

Performative Aspects of Music

Jaan Ross

In 2013–18, research at the Department of Musicology of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre received funding of Euro 408,000 within the framework of an institutional grant IUT12-1; the project in question was coordinated by the author of this text. Here we publish a report of this project, which, in comparison with the official report, has been slightly abridged and amended.

Short description of the project

According to the Western canon, a musical work can exist in the form of a score or of a performance. Scores, however, may be lacking in cultures or genres that are more improvisational in their nature than mainstream Western music. There is a shift in contemporary musicology, the focus of which is moving more towards studies of musical performances rather than scores of musical works. While such an approach has traditionally been accepted in ethnomusicology, the concept of dynamic form has opened up new modes of analysis in music theory. In studies of the history of music, opera and musical theatre, greater interest can be observed towards events, performances and practices than towards the musical texts alone. In cognitive musicology, the activities of performing musicians are studied from different aspects. Analysis of historical sound recordings is emerging as a new sub-discipline. In this project, performative aspects of music will be studied in the synchronic and diachronic context of Estonian music.

Short summary of project results

Preparations have been made to publish an academic history of Estonian music in 2020. In the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, correspondence (16 letters from 1834–35) between the music collector Georg Poelchau (Berlin) and the musician Johann Friedrich La Trobe from Tartu (Dorpat) was discovered. This correspondence provides a great deal of information about musical activities in Tartu at that time. Studies of manuscripts by the composer Johann Valentin Meder (1649–1719), who sojourned in Tallinn, were carried out, as a result of which a number of Meder's autographs were dated. The opera film "Der fliegende Holländer" (DEFA 1964) directed by Joachim Herz was restored and issued in DVD format. In co-operation with Ogarev Mordovia State University, several fieldwork trips to Mordovia were organized and multichannel audio recordings of folksongs were made. Analysis of collective Seto dirges and their comparison with wedding laments confirmed an earlier hypothesis that in Seto multivoiced songs the most important distinctive feature for the identification of the melody is the harmonic rhythm. It was demonstrated that the development of form in the music of Erkki-Sven Tüür can be described as an interaction between the relative activity of elements of musical structure and the textural layers. Deep and surface structures in the oeuvre of Arvo Pärt are connected with each other using musical rhetorics; and in early modern Estonian cyclic musical works, it has been demonstrated that form plays a secondary role in establishing the integrity of a work. Publication of the complete annotated academic edition of works by Eduard Tubin has continued. In collaboration with the East Tallinn Central Hospital, acoustic and laryngographic recordings of patients who are employed as singers were obtained and analysed. A comparative study of examples of the repertoire of Estonian popular song as performed a century ago and today was conducted, using methods from acoustical phonetics. No significant diachronic changes were observed.