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'More than the music': The performer experience of live music performance, an interpretive phenomenological analysis.

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ABSTRACT

The current study addresses the fragmented nature of the music performance literature, exploring the phenomenon holistically. Interpretive phenomenological analysis of semi-structured interviews with 5 musicians was conducted exploring their experiences of live music performance. Using a model emergent from data, the study finds a superordinate theme of ‘more than the music’ addressing relevant features of performance beyond the music itself. ‘Audience engagement’ and the ‘cultural embedding’ of performance are discussed as salient subthemes. The implications of these findings are discussed with an emphasis on future research.

KEY WORDS:	MUSIC PERFORMANCE	CULTURE	AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT	PROFESSIONAL MUSICIANS	IPA
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Introduction

Performing music to a live audience presents many challenges; effective technical execution of practiced techniques, improvisation, expressivity, managing performance related emotions and managing relationships with the audience, fellow performers and other important individuals. Whilst non-exhaustive, this list is illustrative of the complex, multi-faceted nature of musical performance. What these features are like for the musical performer and what they consider salient within their experience of performance is fundamental to understanding the phenomenon. Yet, how these component parts come together, with many more, to form the holistic experience of the live performing musician remains predominantly unexplored within the music psychology literature.

Past research has primarily favoured quantitative investigation, often emphasising isolated aspects of performance. This has resulted in a lack of overall, comprehensive understanding of how the musicians themselves experience performance. After identifying relevant areas for development within the existing literature, the present study addresses this fragmented nature of the field. Employing Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis to analyse qualitative, semi-structured interview data from performing musicians, facilitating the development of a more comprehensive, holistic understanding of live music performance.

Literature review

At current, literature concerning live music performance rarely presents a definition for the phenomenon. However, given an underrepresentation of holistic research on the phenomenon, this absence of a definitive conceptualisation may be problematic. Literature acknowledges the notable complexity of musical performance (Gabrielsson, 2003), yet this complexity may be lost without comprehensive holistic consideration of the individual performing, the audience and the performance itself. As such a salient area for the fields development can be seen in furthering understanding thus, towards an established definition. For the purposes of this study, therefore, the performers experience of live music performance was emphasised and approached with an open mind, exploring performer given conceptualisations of the phenomenon and features that they themselves considered salient.

At current, the literature is primarily one-sided, in review Gabrielsson (2003) notes the dominance of experimental research exploring the physical characteristics of the music itself, most prominently pertaining to timing and dynamics, and intonation and vibrato (Gabrielsson, 1999). Further, when performers themselves are represented within the literature, emphasis is often placed on the ways in which they interact with the music; areas such as, memory and memorisation practices (Lehmann, 1997; Palmer, 2005; Williamon & Valentine, 2002), links between cognition and the biomechanics of performance (Loehr & Palmer, 2007) and attention (Çorlu et al., 2014).

Exploration of the performing musician as an individual has also been conducted, notable areas include music performance anxiety (Kenny, 2005; Taborsky, 2007), the benefits of performing music, related to positive effects on mood (Valentine & Evans, 2001) and quality of life (Clift et al., 2010). Further, it is tied to both eudemonic and hedonic routes to wellbeing (Lamont, 2012), and musicians themselves emphasise its importance, reporting its highly rewarding nature (Lamont, 2011). Music performance

has also seen extensive exploration related to its capacity to induce states of flow (Csikszentmihayli, 2002), with these experiences linked to motivation to continue engaging with music (O'Neil, 1999; Sloboda, 1991). Individual difference variables relating to performance have also been explored, for example, the role of self-efficacy as a predictor of performance success (McPherson & McCormick, 2006; Ritchie & Williamon, 2010) additionally, perfectionism and locus of control as related to performance anxiety (Mor et al., 1995).

Similarly, many factors related to how the performance is viewed by an audience have been established. For example, the attractiveness of performer (Stanley et al., 2002), conveyance of musically congruent emotion (Bermingham, 2000) and movement during performance (Davidson, 2001, 2002) have all been demonstrated as of relevance. McPherson and Schubert (2004) review these and many additional variables, presenting a representative framework with applicative suggestions for performers. However, the extent to which performers are aware of features such as these, and which, if any, they emphasise and incorporate into their performance is, as yet, unestablished.

