

Music and Shape

Dr Helen Daynes

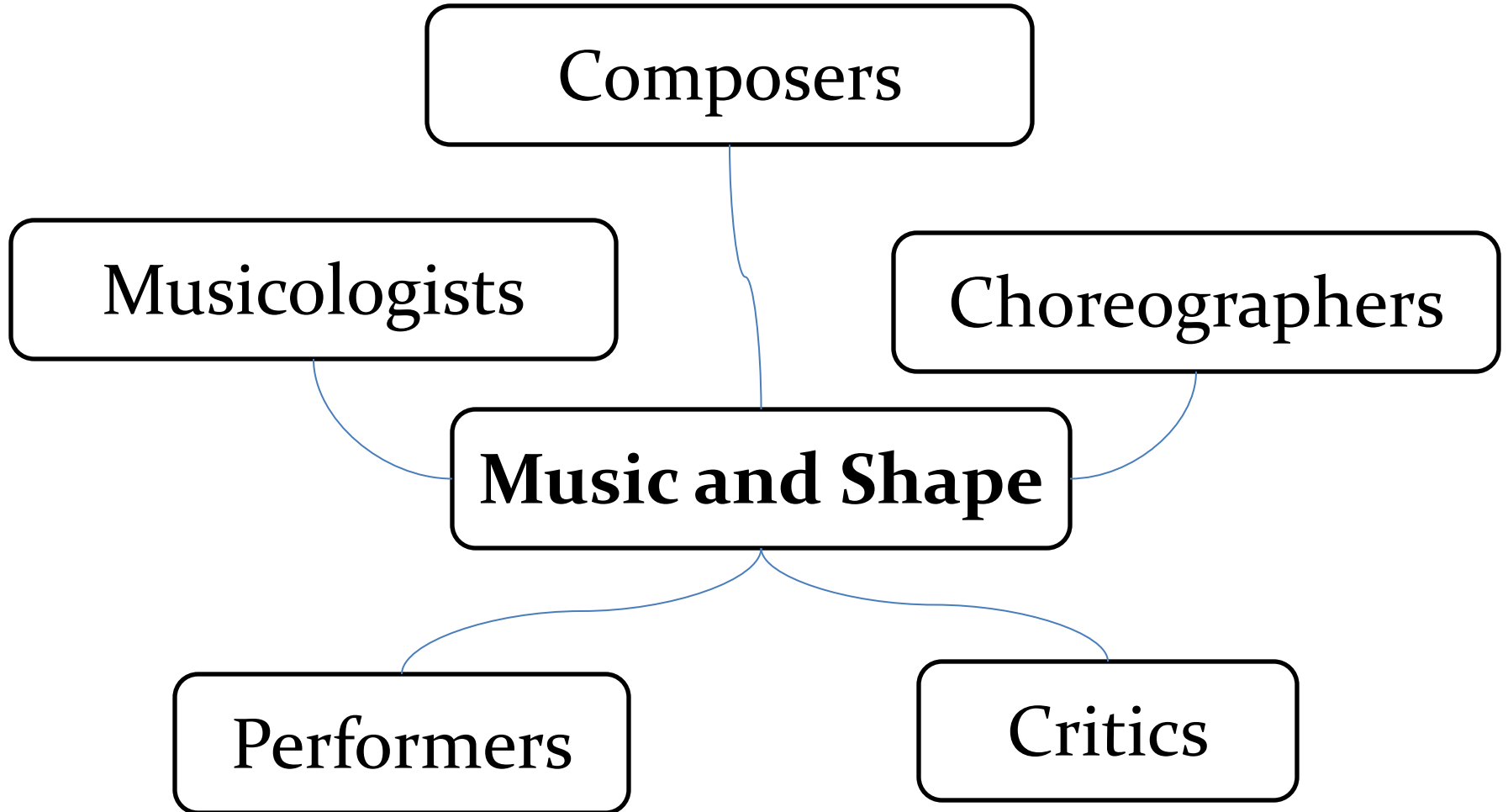
What do we want to know?

