ETHNOMUS PERFORMATIVE ANALYTICAL TOOL: A CONCEPTUAL THOUGHT IN PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL MUSIC IN GHANAIAN CULTURAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: *One of the areas of school music that have drawn attention to researchers is how music performances can be analysed by way of assessment to obtain objectivity in awarding specific grades to students involved in the performance. This paper highlights Ethnomus assessment tool, a culturally contextualised analytical tool for analysing and assessing school musical performances objectively. Additionally, it sheds light on prevalent notions of discussing music using Western musical discourse theories. Simultaneously, it establishes specific analytical frameworks that are adapted to the cultural context for the evaluation of music performances in Ghanaian educational institutions. The paper was approached topically and deductively in order to unravel situations of subjectivity and narrowness of the Westernised analysis and projects a thought that comprehensively situates itself within an African context for music performance assessment. The core of the Ethnomus assessment is in how the cultural elements have been used in the performance as well as the thoughts of audience about the performance. Three people are involved in the assessment procedure: the teacher, the student (performer) and the audience. The paper establishes the Ethnomus assessment tool for school music performance, aiming to contribute to the ongoing discourse in this field and promote objectivity within the specific context of Ghanaian culture. The recommendation is made for educators and musical analysts to adopt a holistic approach, drawing upon the Ethnomus assessment presented in the paper as a foundation for their assessments and analyses. This approach is envisioned to enhance the depth and objectivity of evaluation of musical performances in schools within the Ghanaian cultural milieu.*

KEYWORDS: Ethnomus, Analysis, Assessment, School music, Musical performance, Performative analysis.

INTRODUCTION

School music performance refers to musical presentations or displays that take place within an educational setting, typically involving students, teachers, or musical ensembles affiliated with a school (Mielke & Andrews, 2023). These performances can encompass a wide range of musical genres, styles, and formats, including choir performances, instrumental recitals, band concerts, and theatrical musical productions. In the Music School of Ghana, especially, at the basic school level, such performances are predominantly Ghanaian traditional music performances. In the context of school music, performances serve various purposes, such as providing students with opportunities to showcase their musical talents, fostering a sense of community within the school, and contributing to the overall cultural and artistic environment of the educational institution. School music performances often involve collaborative efforts among students, teachers and the audience. As postulated by Gaunt and Westerlund (2016), such events may be part of regular school assemblies, concerts, or special programs organised to celebrate specific occasions, achievements, or milestones within the school community. School music performances play a crucial role in nurturing students' musical abilities, promoting teamwork, and offering a platform for artistic expression within the educational framework.

Musical performance is a structured presentation of musical sounds, encompassing controlled silences, typically crafted for the purpose of entertaining, enlightening, or enriching the audience (Yang, 2023). The parameters defining a musical performance are frequently shaped by culturally recognized norms within a specific community. While musical performances exhibit variations across diverse global cultures, their essence remains consistent in projecting musical elements to engage and resonate with the audience or listeners (Goetze, 2017). Within the school context, musical performances form the integral part of music teaching and learning but assessment procedures, by way of analysis of the performances are not readily available to the teachers who teach them.

It is worthy of note that assessment in music education has been a common topic of conversation for researchers (Denis, 2018; Fisher, 2008; Payne et al., 2019; Scott, 2012). Music educators, especially those in the basic schools in Ghana, have been faced with the pressures of increasing reliance on standardised assessment, including portfolio assessment schemes which have never worked for many years. The most prevalent approach for evaluating student proficiency and teacher efficacy has shifted towards relying on these standardised test scores (Sugianto, et al., 2023). Indeed, this is attributed to the fact that music education in public basic schools primarily takes the form of performance-based classes (Baird, 2023; Costes-Onishi & Kwek, 2023; Whitson, 2023). For these ensembles, performances become the primary form of assessment for skill mastery and teacher effectiveness. The thorough examination of the reliability and validity of these events has been extensively researched by scholars such as Latimer Jr et al. (2010) and Hash (2012). However, the effectiveness of these tools as an assessment and their impact on self-image and motivation remains an area that requires further exploration.

