

Perception-based classification of Expressive Musical Terms: Toward a parameterization of musical expressiveness

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Abstract

Expressive Musical Terms (EMTs) are commonly used by composers as verbal descriptions of musical expressiveness and characters that performers are requested to convey. We suggest a classification of 55 of these terms, based on the perception of professional music performers who were asked (i) to organize the considered EMTs in a two-dimensional plane in such a way that proximity reflects similarity; (ii) to rate these EMTs according to *valence*, *arousal*, *extraversion* and *neuroticism*, using 7-level Likert scales. Using a minimization procedure, we found that a satisfactory partition requires these EMTs to be organized in four clusters (whose centroids are associated with *tenderness*, *happiness*, *anger* and *sadness*) located in the four quarters of the *valence-arousal* plane of the *circumplex model of affect* developed by Russell (1980). In terms of the related *positive-negative activation* parameters, introduced by Watson and Tellegen (1985), we obtained a significant correlation between *positive activation* and *extraversion* and between *negative activation* and *neuroticism*. This demonstrates that these relations, previously observed in personality studies by Watson & Clark (1992a), extend to the musical field.