- Do performing musicians use the idea of 'shape' or 'shaping' music?
- How do they use these ideas?
- Do the ways in which these ideas are used differ between different musicians?

Our approaches

- Documentary evidence
- Questionnaire study
- Interview study

Documentary evidence

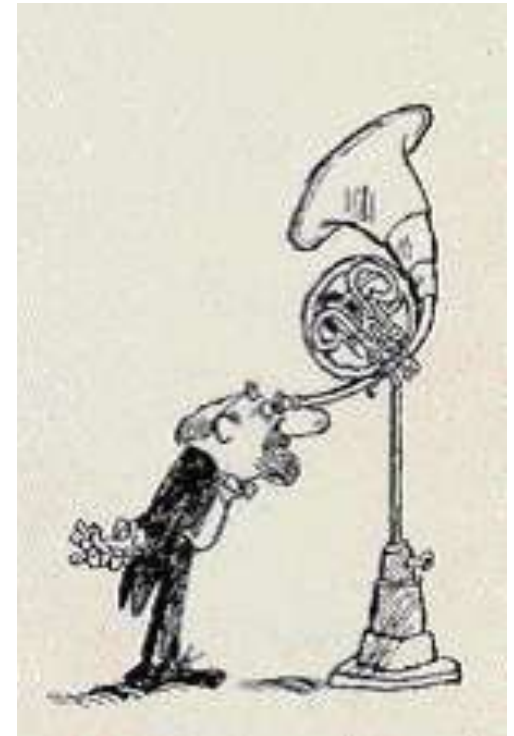
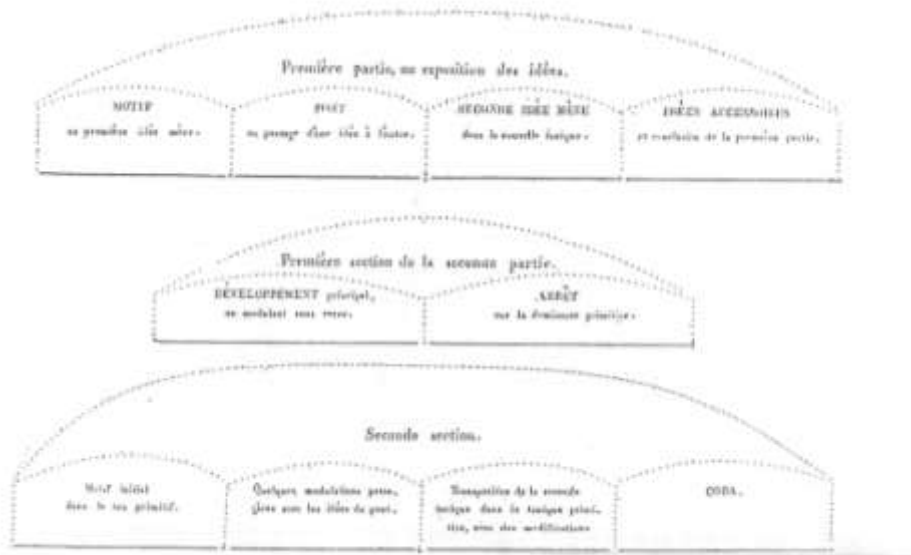


Choreographers



Musicologists

- ‘Shape’ as ‘form?’
 - Spatial representation of musical form?
- Melodic shape?
- Geometry?



Composers

- Mahnkopf , Cox and Schurig (eds.) (2004)
Musical Morphology
 - Shape as surface features that are associated with meaning
- Cassidy (2004)
 - Links between musical shapes and physical gestures of their creation
- Claren (2004)
 - Music with shape has continuity
- Corbett (2004) and Schurig (2004)
 - Musical shape as an interaction between the music and the mind

Composers

- Frederic Chopin (Sand, in Eigeldinger, 1997)
 - ‘Chopin ... is at the piano and does not observe that we are listening to him. He improvises as if haphazardly. He stops. “What’s this, what’s this?”, exclaims Delacroix, “you haven’t finished it!”
“It hasn’t begun. Nothing’s coming to me ... Nothing but reflections, shadows, shapes that won’t settle. I’m looking for the colour, but I can’t even find the outline.”’