Quantitative, experimental research has proven functionally useful, however it cannot, and does not aim to, elucidate the integrated holistic experience of performance in all its complexity. For example, Çorlu et al. (2014) demonstrates that the expressiveness of a musical performance is decreased when available cognitive resources are restricted through the commitment of attention to another simultaneous task. This finding has applicative potential and as live music performance rarely, if ever, happens in an isolated, distraction-free environment, this expands our functional understanding of the processes involved. However, what this is like for the performer, how they experience external demands on their cognitive resources when performing, or how this, as a singular facet of performance, is integrated into the overall experience is not accounted for.

Qualitative research has sought to elucidate this in part, individual components of the performance experience have been experientially explored from the performers perspective. An example can be seen in Holmes (2011), this study investigated timbre as a salient performance variable, noting its relative importance as related to the genre of the performance. Further exploring how motivation towards optimal presentation of musical understanding was the primary underlying drive for imaginative timbre usage. This study provides an incredibly rich understanding of how a performer experiences one salient aspect of performance. However, this still does not address how this experience integrates into said performer's wider performance experience.

The overall experience of live music performance has begun to be represented within the literature in a small capacity. Clark, Lisboa and Williamon (2014), explored performer thoughts and perceptions experienced before and during past performances, one perceived as successful and another as less successful. Interview analysis revealed successful performances as most frequently associated with adequate preparation, possession of positive mindsets and as presenting a sufficient yet attainable challenge. Comparatively, less successful performances were typically associated with inadequate levels of preparation, negative mind-sets, frustration and lack of enjoyment within the performance. Concluding a high level of variability in factors associated with performance quality, Clark and colleagues discuss their potential importance with respect to how musicians perceive and interpret them. A

further, highly relevant, exploration of the holistic music performance experience comes from Geeves, McIlwain and Sutton (2016). This study used grounded theory analysis of interviews and field work, concluding diverse performer interpretations of 'connection' with an audience and pre- and post-performance routines as salient features of the experience. A performance model was constructed with these findings, performers are placed along continuums pertaining to their openness to variability and their valuing of attentiveness or 'attunement'. Respectively, how flexible the musician was with respect to differing performance contexts, and how much the musician emphasised attention from their audience compared with sharing an overlapping experience with them. This research is incredibly important for establishing understanding of an under-researched area, however further study is required to clarify and establish findings in a more robust way.

Ethnographic research also provides an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the phenomenon. Monson (1996), for example, provides key insights into how jazz musicians approach performance. Monson reports rigidly held ideas relating to the performance roles of each instrumentalist within a jazz group, the salience of active listening, and the requirement of an unspoken, musical connection between musicians that facilitates key aspects of performance. Ethnographic research, however, has tended to work within specific genres, this facilitates the rich, in-depth understanding gained, however it also leads to a lack of understanding of the broader features of performance, not ascribed to any one particular genre. Berger (1999) ethnographically worked with rock, metal and jazz musicians exploring the sociocultural impact of their performances within these genres, noting meaning in performance as closely linked to performers wider social lives and the musical structures themselves. However, research such as this occupies a distinct minority in the literature, and as such, the research area is in need of further exploration.

In 2003, Gabrielsson reviewed music performance literature, noting the disparity between quantitatively and qualitatively focused study and advocating the need for further exploratory ideographic work. Whilst, this has improved in recent years the area is still developing. Persson and Robson (1995) discuss problems adequately exploring emotive and experiential aspects of music when using generality focused, heavily experimental paradigms, also strongly advocating the use of qualitative methodologies in progressing the field. In reviewing the fields literature, it is apparent that the lived experience of the musical performer in navigating the complexities of live music performance has not been addressed extensively in past research. Consequently, the research question for the current study is, simply; "What is performance like for the live performing musician?"

Methodology

Rationale

Given the notable lack of research exploring the performer experience of live music performance holistically, an exploratory approach was required for this study. Emphasis was placed on developing bottom up, qualitative, data-driven understanding. As such, an appropriate methodology to facilitate this epistemological position was required.

Phenomenology is concerned with the direct subjective experience of the individual, holistically, their 'lifeworld' (Husserl, 1927). Furthermore, this lifeworld can be broken down into separate but interlinked structures, an organisation of experiential categories which present a useful, open, theoretical framework through which different aspects of a given individual's lifeworld are ascribed (Ashworth, 2006). With relevance to the current study, the categories of 'embodiment', the individual's experience of their body and mind, 'spatiality', the individual's experience of space; 'temporality', the individual's experience of time; and 'intersubjectivity', the individual's experience of others. In approaching the topic of live music performance with an open minded, bottom up approach, a framework such as this was required.

