance becomes the affective and artistic interactivity.

As all music can be meaningfully performed in a manyfold of ways, the perspective we use in this research is only one of many. A concert can be a joint emotional experience, or an individual, private one. The practices we explore here are typical for the period in which the music we played was composed. Only a few decades later, the aesthetic mindset had changed towards a more individualistic approach. Exploring other aesthetic attitudes than the ones embraced today can, however, reveal unexplored potentialities in the music and in performing and listening to it.

In research in historical performance practice and in higher education in early and mid-eighteenth-century music, the focus of the attention has often been on playing techniques and tools like articulation, ornaments etc. We argue that higher music education in performing music from this period would gain from an enhanced focus on what was expressed as the essence of musical performances – evoking identifiable emotions in the listeners. This would increase the students' possibilities to create engaging performances, and themselves get a more vibrant experience of the music. The practices we re-enacted also provide tools to develop a more shared listening. We think that the method we developed to label the music's affections would give students working with music in this particular style a tool to discuss the affections of the music and to develop a nuanced and more refined understanding of the affective potential of the music. That would in turn enable more varied and insightful performances as well as increase their own affective perception and experience of the music. This can of course be done on period instruments and modern instruments alike.

#### References:

Maria Bania and Tilman Skowronek (2020). Affective practices in mid-18th-century German music-making: reflections on C. P. E. Bach's advice to performers. *Early Music*. 48/2 p. 193–203.

Isabella Van Elferen (2007). "Ihr Augen weint!": Intersubjective tears in the sentimental concert hall. *Understanding Bach*. ii, p.77–94.