Composers

- Benjamin Britten 



- ‘I never, never, start a work without having a very, very, clear conception of what that work is going to be. Err ... When I say conception, I don’t mean, necessarily tunes, or specific rhythms, or harmonies, or... old fashioned things like that, but I mean the actual ... shape of the music, the kind of music it’s going to be, rather than the actual notes ...’
- ‘... I know that the first drafts for *The Turn of the Screw* were in what one would call then the normal three-act form ... and ... even I think, the libretto was written in that shape ...’

Critics

- Performance 'taking shape'

When Ann Murray talks about a role, it is always within the wider context of how the performance takes shape in partnership with producer, conductor or fellow singers. So her swiftness in deflecting examination of her own part in

David Nice, *Gramophone*, May 1994, p. 28

Critics

- Shape as 'form'

motet); and shape seems an unimportant consideration for him. The music might have seemed

D.F. Gramophone, October 1983, p. 106

scene. Yet his feeling for the shape of a Bach fugue, and for part-playing and the character and brilliance of Bachian figuration, is full of finesse, quite the equal of any Bach specialist's.

S.P. Gramophone, August 1965, p. 55

Martinu's Third Violin Sonata (the last of five: cataloguers watch out) is a work of classical proportions: in its conventionally balanced four movements, tradition largely controls the shape; imagination, often, the sound. The sound does indeed often suggest

M.M. Gramophone, December 1971, p. 92

ence. Part I is, though, superior to Part II in this respect, yet the piece as a whole has an overall shape which, if hard to grasp in detail, grows increasingly apparent with each hearing. While, as I say, this is better carried through here than in *Silver Apples*, that shape is fundamentally the same in both instances and might, very roughly, be defined as an Apollonian first half giving way to a Dionysian second. As

M.H. Gramophone, August 1972, p. 89

Critics

- Shape as ‘expression’

Decca 12002 (10 ins., 3 11/16").
If we must have another recording of Grieg's best-known song it should be sung without the erratic sense of rhythm Marjorie Lawrence shows in her attempt to render the melodic line "expressive." It is a pity this artist has so little feeling for the shape of a phrase. The Rachmaninov song is welcome, but I failed to hear more than

A.R. *Gramophone*, April 1947, p. 7

best of the lighter pieces I have heard this month. The orchestral playing is not just good, it is really outstanding: the conductor knows how to give us flexible and shapely phrases as well as tightly rhythmic music: and Decca's recording combines

T.H. *Gramophone*, July 1954, p. 25

‘The music breathes a life of its own as he ardently inflects its phrases to shape the tension of his line’

Nalen Anthoni, *Gramophone*,
September 2008, p. 65

Critics

- The music has shape

Caractacus, the composer's Op. 35 (Leeds, 1898 : dedicated to Queen Victoria), immediately precedes the *Variations*, the *Sea Pictures*, and *Gerontius*, and looks strongly onward from the earlier cantatas, both in shape and idiom. A chromatic

W. R. Anderson, *Gramophone*, March 1934, p. 32

A good record. Not intense, searching, strangely revealing piano interpretations such as Rosalyn Tureck gives us, nor a piano imitation of a harpsichord, but straightforward performances, done with feeling for the music, with a nice appreciation of its shape and texture. And very well recorded. A.P.

A.P. *Gramophone*, August 1957, p. 11

The Delmé find the shape, structure and even the nobility of Haydn's *Emperor* but the detail seems sadly lacking. The lively dotted rhythms of the first

Michael Quinn' *Gramophone*, May 1999, p. 74.

In particular, the String Quartet is an extreme example of a music of effects rather than of 'ideas' in any conventional sense. The result, beginning with frantic high harmonics and ending, some twenty-six and a half minutes later, with the barely perceptible breathing of the players, is music whose expression is always utterly clear and direct, but which seems mechanical in its apparent rejection of the kind of relationships between significant detail and overall shape and perspective through which most music communicates.