An appropriate methodology for applying this framework is therefore, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009). IPA, builds on the paradigms of phenomenology, integrating them into a functional epistemology, widely used in qualitative psychology. Parallels between the capabilities of IPA and the aims of this research are noted, thus, the current study adopted the methodological IPA framework set out by Smith et al. (2009) and a theoretical phenomenological stance (Ashworth, 2006; Husserl, 1927).

Participants

Five male performing musicians from the United Kingdom participated in the study (see Table 1.). The participants were all considered to be professional musicians in that audiences had paid to see their performances (in line with previous research by Geeves et al., 2016). Factors influencing participant selection were level of performance experience and performance instrument, sampled initially through convenience sampling (Brewis, 2014) with further participants recruited through snowball sampling from initial participant's social networks (Biernecki & Waldorf, 1981). Noting the delicate ethical balance required in convenience sampling involving friends of the researcher, Brewis (2014) presents guidance in this area which was adhered to as great an extent as was possible. These sampling methodologies were chosen as a result of the researcher's stance as embedded within a social network of musical performers (see Reflexive Analysis for a detailed account). In line with suggestions for IPA laid out by Smith et al. (2009) an initial target of three participants was set, with acknowledgement that further interviews may be required to achieve theoretical saturation. This occurred after the fifth interview, falling within the recommended range of three to six participants for IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a method of data collection in line with IPA (Smith et al., 2009). Interviews were recorded, lasting a mean average of 39 minutes, with a total of 196 minutes of audio interview data collected.

The interview schedule was constructed using broad questions relating to the four-forementioned phenomenological experiential categories (Ashworth, 2006). These four broad questions formed the basis of interviews, with resulting discussion built on participants initial responses. Further prompts within in each theme were developed, and explored after the initial participant response was exhausted. These prompts were based loosely on salient areas established within previous literature and concepts the researcher had become sensitised to through his own performance experiences. Following the initial interview, these prompts were updated throughout the interview process as part of ongoing analysis and reflection.

Participant	Age	Nationality	Years playing music	Years performing music	Instrument(s) played (performance instrument(s) in bold)	Performance frequency (average per month)	Self-identified performance genre(s)
P1	20	British	13	5	Vocals, Drums, Guitar, Piano	3	Metal
P2	21	(Welsh) British	15	4	Guitar, Bass, Drums	2	Progressive Rock, Metal
P3	23	British	6	5	Drums	1-2	Heavy Rock
P4	21	British	5	5	Guitar, Bass, Vocals	~4	Country, Rock, Metal, Blues
P5	26	British	13	8	Vocals	4-8	Wedding and Function

Table 1. Sample Demographics

Data analysis

Whilst the sample was not exhaustive with respect to variables such as performance genre, performed instrument, level of fame, level of experience, age or gender, theoretical saturation was reached. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and analysed using IPA processes described in Smith et al. (2009). Emergent themes were subsequently developed, these themes were first established individually as categorised within the four discussed phenomenological themes (Ashworth, 2006). Following this, connections between these themes were explored and in doing so, superordinate themes established.

Validity was assured through reflexivity and several procedures. Following analysis, member checks were conducted, in which findings were presented to participants to ensure congruence with their experience (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Exemplary quotes related to discussion are also presented throughout analysis to demonstrate the researcher's interpretations as not having gone beyond the information presented by participants, allowing the reader to form their own interpretations of data (Sparkes, 1998).

Ethical considerations

An abridged version of the full research and ethics proposal as approved by Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) is presented here.

The research was carried out in accordance with British Psychological Society ethical guidelines (The British Psychological Society, 2014) and those established by MMU. Participants were all over 18 years of age and as the study required no deception, full informed consent was gained prior to interview commencement. Whilst the topic of exploration was unlikely to present any ethical complications, effort was made within the recruitment process to ensure the performers recruited were comfortable speaking on the subject. Furthermore, if at any point during the interview process, participants wished to take a break or discontinue the interview this was facilitated.

