

Commentary on Watanabe and Takeda

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ABSTRACT: This is a commentary on Watanabe and Takeda's article, "Why do I like Schumann more than Chopin? A Physiological Analysis of Pianists' Affinities for Composers". The study offers a valuable insight into the relation between pianists' physiological 'Stance Type', as evaluated through 6 short test exercises, and their preference as well as aptitude for music by certain composers. While being a valuable presentation of a potentially very practical and effective method that addresses development and improvement of piano performance skills, there is some scope for improvement, namely: insight into how the three hypotheses were derived, detailed explanation of the proposed body positions for the performance of tempo-driven and momentum-driven composers' music, reasoning for effectiveness of the two body positions, and reconsideration of some terminology.

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THE paper "Why do I like Schumann more than Chopin? A physiological analysis of pianists' affinities for composers" (Watanabe & Takeda, 2023) examines the topic of association between physiological characteristics of pianists and their preference for certain repertoire. The study offers a valuable insight into the relation between pianists' physiological 'Stance Type', as evaluated through six short test exercises, and their preference as well as aptitude for certain composers' music. While it is a valuable presentation of a potentially very practical and effective method that addresses the development and improvement of piano performance skills, there is some scope for improvement.

The paper informs us about Kobayashi's (2019) report that his parallel-type students favored tempo-driven composers and his cross-type students preferred momentum-driven composers. The three hypotheses presented in the paper are based on this observation, however, the paper does not give any further insight as to how these hypotheses were derived. In other words, what could be the reasoning for such an association between the stance type and music by certain composers? Such insight could be incorporated into the discussion: this section states that the affinities and preferences for certain composers can be associated with stance types, but it does not provide any insight into how such an association could be explained.

The paper is based on Kobayashi's (2019) proposal suggesting that composers can be classified either as momentum-driven or tempo-driven and that the performance of composers' music in these two groups should be approached differently in terms of physical preparation. This primarily relates to the performer's body position and upper body movements. The paper provides us with Kobayashi's (2019) statement that to perform momentum-driven composers' music more easily, pianists should use their elbow as a pivot, allowing for free movement of the wrist, while tempo-driven composers' music requires using the shoulder and wrist as a pivot. However, even for the experienced piano player, the exact position and movements that need to be adopted for each of these approaches are indeed difficult to understand from such a concise description. To explain the two approaches, the paper would benefit from an illustration or, better yet, a video snippet.

Currently, the paper does not provide any reasoning for the two body positions. The naturally arising question is how a particular body position might help when performing a piece by a tempo-driven composer, and why a different position is more beneficial when performing music by a momentum-driven composer. While an in-depth investigation of the physicality of piano playing is not the focus of the paper, the idea of a more individualized approach to piano pedagogy is still at the core of the paper, and so it would benefit from some insight into this aspect.

Lastly, one detail that catches the reader's eye is the usage of the word 'swing' in the context of talking about fluctuations in the tempo. Adoption of this word in such a context can be rather confusing. 'Rubato' might be a more suitable term, as 'swing' can easily be confused with the musical feature where



rhythms are played in a softly dotted manner instead of a straight execution, which is not what the paper is concerned with.

Despite the aforementioned issues, the paper could potentially act as an insightful piece of proposal to approach the selection of piano repertoire in a manner that pays more consideration to individual differences among pianists.

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NOTES

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