

CONFERENCE REPORT

CIM19 – Conference on Interdisciplinary Musicology 'Embodiment in music'

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CONFERENCE DETAILS

CIM19 – Conference on Interdisciplinary Musicology

'Embodiment in music'

26-28 September 2019, Graz, Austria

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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Exploring the 'hows' and 'whys' of music is a real challenge, one that necessarily requires cross-disciplinary scholarship. In recent years, musicological inquiries have greatly embraced such prospects with numerous publications, events, and transdisciplinary dialogues. In this changing landscape, the Society for Interdisciplinary Musicology (SIM, www.idmusicology.com) has the explicit aim of promoting scholarly interactions between humanities, sciences and practically oriented disciplines in the area of musicology. In an attempt to provide such meeting points for music research, SIM organizes every one or two years the Conference on Interdisciplinary Musicology (CIM). Originally developed by Richard Parncutt, this conference series aims at fostering epistemologically distant collaborations between all musically relevant disciplines and paradigms. The latest conference of the series, CIM19 (<https://sites.google.com/view/cim19/home>), was held on the 26-28th September 2019 at the Centre for Systematic Musicology of the University of Graz (Austria).

The main theme of this event is captured by the following question: "What does it really mean for music cognition to be embodied?". In what has been an insightful three-day event, scholars from diverse backgrounds tried to critically engage with this question and reflect upon the theoretical, empirical and performative aspects of embodiment in musical contexts. At the crossroads of interdisciplinary musical discourse, CIM19's themes revolved around the centrality of body and action in human musicality as interpreted through philosophical, historical, linguistic, social, psychological, experimental, artistic or even political perspectives. Along these lines, CIM19 instigated dialogues on the cultural diversity of musical subjectivity across time and space, emphasizing the role of a

physically-rooted intersubjectivity in the development and manifestation of musical life, style, and identity. Delegates' shared, yet diverse, interests allowed CIM19 to be an enlightening meeting place for exploring the embodied and social factors associated with musical activities through the lens of cross-disciplinarity.

KEYNOTES

The conference opened with a keynote given by Renee Timmers (The University of Sheffield, UK) on the role of cross-modal correspondences in shaping time and tempo during music performances. Starting from the overall-agreed relationship of movement with temporal cues as displayed in musical acts, she argued that the strong connection between time, tempo and movement is better understood through cross-modal correspondences. From this point of view, action might be the building block of this profound interplay, highly influencing the shaping of these musically-related modalities and their further correspondence. Such a perspective, she suggested, might prove useful for understanding performance communication and planning, as well as phenomena such as synaesthesia.

Following up on the embodied notions of music cognition, Fred Cummins (University College Dublin, IE) in his keynote "Audition as sense-making, and its contribution to the shared human lifeworld", conceptualized our bodily interactions with the world as a sense-making activity which manifests itself through touch, vision and, last but not least, audition. Elaborating on the physically-grounded modes that enable this body-surroundings reciprocity, he then turned to musicking, suggesting that musical co-doings constitute a form of auditory sense-making which allows for collective constructions of the world to arise. This co-creation of meaning, he argued, is clearly evident in joint musicking, as well as ritualistic practices, and portrays a physicality that surpasses the predominant, disembodied, linguistic notions of meaning construction.

From a complementary perspective, Anthony Chemero (University of Cincinnati, USA) shared his view on the role music research can play in understanding human cognition more broadly. He suggested that music perception and performance are fields of inquiry with high relevance for a deeper comprehension of embodied cognitive processes encouraging, hence, the exploration of the valuable possibilities the musical body has to offer. By thoroughly presenting a pile of empirical evidence on auditory perception and musical performance, he drew connections with embodied cognitive science, arguing for the importance of embracing such musicological orientations in the study of the human mind.

In the final keynote of CIM19, "Understanding Musical Empathy: Perspectives, Problems, and Possibilities", Dylan van der Schyff (Oxford University, UK) addressed the concept of empathy in the context of human musicality. Moving beyond representational, and folk notions of empathy – often based on attribution and recognition of mental states – he argued for the corporeal foundations of our ability to understand others. This primal capacity, as he argued, develops through associations of bodily movements and facial or vocal expressions with our own somatic experience. On account of this, he proposed Interaction Theory (IT) as an appropriate framework for understanding musical empathy. The latter is well-positioned to go beyond 'internalist', disembodied views, and to explore the role of the situated body in musical experience. In addition, he further elaborated on musical empathy through a recently emerged approach to cognition – the 4E framework (embodied, embedded,

extended, and enactive), which draws insights from affective neuroscience, developmental research, social cognition, phenomenology, and dynamical systems theory.