Participants were informed that they had the 2 weeks after their interviews to choose to withdraw their data from the study. This process was enabled through the creation of unique identification codes under which participant data was stored. Participants were debriefed, thanked for their participation and given relevant follow-up information. Confidentiality was promised to participants and achieved through the use of private interview rooms within MMU, and the anonymization of transcripts. No participants chose to withdraw their data from the study, and no ethical complications arose at any point.

Analysis and Discussion

Findings for this study fall into three broad, interlinked categories, answering, from the performers perspective; 'what does it mean to perform?' 'what is the performance experience like?' and 'what is it like to be a performer?'. The foremost category addresses performers beliefs and attitudes about performance, the features they consider important, their aims and their approach to performing. The second category directly addresses the salient experiential features of performing music live. Finally, the third category addresses the performer as an individual embedded in their subjective lifeworld, exploring the ways in which this is related to performance.

The findings also demonstrate the exceptionally complex nature of live music performance, none of the individual themes exist in isolation, all were interlinked to other salient aspects of the phenomenon. As such, simply presenting isolated themes within these categories would neglect this complexity, therefore a model was constructed, functionally displaying the findings and their relationships (see Figure 1.). Furthermore, the themes of 'audience engagement' and 'cultural embedding' are discussed in depth, these represent salient components of the phenomenon, with other findings discussed in reference to them. These themes come together under the superordinate theme of 'more than the music'. The overarching finding of this study is that, performed music is only one feature of a complexly interrelated multi-faceted phenomenon. Given the heavily emphasised nature of physical music within performance literature, this finding stands to challenge the norms of the field. Resulting conclusions and respective directions for future research are discussed.

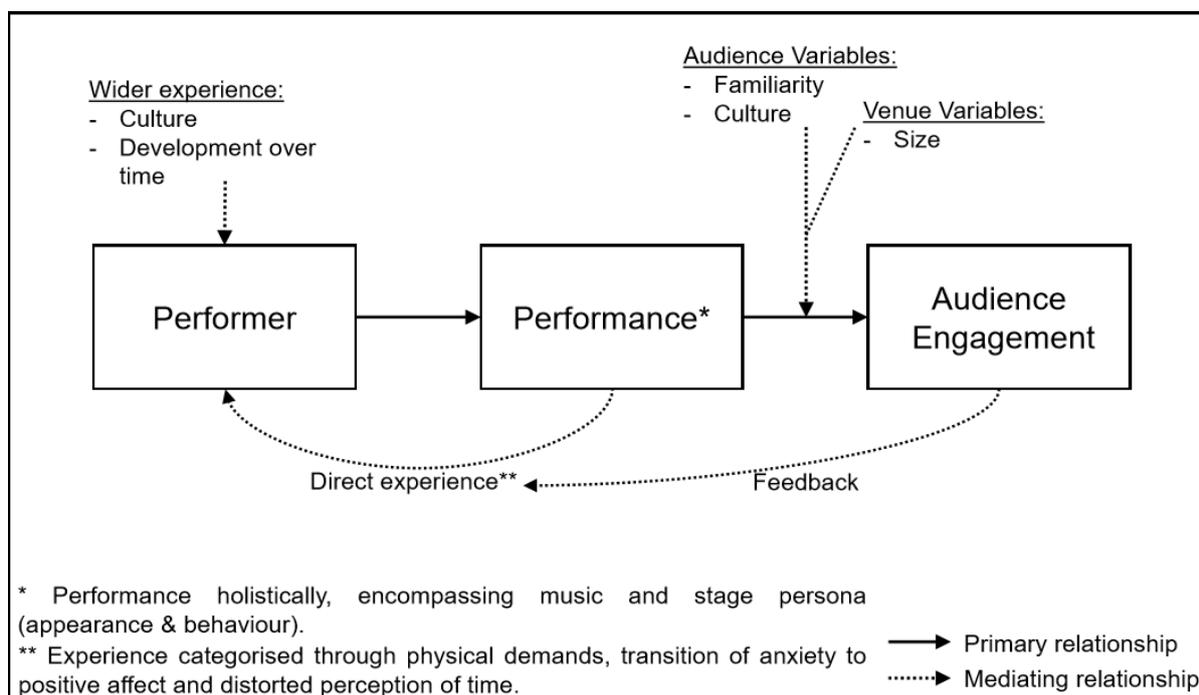


Figure 1. A model illustrating salient features of live music performance.

More than the music

The performance of live music is about more than just the music. This sentiment was presented by all participants.