Again, the absence of a performative analytical tool for evaluating school music performances prompts a situation where music teachers may resort to either employing their idiosyncratic methods or relying on Westernised frameworks to assess musical performances. This reliance on Westernised approaches, however, may introduce ambiguity when applied to the African music performance context. Morrison (2018) explains performative analysis in music as a

scholarly approach that involves examining and interpreting a musical performance through the lens of both the performer's execution and the audience's reception. He is of the view that this analytical method delves into the nuances of how a piece is rendered, considering elements such as technique, expression, and interpretation by the performer. Additionally, performative analysis takes into account the impact of the performance on the audience, exploring their reactions, engagement, and the overall experience. From this definition, it is indeed clear that the audience involvement is absent.

In essence, performative analysis aims to go beyond the written score and theoretical aspects of music, focusing on the lived experience of a musical piece in a performance setting. It acknowledges the dynamic and interactive nature of music as a performed art form, emphasising the significance of both the performer and the audience in shaping the overall musical experience. In this regard, assessment of school music performance has always relied on the teacher without involving the audience.

An assessment tool in music performance entails a methodical scrutiny and interpretation of the diverse elements within a musical composition. It centres on comprehending the structure, form, and significance of the music, along with considering the cultural and historical context in which the performance takes place. This statement underscores that the cultural and historical context of Ghana is distinct from that of any European country. In Ghana, music holds a pivotal role in daily life, contributing significantly to diverse social, religious, and cultural occasions. Its performance spans various contexts, encompassing traditional festivals, religious ceremonies, and entertainment venues.

Like Meyer (2015) intimated, the cultural landscape of Ghana, in particular, is characterised by its richness and diversity, encompassing a dynamic spectrum of musical traditions that mirror the country's historical evolution, core values, and societal intricacies. Therefore, within this cultural milieu, the method by which music is executed and scrutinised assumes paramount significance, playing a pivotal role in unravelling the profound cultural connotations and the evolving dynamics of Ghanaian society. Thus, the excessive dependence on Western methodologies for analysing and assessing musical performances in schools has resulted in a deficiency in conducting comprehensive assessments of music performance. This shortfall is particularly evident in the absence of an analytical paradigm specifically tailored to the cultural context of the country, despite the inherent cultural significance of music in Ghana. Intricate rhythmic patterns, distinctive tonal structures, and symbolic connotations that frequently go beyond simple musical notes are characteristics of traditional Ghanaian music.

Additionally, as a result of globalisation and technological development, current music in Ghana is fusing traditional and modern components in a compelling way that calls for distinctive understanding of musical performances (Agyefi, 2021). The challenge arises from the lack of a well-defined assessment framework capable of faithfully capturing the intricate nature of musical performances in Ghanaian schools. The existing analytical paradigms, used in musical discourse, and which dovetails into assessment are predominantly rooted in Western contexts. This may inadequately address the subtleties, indigenous concepts, and cultural implications inherent in Ghanaian music. Consequently, there is a potential for misunderstandings or oversimplifications of the meanings and values embedded in the music, posing a risk to the preservation of cultural authenticity. This deficiency in assessment tools hinders objectivity in school music performance assessment.

In order to bridge this lacuna, it is imperative to formulate a thorough analytical but assessment paradigm firmly rooted in the cultural milieu of Ghana, harmonising with the distinctive attributes of its musical performances. This paradigm should encompass considerations of historical foundations, social functionalities, spiritual dimensions, and the intricate interplay of assessment between the teacher, the students and the audience. Furthermore, it ought to acknowledge the contributions of individual musicians, ensembles, and audiences in shaping the meaning and significance of the music. By developing an analytical but an assessment tool, specifically designed for the Ghanaian musical context, scholars, researchers, musicians, and enthusiasts can gain deeper insights into the complexities of school music performance. This proposed framework not only promises a more precise interpretation of the cultural significances embedded in the music but also cultivates an enhanced appreciation for the diversity and evolution characterising Ghanaian musical traditions within the context of a swiftly transforming world. The overarching objective is to guarantee objectivity of the essence of Ghanaian school music performance assessments, recognizing its profound influence on the broader global musical performances. In this position paper, I expound upon the four primary modes of discourse regarding music, as established by Western music theory. Additionally, I advocate for an assessment tool called Ethnomus assessment tool that aligns more contextually with the analysis, assessment, and discussion of school music performances in Ghana.

