

## Introduction

The term or idea of musical 'shape' has been widely used by musicians, but is poorly documented. The 'Shaping Music in Performance' project, part of the AHRC Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice (CMPCP), is intended to increase the understanding of this term and its use by performing musicians.

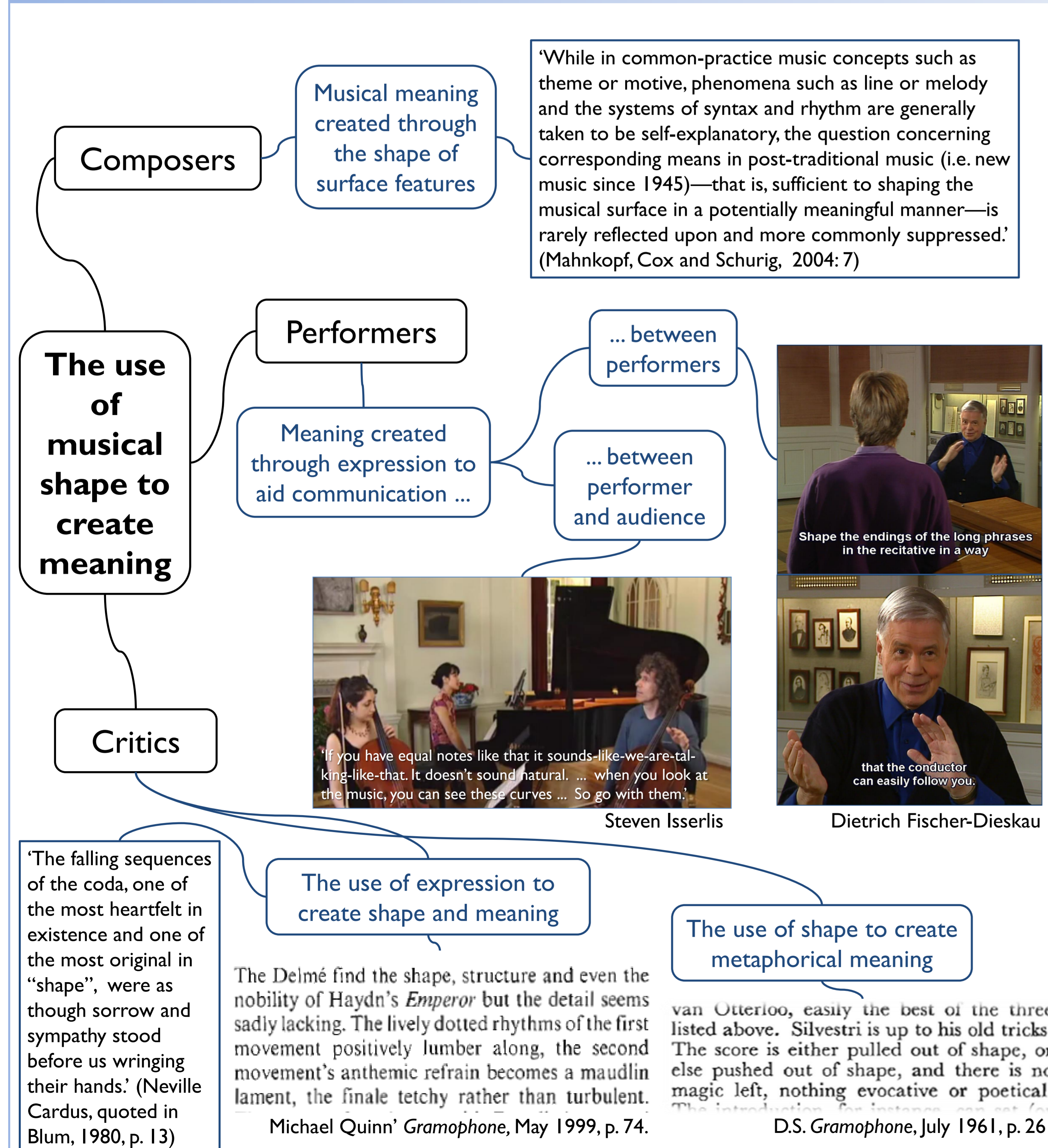
## Main approaches

Several strands of the project are underway, which address varying research aims connected with the project. This poster will focus on two strands that provide evidence for the creation of musical meaning through the use of shape in musical performance.