'...getting on stage and being able to perform is a completely different thing, because you watch a lot of bands these days ...they get up and they can do the most technical things that are way out of anyone's league. But they can't necessarily get on stage and give a performance, they're just stood there, looking at their instrument, concentrating really hard' (P4.)

Whilst acknowledging the necessity of sufficient musical competence, this competence was viewed as an almost taken-for-granted feature of live performance. Whilst poor technical proficiency was described as having the capacity to ruin a performance.

'If you go up on stage, and say for a guitarist, and you don't know what you're playing. Like I've said with the audience, they're going to look at you like, "what the hell are you doing on here? Like just get off now"' (P1.)

Participants also highlighted scenarios in which other performance variables were considered to outweigh musical ability, noting simultaneous musical competence and ability to 'perform' as optimal.

'like a punk band playing the easiest thing in the world, but they're proper giving it some. ...and you're like I really vibe that, I get it. ...It's kind of balancing the two, being able to play to a really high level but it not take over the performance part, because music isn't just playing an instrument, it's the whole package.' (P4.)

Hence, the prevailing performer view of live music performance is that whilst the music itself is foundational, it does not presuppose performance quality or account for the full depth of what it is to truly perform. Further performance variables were therefore explored.

Stage persona

Participants reported an awareness of how they were perceived on stage, and with respect to this, they noted they played certain roles. A persona that embodied their performance ideals, often drawing on their experiences as an audience member themselves.

'...it's not even about what you're listening to, you just can't take your eyes off him because there's something about him. That's the goal. ...To be able to play, just as good and be that cool on stage, that's the goal, that's what I aspire to be' (P4.)

The current study posits stage persona, as the choices the individual musician makes relating to their behaviour and appearance on stage. When this is considered alongside the music itself, the on-stage performance of an individual musician can be holistically accounted for. Therefore, stage persona, as attended to by an audience, may account, in part, for this noted discrepancy between perceived music quality and perceived performance quality. Fundamentally, this relates to how audiences perceive a performance, in keeping with this, audience engagement was reported by participants as the defining feature of live music performance.

Audience engagement

Participants viewed the promotion of audience engagement as incredibly important and, frequently, judgement of the quality of the performance was based on the extent to which audience engagement had been achieved.

'I did plenty of gigs where people would be silent and by the end of the show I'd be pouring with sweat and my voice would be really hurting, but I would've got them to at least sing.' (P1.)

'...at the end of the gig you know whether it's been a good gig because they've all been doing what you need them to do.' (P5.)

This was however, tempered with an awareness of the potential moderating factors that could influence their capacity to achieve this.

Impact of the audience

‘...you’re there to entertain, but at the same time part of that entertainment is them wanting to be entertained as well and it goes hand in hand’ (P5.)

High variability was noted between audiences, given a relatively stable performance from the performer, the resulting engagement elicited from the audience may still change dramatically between performances.

‘...play these same gigs, same set, same effort in and they sit there, end of a song, no claps, no nothing, they don’t even care. They’d rather you weren’t there’ (P4.)

With so much of the perceived success of a performance in the hands of the audience, factors that influence the audience’s relative engagement are notably important. Corresponding research holistically exploring the performance experience from the perspective of the audience would therefore be an important area for exploration. From the performer perspective, participants drew an important distinction between performing to a familiar crowd who had previous knowledge of them, compared with an unfamiliar crowd that didn’t.

‘if they’ve never seen you before, they obviously don’t know the songs so they might just want to stand there and listen’ (P1.)

Whilst this oversimplifies the complex interaction between an audience comprised of many individuals each with their own level of familiarity and is reductionist of factors such as performance genre. This does illustrate audience familiarity as a salient contributing factor to overall audience engagement. Further study with the specific aim of elucidating this aspect of performance would be required, owing to its complexity even as a singular performance aspect.

Impact of the venue

A further variable performers frequently noted as facilitative or inhibitive of audience engagement was the performance venue. Performers linked the increased space with enhanced ability to perform, and consequently enhanced audience engagement.

‘the more space the better. Because you can do a lot more with interaction with band members and going out into the crowd a bit as well’ (P5.)

It is also noted however, that bigger venues may only be better to a certain extent. At a certain point, it may inhibit the ability of the performer to engage with the audience.