REVIEW OF EXISTING APPROACHES OF MUSICAL VIEWPOINTS

Referentialism

According to Eitan (2008), referentialism refers to the extra musical world of concepts, actions, emotional state, and character. In light of this, music inherently extends its reference beyond its intrinsic components to encompass extrinsic elements of significance, including historical context, cultural connotations, and narrative connections. Performers play a pivotal role in conveying referentialism in music. It is their interpretation that brings out the non-musical elements present in a composition. While the composer provides a framework, the performer adds nuance, shaping the narrative or emotional trajectory of the piece. Taruskin's work scrutinises the interactions between musical text and performance. He argues that referentialism plays a pivotal role in shaping the performer's decisions about tempo, dynamics, and articulation, illustrating the practical implications of extramusical meaning on stage (Taruskin, 1995). Agawu (2014) also explores semiotic aspects of music, contending that signs and symbols in music significantly affect how performers convey meaning. He delves into how performers grapple with referential elements to communicate specific narratives. Kramer examines the historicity of music and its contextualization in cultural frameworks. His work helps elucidate the notion that music cannot be divorced from its referential context and that performers must engage with this context to deliver a meaningful rendition (Kramer, 2021). In analysing music in the Ghanaian cultural contexts, the referentialist point of view plays a very important role because there are so many other activities that goes on during our performances that is outside the music itself like dancing, costuming, and other things that require the performers to know the intentions of the composer to be able to give a meaningful performance to their audience. Referentialism in music, when realised through performance, offers a multi-dimensional experience, enriching compositions with non-musical meanings. The challenge at hand stems from the participatory nature of African music performances, specifically in the context of Ghanaian school music performances, which diverges from the more contemplative

approach. These performances typically entail active involvement from both the performers and the audience. While referentialism primarily addresses the interpretation of music by performers, tailored to enhance audience understanding, the participatory nature of these performances raises the possibility of audience disconnection if their perspectives on the performance are not actively solicited. In this manner, relying on referentialism to assess or talk about school music performance in Ghana may not be complete. In this vein, utilising referentialism as the sole basis for assessing or discussing school music performances in Ghana may prove inadequate.

Absolutism

Absolutism is one of the ways of talking about music. According to Friedmann (2018), the absolutist viewpoint is where music projects the essentials of beauty without the need of programmatic references or associations. Eitan (2008) also states that absolutism lies exclusively in the perception of the relationship set forth within the musical works of art. Adherents of absolutism assert that meaning is autonomously generated, implying that the significance of music is self-contained and resides exclusively within the confines of the musical composition. According to this perspective, responses evoked are considered secondary and independent of the music itself, with the primary function being the expression of musicality.

Kruse (2005) states that Langer (1957) argued that music is an autonomous art form, distinct from other modes of expression, and it communicates meaning solely through its internal structures. Langer contended that music's meanings are not referential or extramusical but are grounded in the relationships between musical elements, such as pitch, rhythm, and timbre. Hanslick (1854) held a similar view asserting that attempts to attribute specific extramusical meanings to music are futile. He emphasised the inherent subjectivity of human interpretation, contending that different listeners may ascribe vastly different meanings to the same piece of music, thus supporting the idea that music's meaning is self-contained according to Gurău-Mihalache (2015). Levinson (1982) has contributed to this discourse by discussing the open-textured nature of music. He posits that although music has the capacity to elicit emotions and conjure mental images, these responses remain fundamentally intertwined with the music itself. This is because listeners engage in the process of formulating their individual interpretations and establishing connections to the auditory stimuli. Levinson's standpoint corresponds with the notion that the meaning of music is inherent to the musical composition itself. The absolutist perspective, as advocated by Levinson, exclusively attributes meaning to the musical piece and disregards external factors. Applying an absolutist lens to analyse musical performance within the Ghanaian cultural context proves limiting, as such performances encompass a multitude of elements, including storytelling, dancing, and cultural concepts. These additional elements extend beyond the confines of the musical piece and contribute significantly to the holistic understanding of musical expressions in Ghanaian society.