## Strand I: Documentary Evidence

Evidence has been found in written and audio-visual materials that reveals the use of shape by a range of professionals in musical and music-related fields. Some of those relating to musical meaning are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Examples of the use of the term 'shape' or 'shaping' in relation to musical meaning



## Strand 2: Questionnaire evidence

### Aims:

- To quantify, to some extent, the use of shape by performing musicians
- To gain a fuller understanding of the ways in which shape is used by performing musicians

### Method:

- Online questionnaire administered through Survey Monkey
- Mixed methods approach: open-ended and closed-ended responses
- Participants recruited through snowballing, then targeting of specific groups

### Respondents:

- n = 231 (m = 105; f = 126) (62.4% completion rate)
- Modal age group = 25–34 (see Figure 2)
- Mixture of instrumentalists (see Figure 3)
- Respondents from 31 different countries
- 64.5% professional musicians or of professional standards

Figure 2: Age distribution of participants

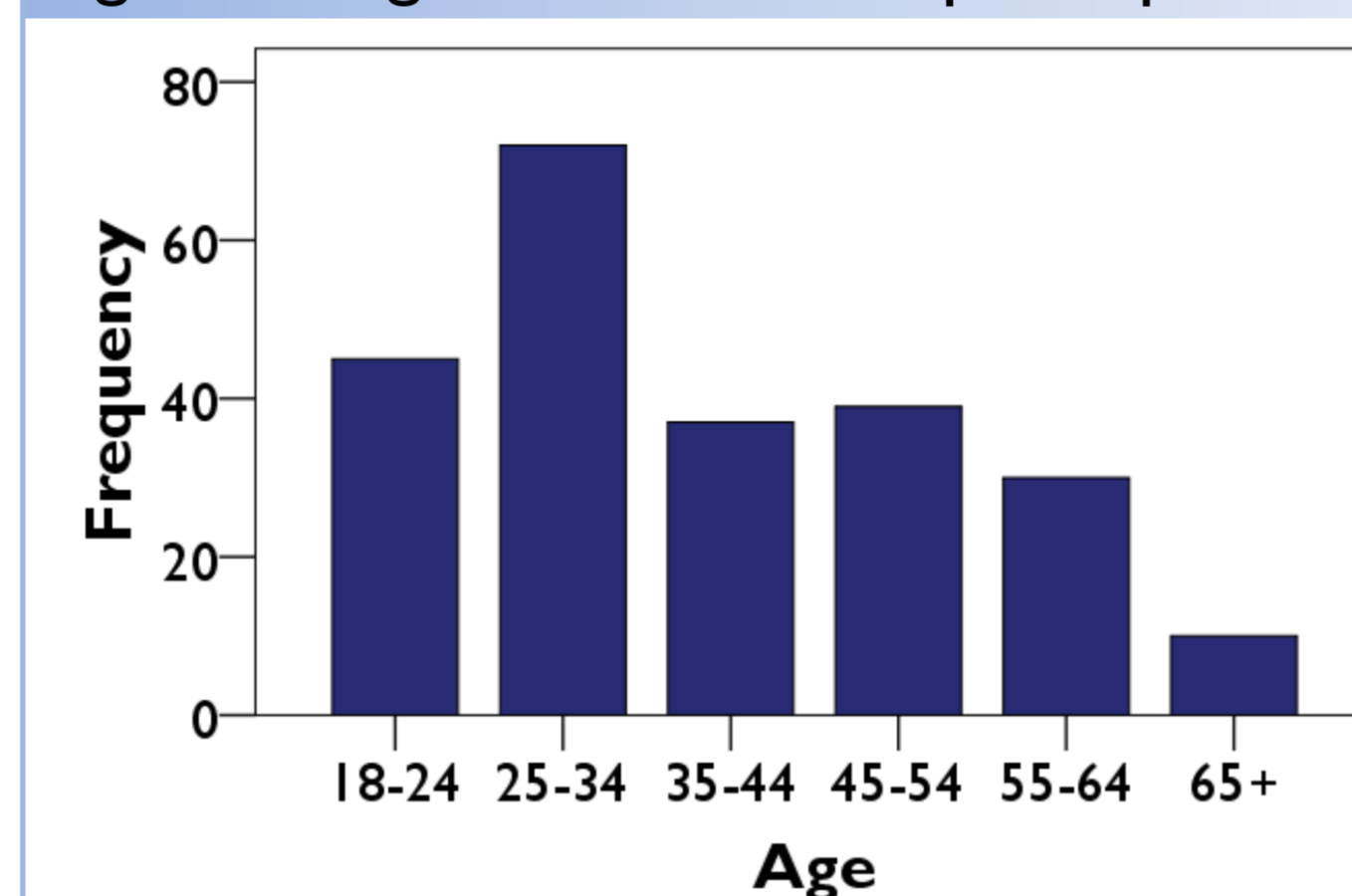
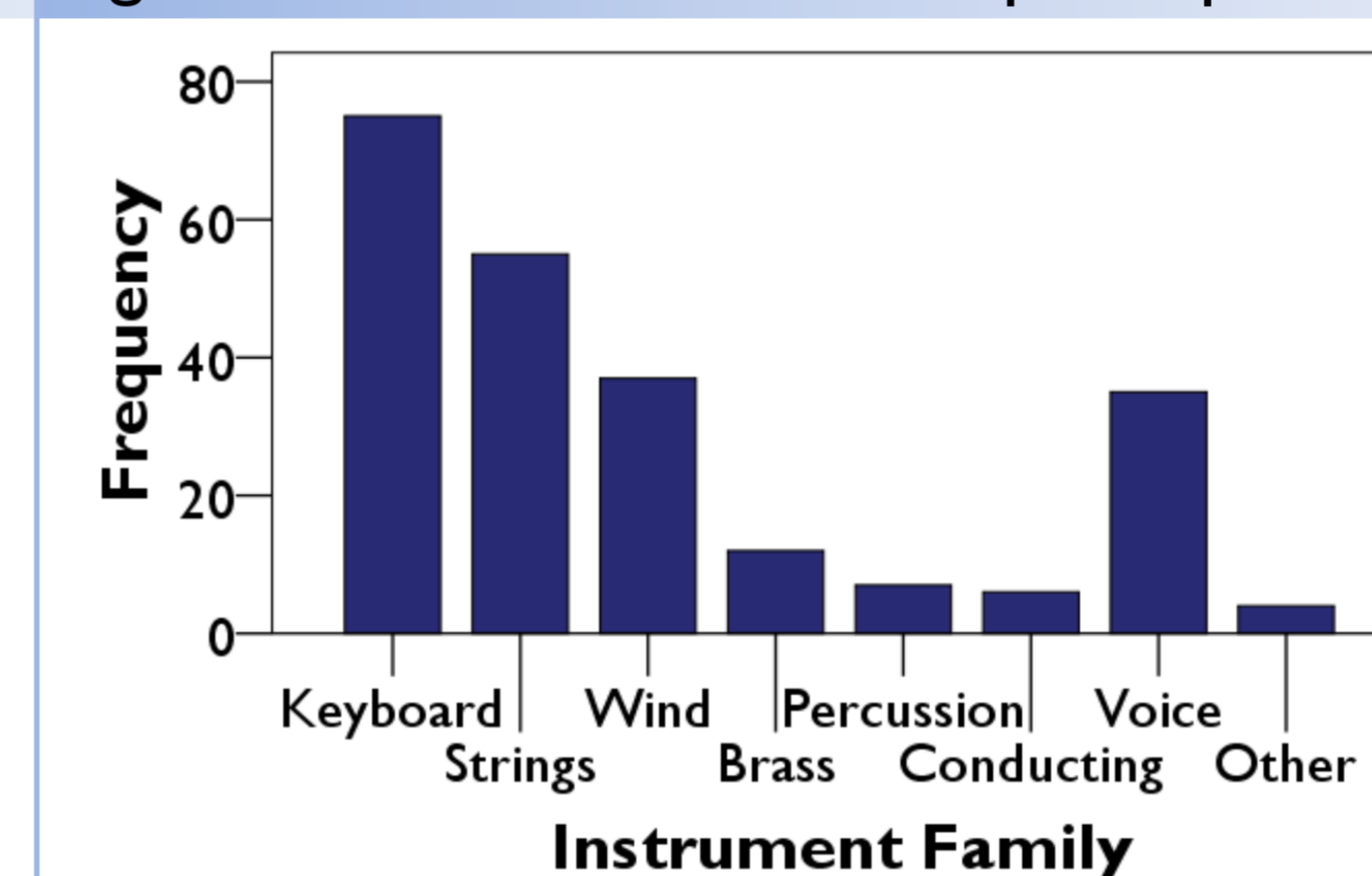


Figure 3: Main instruments of participants



## Results pertaining to musical meaning:

- 89.7% of participants think about shape when thinking about how to perform music
- Fairly high levels of agreement with statements pertaining to musical meaning (see Table 1 and Figure 4)
- Comments from participants were frequently related to ideas of meaning, that concerned communication, emphasis, and expression (see Figure 5)
- 'Meaning' was nominated as an alternative word for shape 17 times (cf. 'line', 42 times; 'narrative', 15 times; 'phrase', 112 times).