‘I’ve never done it before, but hopefully I will do, when you play a stadium I reckon that’s very challenging for anyone anyway, because you’re playing to such a massive audience, you’re playing to people you can’t see because they’re so far back. I reckon that could play with your head as well, because it’s hard to read and perform for someone that you can’t really see or know who’s there.’ (P3.)

As this was only a suggestion, no firm conclusions can be drawn from this, however, it is illustrative of a potential ceiling for the finding that ‘bigger is better’ relative to venue size. Following from this, one participant noted that sometimes spatial features of the venue invited audience engagement to an unwanted degree.

'if we're playing and there's not a stage, and they've had quite a few drinks, they can get a bit too... they can try and take the mic out of my hand and get a bit too much' (P5. – Wedding & Function)

This sentiment has been echoed in previous research, Brand et al. (2012) discusses the relevance of venue size on jazz performance, noting that smaller venues were considered better by the audience owing to their intimacy, however, performers noted that this also invited a degree of overfamiliarity and unwanted audience intrusion. The current study provides preliminary support for this finding across genres, however, as other participants only talked about audience engagement positively, further investigation is required. This would also present an opportunity to explore the limitations to audience engagement potentially presented by especially large venues.

Feedback

'Ozzy Osbourne says the more crazy that the audience go, the more crazy that he goes, and that's true. ...And it's the same vice versa. Like if the audience isn't doing anything then I'm just going to stand there and sing and get it over and get it done with.' (P1.)

The nature of live musical performance makes audience feedback immediately and abundantly available, performers are inherently exposed to it and their performances continuously shaped by it. However, the methods through which the performer attends to such a vast quantity of available feedback are currently unestablished. This paper suggests two potential approaches performers may take to this end. One participant reported a tendency to view the audience as a single entity.

'...I don't interact with singular people. Just act as if the audience is one thing, not as like 200 people.' (P4.)

This deindividuation may be one way in which a performer can parsimoniously attend to their audience without being overwhelmed by the quantity of available information. Comparatively, however, other participants noted an opposite approach to attending to the audience. These performers would isolate and target specific individuals in the audience who weren't engaging to encourage them to interact.

'there have been times when I've seen people sat down and I've just been like "get up, come here, make some friends, enjoy yourselves"' (P3.)

How performers attend to their audiences is likely much more complicated than the dichotomous approaches as presented here. Performers will most likely use a varying combination of attending to the audience specifically and holistically across the course of a performance, and the strategy they adopt may fluctuate over time. Further research would be required to elucidate this aspect of performance fully and as such this direction is advocated.

Wider experience

The current study initially aimed to solely investigate the direct performance experience, exploring meanings performers attached to it, however, it became evident that separating the performance from who the performer was, would not do justice to the complexity of the phenomenon and would not be adequate in exploring the phenomenon holistically. Considering the performer themselves lead to emergent

themes of the performers development over time and, most saliently, performance as being heavily culturally embedded.

Development over time

Participants acknowledged that ability to perform and understanding of what it means to perform develops over time, this was interpreted positively by participants as improvement with experience.

'it's a case of... the more you do it, the more you get better at it. ...When I first started I couldn't really perform, I just stood there with the guitar strapped up, as high up as possible to make sure I was playing and my technique was flawless and everything. But like 3 years down the line, I'm on a [location of a large festival] stage, with my guitar like way below my knees, just dancing around and going crazy' (P4.) [changed for anonymity]

Cultural embedding

Performers initially reported the ways in which they performed as influenced by wider culture, through being an audience member themselves, and through the relevance of their role models. Taking cues on how to perform from being embedded within a lifeworld in which live music performance was incredibly prevalent.

'...like I want to be Slash ...I just pretend that like I'm doing what they're doing. Like what the audience is seeing is what I look at when I'm at festivals watching my favourite band' (P4.)

As such, performers as participants are incredibly well situated to inform on the topic and the use of expert participants such as this is advocated for future investigation into the topic. Through discussion, participants also noted various cultural features that they associated with the genre of music they performed and the ways in which they chose to present this through their stage persona.