Formalism

Musical formalism is the theory that music's nature is innate, self-evident, able to be systematically deduced, and rational. Essentially, a composition's meaning is entirely determined by its form and structure (Staufer, 2018). According to Staufer, formalists in music theory, like Schenker, insist that music's primary meaning lies in its structural elements. They argue that music is a language unto itself, with a grammar and syntax that convey meaning intrinsically, without any reliance on external referents. This perspective asserts that music's absolute meaning is derived from its internal relationships and coherence (Rosenschein & Smoliar, 1978). Similarly, to Grant (2012), formalism emphasises the products of musical creativity, usually called musical works or pieces, as being the key component in understanding what music is and does, why it should be valued, and whether music is most important to education. He goes on to assert that the formalist perspective on musical experience is predominantly intellectual, focusing on the cognitive engagement with form for its intrinsic value. Drawing from this literature, it becomes evident that formalists approach music by scrutinising its structural elements. Consequently, if a formalist were to analyse a music performance, the emphasis would likely be on the structural intricacies inherent in the music performance.

The importance of the structural and technical components of the music itself is emphasised by the formalist approach to music performance. With this it is seen that the main objective of a musical performance is to faithfully and precisely communicate the composer's intentions as they are laid forth in the written score. In accordance with this perspective, the performer's interpretation is expected to be shaped by a comprehensive understanding of musical elements such as form, harmony, rhythm, melody, and dynamics. In this context, it is emphasised that the musical composition should not be eclipsed by the performer's internal reflections, past experiences, or external influences. The focus remains on a faithful representation of the inherent creative components of the musical piece.

Formalists argue that an adept performance meticulously follows the principles of harmony, coherence, and unity. They emphasise the significance of accentuating the overall structure and connections among various elements in the composition. Moreover, they stress the critical nature of refining technical skills and achieving mastery over the voice or instrument to authentically communicate the composer's intentions. Nevertheless, in the Ghanaian cultural context, strict adherence to these formal rules could potentially restrict performers from expressing their musical abilities freely and limit audience engagement in the performance.

Expressionism

Expressionism is seen as artistic style in which the artist seeks to depict not objective reality but rather the subjective emotions and responses that objects and events arouse within a person (Encyclopaedia, 2023). Arnold Schoenberg is commonly recognized as a trailblazer in the realm of Expressionism within the musical domain. His atonal compositions, notably exemplified in the works of the Second Viennese School, mark a radical departure from traditional tonality.

Grimes (2012) gave an exposition on Schoenberg's seminal essay titled *Brahms the Progressive*, in relation to expressionism and stated that "for the necessity of moving beyond traditional harmony and structure in music to genuinely convey the inner turmoil and

dissonance inherent in human experience" (128). An exemplary manifestation of Expressionism within his body of work is evident in "Pierrot Lunaire," a composition that intricately weaves spoken word with dissonant music, creating a haunting and fragmented narrative (Penton, 2021). Similarly, Gustav Mahler, a prominent figure in the musical landscape, infused Expressionist qualities into his symphonies. Notably, a piece such as the *Symphony No. 6* illustrates Mahler's extensive orchestration, dynamic contrasts, and intricate harmonic language, conveying a deep introspection and emotional resonance reflective of his personal psychological journey and the broader human condition as highlighted by Monahan (2011).

Expressionist composers often employed dissonance as a means to evoke powerful emotions. A notable example is evident in Alban Berg's opera "Wozzeck," where Berg's utilisation of atonality and exploration of psychologically charged themes delve into the unsettling and anxious undercurrents of the human psyche. This effectively captures the subjective emotional turmoil experienced by the characters in the opera, as elucidated by Bernstein (2010).

The focal point on articulating intense emotions and inner sensations in the interpretation of a musical piece is denoted as expressionism in music performance. Performers are urged to delve deeply into the emotional dimensions of the music, actively expressing their own feelings during the rendition. This encouragement for performers to deviate from strict adherence to the composer's directives, in order to more authentically convey their emotions, often culminates in a highly personalised and distinctive interpretation of the piece. Extreme dynamic contrasts, dramatic phrasing, and powerful bodily gestures are only a few expressionist performers' tools for conveying their emotional states to the audience. A visceral and emotional connection must be made with the audience in order to elicit powerful feelings and perhaps even challenge conventional ideas of musical harmony and beauty.