PRESENTATIONS

During these three days of intellectually rigorous debates and thought-provoking discussions, participants had the opportunity to attend different sessions covering the following topics:

- Bodies, brains, and musicking
- Embodiment beyond the body: Politics, philosophy, and audiomarketing
- The musical body in theory and practice
- Coordination, action, and perception
- The body in cultural context
- Experimental approaches
- Musical meanings in mind and action
- Musical interventions
- Listening and feeling with(in) the body
- Instruments, practice, and performance

Each session included two parallel sub-sessions with four talks each, allowing the delegates to attend the presentations pertinent to their scholarly interests. Beyond the conventional conference format, some of the talks were delivered virtually. This layout gave remote presenters a chance to share their work with the Graz attendees without flying to Austria and allowed them to respond to questions from the audience in real time. Regular talks were also live-streamed and remote participants could pose their questions to the presenters via comments on the YouTube livestream session of the talk.

On the last day of CIM19, a poster session was held, which, in addition to the traditional posters, introduced a new form of virtual presentation, the *flash talks*. These were short videos of five minutes, in which presenters were able to outline a brief overview of their research. The videos were played on repeat during the poster session and participants had the chance to explore the content of their choice either by attending the screenings or engaging with the poster presenters, or both.

REFLECTIONS ON CIM19

After contemplating these days of scholarly exchanges, I feel that CIM19 has been an insightful event, full of novel and inspiring ideas on music, body and cognition. Scholars from diverse epistemological backgrounds came together and created a stimulating environment, necessary for new perspectives to arise and interdisciplinary prospects to flourish. Endorsing embodiment's explanatory value in the musical context poses key challenges to the musicological discourse, and CIM19 has provided a good starting point for us to address the demands and encounter these newly-established horizons with creativity and open-mindedness. As an early-career researcher entering the musicological field, I found the discussions with the participants to be very engaging and promising of a prosperous, cross-disciplinary future of music research. Embracing novel prospects requires receptiveness and flexibility

and I feel extremely lucky for having found myself among inspiring scholars, ready to learn from the past and move towards an unknown, challenging future with optimism and cooperation.

Moreover, CIM19's semi-virtual conference format, following the guidelines as originally developed for the 15th International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition and the 10th triennial conference of the European Society for the Cognitive Sciences of Music (Parncutt, 2018) that took place in the University of Graz in July 2018 (<https://music-psychology-conference2018.uni-graz.at/en/>), enabled scholars to virtually attend or present their work from every part of the globe at low financial and environmental cost. In times of climate change, adopting environmentally-friendly formats through virtual participation carries profound benefits, especially in the reduction of carbon emissions related to air travel, while it also introduces more inclusive ways of conferencing for those who cannot afford travelling. However, conferences are not only meeting points for intellectual debates, but also places for scholars to mingle and interact with each other. Semi-virtual formats can definitely complicate this social aspect, yet technological advances offer creative alternatives to the new order of things. Understanding the importance of socializing in conferences, CIM19 included a virtual-socializing event, during which physically-present delegates had the chance to interact online with remote participants through the Zoom software. Upon discussion with the attendees of the event, being able to virtually socialize is an intriguing option that preserves the social significance of conferencing, often ignored or impossible in semi-virtual formats.

In conclusion, CIM19 has been an illuminating, intellectual rendezvous for researchers, scholars, and performing artists interested in the profound interaction between embodiment and music. Body and action reveal new paradigms to the musical domain, and CIM19 has offered us the chance to discover, elaborate and reflect on the possibilities of this rich interplay. Embodied-friendly notions of music cognition become more and more relevant for a vast array of musical experiences and cultivate our knowledge on the complexity of music through a new lens that surpasses the mental and embraces the corporeal. From historical themes of 'music and the flesh' to performance and composition, this musical viscosity is a very promising prospect that will push the boundaries on the ways we approach and research music. In my humblest of opinions, such intellectual novelties will not be strictly confined to 'detached', theoretical frameworks, but will rather introduce fresh paradigms to the clinical and therapeutic applications of music. Steps towards body-centred praxes of music therapy have already been taken, yet the road is long and the possibilities still await us to explore and develop. As the musical body is gaining epistemological ground, my prediction for the years to come suggests a deeper realization not only of the pertinence of embodiment in the therapeutic process but, more broadly, of the highly intertwined relationship between the musical, the corporeal and the eudaimonic.

Reflecting on the aftermath of my experience as both a coordinator and participant of the conference, I believe that CIM19 has considerably broadened my perspective on the body-music entanglements, motivating me to pursue collaborations beyond the realm of music, yet very germane to it. Understanding the musical body but also exploring music through its physicality is a complex mission and one that emphasizes the importance and relevance of cross-disciplinary partnerships. In order to establish these synergistic grounds, the Society for Interdisciplinary Musicology (SIM) will vigorously continue to organize the CIM conferences (next CIM date and location will soon be announced) and run its own international peer-reviewed journal, the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Music*

Studies (JIMS, <https://musicstudies.org/>). Following up on CIM19's theme, JIMS will publish a special issue on the topic (including submissions of the CIM19 presenters), for those interested in discovering the cross-disciplinary pathways and reciprocities of music and embodiment.

REFERENCES

Parncutt, R. (2018, January 18). *Low-carbon, multi-hub global conferencing: Balancing the real and the virtual* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VAqjUqZL0k>