'...it's very country, like, everyone was in the boots and the hats, got the big cowboy belt buckles on and everything. So, we kind of had to dress appropriately on stage and wear a similar kind of thing ...The band had to have the country image' (P4. – Country)

'...on stage, in the band I do try and like put like... try and make my voice a little bit lower, a little bit more gravelly and like meaner sounding. I do like scream and shout a lot at people and swear, I swear a lot anyway but on stage it is a lot, because like with that music you just want to feel that aggression and angst.' (P1. – Metal)

Furthermore, the nature of audience engagement was also noted as variable between performance genres. The type of audience behaviour performers elicited was dependent on the social conventions of the genre and engagement-oriented features of the music itself.

'They're not so much the jumping around, they'll sing along and everything ...more just want to listen to the music and take it in, and just admire, because prog rock is quite technical, they sort of want to admire what the performers are actually doing, what they're playing.' (P2. – progressive rock)

'moshing... or just like headbanging, or just moving...' (P1. – metal)

‘The best one with crowd interaction we do with our set is, um... ‘Sit Down’ by James ...we’ll sit down with them, and get them to do call and response’ (P5. – Wedding & Function)

Therefore, performances themselves are also discovered to be embedded within, and influenced by culture. Recent work by Susino and Schubert (2018) discusses the considerable impact of the cultures associated with music genres on biasing listeners impressions of the music. Their study represents one of many beginning to explore culture as incredibly impactful within music psychology. This research has been primarily devoted to music listening however (Boer & Fischer, 2012; Miranda et al., 2015). As such, current findings contribute to a growing body of research on the interactions of culture in music, specifically, this study elucidates its interactions with performers and performed music.

A potentially salient area for future exploration would be exploring how performers exist as influencers within culture, this may tie to the level of fame of the performer. Similarly, to when hypothesising about audience engagement in especially large venues, one of the limitations of the current study was in the challenge to recruit performers of this level of fame. Consequently, this variable was not emphasised in the recruitment process, performers were considered professional in line with previous work by Geeves et al. (2016). However, the field could benefit from further defined conceptualisations regarding what ‘amateur’ compared with ‘professional’ musician describes, including further subdivisions within each of these labels. One solution to the challenge of recruiting famous performers may be in employing discourse analysis of published interviews and media. Working from the themes established by the current study, this divergent methodological approach would provide insight as to the transferability of findings.

Direct experience

Performers categorised their experience through physical challenge, a transition from anxiety to positive affect (adrenaline and euphoria), and distorted perception of time. As the current study’s findings on this aspect of the phenomenon are congruent with the literature (Kenny, 2005; Taborsky, 2007; Lamont, 2012; O’Neil, 1999) the primary theme discussed relates to how these features may interact.

Transition in affect related to perception of time

The embodied and temporal experiences of performance were described similarly by all participants.

‘Say we’re on at half 9 at night, and we get to [the venue] for 5, so what’s that. You’ve got 4 and a half hours to wait. That time, is the slowest time you will ever experience, because you’re waiting and you’re nervous and it just drags on. It’s sort of like torture, it’s just making you wait and wait, get more nervous, get more worked up, and the closer you get, the more nervous you get. ...But as soon as the first song starts playing your nerves slowly go away ...like I’ve said, adrenaline rises and it sort of switches and you don’t want it to end. And it ends and it literally feels like you’re up there for two minutes.’ (P1.) [changed for anonymity]

“...after the first song, my nerves completely went. My nerves just completely went and just changed to... like ecstatic, adrenaline, energy, and just complete happiness.’ (P1.)

A connection was made between emotion and perception of time, with the time before performance related to anxiety and slowed time, whilst performance was related to positive affect and faster perception of time. Furthermore, one participant noted that during performances in which anxiety was present throughout, this speeding of time did not occur.

‘I’d get really nervous, the songs seemed to drag because I was so nervous and I was trying to make sure I didn’t make any mistakes’ (P4.)

Wider, generalised research on temporal perception as related to affect has demonstrated similar findings (Droit-Volet & Meck, 2007). Whilst music performance literature notes experiences of timelessness during flow (O’Neil, 1999), at current temporal perception related to specifically music performance anxiety has not been established. Several studies have demonstrated flow and music performance as negatively correlated (Fullagar et al., 2012; Cohen & Bodner, 2018), however, temporal perception related to music performance anxiety was not accounted for in these studies. As such, temporal perception during flow compared with musical performance anxiety may also be antithetical, however, further experimental study of this is required to establish robust conclusions.