The incorporation of expressionism stands as one of the methodologies through which Ghanaian music scholars analyse their music performances. This approach affords the composer the opportunity to imbue their music with purpose, while concurrently providing the performer with a platform to articulate the composer's intentions to the audience in a comprehensible manner. However, it is noteworthy that Expressionism, by its nature, directs its emphasis primarily on the performance itself, potentially resulting in a silent audience if the intricacies of the performance are not fully comprehended.

Elements of Ghanaian Musical Performance

One of the things that justifies and rationalises a new assessment tool for music performance is the inherent elements in Ghanaian music performances. The Ghanaian musical performance comprises numerous components seamlessly integrated to form a cohesive presentation. These elements, encompassing dance, attire, traditional musical instruments, and stage arrangements, operate in synergy rather than isolation, collectively enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the performance. To illustrate, in moments of melancholy within the music, the costumes and dances mirror the mood, similarly responding with vibrancy and liveliness when the musical tone shifts to joyous expressions. In this fashion, the sentiments and reflections of the audience become pivotal in evaluating a specific school music performance. The effectiveness of influencing audience satisfaction can only be discerned through direct insights from the audience themselves.

Cultural Implication

Another justification for the Ethnomus assessment tool lies with the cultural implication of the performance. What cultural trait will involve the performance? What does the teacher consider as cultural value in the performance? What about the performers themselves? What about the audience? Indeed, the evaluation of school music should encompass the incorporation of cultural elements inherent in the overall performance, reflecting the cultural contexts relevant to the execution. In instances where the performance originates from the Ewe culture, it becomes imperative for school music to integrate Ewe cultural themes. The costumes used, historical context, drums, songs and so on. This approach aids performers in comprehending the specific cultural context of their presentation, fostering creativity in their preparation for performances.

Storytelling and Narrative

Similar to numerous cultures globally, storytelling holds a significant role in Ghanaian society. It serves as a medium for information dissemination, education, and historical preservation. For performers, effectively conveying their message becomes a delicate balance – ensuring engagement without causing disinterest. Elements like dance and costume play a pivotal role in communicating the storyline to the audience, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the narrative or message embedded in the performance. Consequently, the assessment or analysis should prioritise the effective communication of storylines to the audience. Providing the audience with an opportunity to express how the narrative in the performance has personally resonated with them becomes a crucial aspect of this evaluation.

Execution Artistry

The quality of a performance is inherently tied to the proficiency of the performer. Mastery over the performance and technical competence are essential attributes for effectively coordinating with the various elements constituting the performance. For instance, a dancer must be attuned to the drummers' cues to avoid disrupting the performance or causing confusion among fellow performers. Similarly, the drummer or timeline player in a traditional ensemble holds a pivotal role, demanding consistency throughout the performance. The performer should also be able to convey the emotions within the music to the audience. This area of the performance is critical to school music performance analysis to ensure objectivity in assessing performances put up by the students.

Ethnomus Assessment Tool

Ethnomus originates linguistically from the fusion of "ethnic" and "music". It precisely denotes an emphasis on cultural music performed within an educational environment. The upshot discussion on the Westernised ways of analysing music reveals that whether applied independently or in tandem, absolutism, expressionism, formalism, and referentialism as methods for discussing or analysing music often exhibit a notable absence of consideration for audience participation. The Ethnomus Analysis is specially designed to analyse and assess school music performances. It does not consider the cultural context in which the performance takes place only but acknowledges the crucial role of the audience in assessing a performance. The model takes into account the general thoughts of the audience, performers' perception of their own performance and the involvement of the music teacher, who may be conducting the assessment as illustrated in Fig. 1 below.
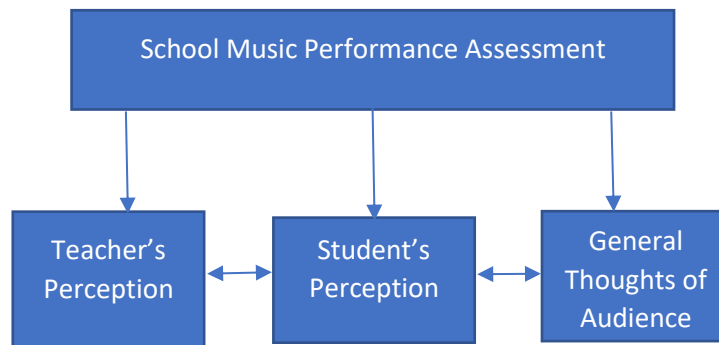
Figure 1: Ethnomus Analysis by Arko-Mensah (2024)