Table 1: Agreement levels for scale items related to musical meaning

Statement	Strongly agree or agree
Musical 'shape' is similar to a changing feeling	43.4%
Musical shape changes with the emotion or mood of the music	66.2%
Musical shape is related to meaning in music	66.5%
Musical shape changes with the tension or intensity of the music	74.7%
Musical shape is linked with emotive or expressive attributes of the music	78.8%

Figure 4: Agreement distribution for statement concerning meaning

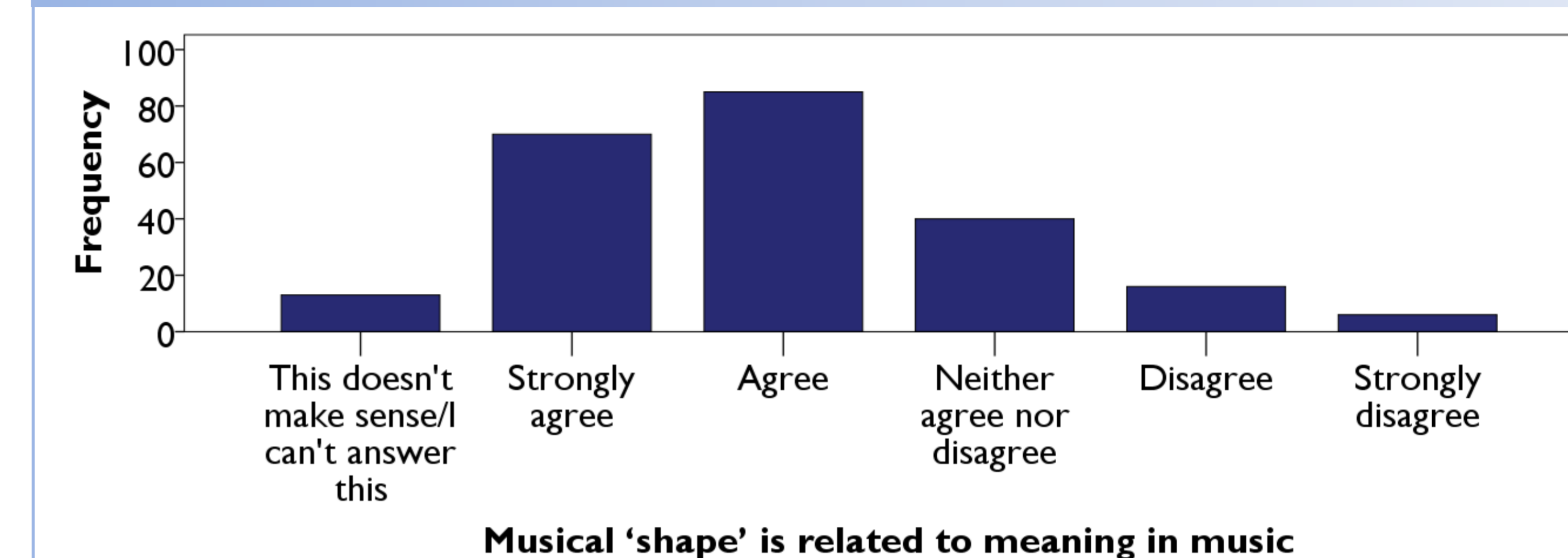


Figure 5: Selected comments related to musical meaning

- Participant 87: 'playing music without shape is like reading poetry without any inflections or pauses - shape gives music its meaning and more effectively communicates its message from the performer/composer to the listener'
- Participant 178: 'In thinking about the rise and fall of a phrase - how to shape it so as to guide the listener and give the music meaning'
- Participant 198: 'Shape in music for me is somewhat equal to lingual discourse: you have elements of meaning in music, you have grammar, and when combined you get a composition that tells a story.'
- Participant 288: 'Shape is always felt, responsive, vital to performance and critical in relaying meaning and understanding to the music.'
- Participant 333: 'In performance if a performer doesn't have an idea of large scale (whole piece), mid scale (sectional) and small scale (phrases) shapes, then the piece loses meaning and impact.'

## Conclusions

Both strands of the study outlined here reveal the relevance of musical shape to meaning in music, most commonly through the use of expressive shaping of musical materials. Though musical meaning was not the most common synonym provided for musical shape, the high levels of agreement with statements concerning meaning-related ideas suggest that participants' shaping of music contributes significantly to the meaning they wish to portray. Individuals' comments reinforced the nature of this relationship, and highlighted the importance of shape for the creation of meaning in music.

## Future studies

Follow-up studies will investigate the thought-processes and experience of musicians shaping music in performance idiographically, using interviews, retrospective protocol analysis and interpretative phenomenological analysis.

## References

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