Discussion and conclusion

The primary findings of this study relate to the influences of culture and audience engagement on live music performance. The ongoing ‘conversation’ taking place between performer and audience in live music performance has been noted before in the literature (Berliner, 1994; Davidson, 1997). Qualitative research on jazz performance by Brand et al. (2012) establishes the considerable, influential power of the audience and the reciprocal nature of the performer-audience relationship. Similarly, non-genre-specific findings from Geeves, McIlwain, and Sutton (2016), posit the importance of a performer-audience ‘connection’ established within performance. The present study identifies audience engagement as the defining feature of live music performance, noting its variable actualisation relative to performance genre, and as moderated by both venue and audience characteristics.

The current study also establishes the significant influence of contextual factors on performance. The most salient of these factors is the variable influence of culture on the performer themselves, their performance, and the audience. Musical performance evaluation within literature is frequently based on technical proficiency (McPherson & Schubert, 2004). Findings from this study would challenge this approach as reductionist of the complexity of the phenomenon. Live performed music cannot exist in isolation and this should be reflected in the fields approach to study. Many studies have established relevant external factors such as the tendency of assessors to anchor evaluations around their initial impression of the performer (Vasil, 1973; Ybarra, 2001) and the impact of the halo effect (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997), however, these are rarely accounted for in practice.

Furthermore, pertaining to assessment in areas such as music education, movement towards incorporating measures of the additional facets of performance such as ability to engage the audience is advocated. How the performer performs, beyond simply the music that they play should be accounted for. The argument could be made that assessors are predisposed to a certain level of engagement, and as such cannot accurately assess this through their own personal experience. Therefore, the development and implementation of broader measures could be incredibly valuable for the field, both for the primary purpose of measuring audience engagement, but also relating to the increases in understanding that could be gained in the process.

To conclude, this report opened with the assertion that musical performance is exceptionally complex. The findings of this study do not dispute this, the immense complexity of the phenomenon is only supported by this research. The primary purpose was in establishing salient aspects of the holistic performer experience of live music performance and the links between them. These are presented in Figure 1., providing a platform for further research. The next step for this model is testing its robustness, accounting for variables such as a wider spread of genre, fame, gender etc. Furthermore, with adaptation, the model may have wider-ranging applications across other performance-based disciplines. Overall, the findings present a case for live music performance as including, not only, all the complexities of the music itself, but as multi-faceted, inclusive of all the additional complexity this entails.

Reflexive Analysis

Noted in previous literature is the capacity for researcher beliefs and assumptions to influence data analysis using IPA (Elliot et al., 1999). As such, in facilitating the transparency of this study (Smith, 2015) I will explain my previous experience with the topic, and how I feel this situated me to explore the phenomenon of live music performance. I am a musician myself and have been embedded within various musical environments and networks for most my life, including many instances of live performance. This topic formed the basis for a similar yet divergent coursework project during my second year of study as an undergraduate psychology student, this project went very well and I felt it elucidated a large amount of the phenomenon that was underrepresented within the literature. That project acted somewhat like a pilot study to my dissertation.

My prior experience with the topic placed me well to conduct in-depth qualitative interviews, terms and concepts presented by participants were familiar to me and this facilitated smooth interview proceedings. Similarly, the nature of the convenience sample used facilitated rapport and understanding of participants responses. However, as I was the only researcher, I was also aware of the influence my prior interpretations may have in data analysis. To resolve this to as great an extent as possible, I made a cautious reflexive effort to emphasise understanding the conceptualisations of the phenomenon as presented by the participants themselves, alongside interpretations through my own conceptual frameworks of the topic.

In the previous coursework, I had recruited a performer friend of mine, owing to the richness of the data collected in that process, I chose to again recruit him for the initial interview of this study. As part of this process, he recommended two individuals for further interviews owing to their performance experience, one of which was a mutual friend of ours and became the second participant. Participant 3 was another performer

friend of mine who volunteered after learning of my research. The other individual recommended by the initial participant became participant 4 who then in turn recommended participant 5, at which point theoretical saturation was reached. I deliberately emphasised the right to withdraw to participants explaining that they were under no obligation to participate. Furthermore, social desirability in answers was accounted for through the open nature of the questions asked within the interview.

Interviews, excepting the initial interview, were informed by my analysis of prior interview data and the understanding I gained from this. Reflection on established themes influenced the interview schedule, and once all interviews had been conducted, comprehensive data analysis was conducted with my developed understanding of the topic.

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