The approach aims to integrate diverse perspectives, fostering a comprehensive evaluation of musical performances in schools, taking into consideration the cultural context in which the music is performed. It places the responsibility of the assessment to the teacher, the students who are the performers and the audience, who are the consumers of the performance.

Teacher's Perception

The teacher, who is the main assessor or analyst sets the criteria, based on these thoughts for the specific skill being looked for. This may include:

i. *Technical Proficiency of the performers*. This measures mastery of instrumental or vocal techniques, accuracy in pitch, rhythm, and dynamics.

ii. *Expressiveness* that deals with the ability of the performers to convey emotions and interpret the musical piece effectively. This may include use of dynamics, phrasing, and articulation to enhance expressiveness.

iii. *Ensemble Coordination* that looks at cohesiveness and synchronisation among ensemble members. It also includes effective communication and responsiveness during group performances.

iv. *Musical Interpretation* will capture how the performers convey the composer's intentions. Individual or ensemble's unique interpretation of the performance will be necessary.

v. *Stage Presence* will deal with the confidence, posture, and overall stage demeanour of the performers including how they engage and captivate the audience.

vi. *Cultural Relevance*: Incorporation of cultural elements in the performance as well as the authenticity in presenting cultural themes will be necessary

vii. *Creativity* will include originality in arrangements or interpretations as well as innovative use of musical elements to enhance the performance.

Student's Perception

Performers can play a pivotal role in assessing their own musical performance, contributing to their ongoing growth and improvement. By actively engaging in self-assessment, performers can develop a heightened sense of awareness, identify areas for improvement, and cultivate a proactive approach to their own artistic development. Self-assessment is an integral part of the learning journey, fostering continuous growth and refinement in musical skills and expression. They reflect on the overall learning process leading up to the performance. This will include the effectiveness of practice strategies and rehearsal techniques. Performers (students) can assess themselves using the criteria set by the teacher.

General Thoughts of Audience

The general thoughts of the audience about the performance will basically include constructive feedback that focuses on positive aspects and areas for improvement. It will also encompass expression of appreciation for individual or collective achievements. Their engagement and thoughtful feedback contribute to a rich and meaningful musical experience for all.

CONCLUSION

Ethnomus Assessment tool presents a framework that aids objectivity in school music performance assessment. As mentioned earlier, numerous educators have traditionally utilised their personal perspectives to evaluate the musical performances of their students. There has been a notable overreliance on Western viewpoints in the assessment and analysis of musical performances. Frequently, the emphasis has been primarily on the auditory elements of the music or the composition itself, neglecting consideration of the culturally contextualised environment in which the performance takes place. Ethnomus assessment tool has three major aspect with the suggested scores marked out of 100 as indicated below:

a.   Teachers' Perception – 50 marks

b.   Performer's Perception – 30 marks

c.   General Thoughts of Audience on the Performance – 20 marks

This framework will certainly help music teachers to do objective assessment of student's performances. It suggests that the absence of any of the aspects makes the school music performances assessment incomplete. Indeed, an analytical tool portrays a holistic approach to assess school music performances. It is recommended that music teachers and educators adopt such a holistic and comprehensive approach by utilising the Ethnomus assessment proposed in the paper as a fundamental framework for assessing music performances. Ethnomus assessment tool is anticipated to augment the thoroughness and objectivity of assessments for musical performances in schools, particularly within the context of Ghanaian culture.

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