A.W. *Gramophone*, August 1981, p. 62

Critics

- The performer shapes the music

tion he tightens the phrasing as the symphonic argument gathers complexity, and thus gives the movement a satisfying sense of shape and wholeness. With the first act of the drama effectively

A.S. *Gramophone*, September 1988, p. 44

For the shape of a Bach *phrase*, though, he shows less feeling and indeed chooses not to shape them much at all. One would expect any 'cellist, I think, to play the bass of the D minor prelude—which is much more than a succession of single notes providing support for the toccata above—a hundred times more interestingly. No violinist, either, would be tempted to dash off the D major prelude at such a ridiculously fast, meaningless speed. And Richter doesn't shape the actual subjects in the fugues very much, preferring to state them flatly and to let the counterpoint achieve its own expressiveness as the fugues proceed—though this often

S.P. *Gramophone*, August 1965, p. 55

Critics

- ‘Wrong’ musical shape

perceptibly mannered. Dichter hasn't quite Serkin's gift for tensing the music without hammering it unmusically out of shape; nor all Serkin's

R.O. Gramophone, September 1980, p. 34

van Otterloo, easily the best of the three listed above. Silvestri is up to his old tricks. The score is either pulled out of shape, or else pushed out of shape, and there is no magic left, nothing evocative or poetical.

D.S. Gramophone, July 1961, p. 26

Very good recording, but for Kempff curiously desultory playing. He has his moments—but in general there's an uneasiness about his tempo rubato and a lack of conviction about the direction of his performances which rob each work here of shape and overall effect. Why does he

S.P. Gramophone, November 1962, p. 68

Nerini in the French version. But Stokowski's reading is exaggerated, sometimes, to the point of becoming grotesque. Let one example serve: the woodwind solos pulled out of shape at the beginning of "The Story of the Kalendar Prince". A.P.

A.P. Gramophone, March 1956, p. 21

Performers

- ‘With Vivaldi there are so many possibilities to shape the music. Take the slow movement of No 11, the D major. After four days of rehearsals, a concert, and five days of recording, we were so played-in together that it felt like we could just do a jam session, and a nice slow movement would come out of it. And that's actually the feel of that movement. It's my favourite thing on the disc. It really feels like we just grasped the moment. And then we actually repeat it, which is a bit naughty, because Vivaldi didn't write a repeat. But at the time I thought, it's so lovely, and it's so short, my goodness, we just must do it again! So we repeated it, and the second time the harpsichord joins in. I just loved that atmosphere of exploration.’
- ‘Another instance is the second movement of No 2, the E minor. At one point I have three beats by myself as a soloist, so I just took that quite freely. I wanted the contrast between pulse and freedom to be really strong, so I played around with the timing quite a bit. In rehearsal I tried to do it differently every time, so the orchestra would never, ever get hooked on thinking ‘OK, so she's going to play it there’ — so it would never actually sound stale, and never, ever sound planned. So you get that freshness in the playing, where people are listening to what you're doing — and you can actually hear that in the sound.’

Rachel Podger, Baroque Violinist, *Gramophone*, May 2003, p. 15.

Performers

- ‘You work closely with Adès — how much influence did you have on the work?’
- ‘There is a lot of me in there. I didn't have any influence over the structure or shape of the piece, but I know that he had my playing in mind when he wrote it. It was like having a mirror held up to my playing because he could see things about my playing, and what I might be able to do, that I didn't know myself.’

Anthony Marwood, violinist. *Gramophone*, March 2008, p. 15

Performers

Tchaikovsky's 5th Symphony

With regard to "M.M.'s" criticism of my recording of Tchaikovsky's 5th Symphony, in which he stated that two cuts I made in the finale "must have been dictated by a desire to improve on Tchaikovsky". May I point out that these cuts were made expressly at Tchaikovsky's wish.

He was not satisfied with the shape of the finale, as originally published; and in a letter prior to an early performance, gave exact instructions where these two cuts should be made.

I trust this will justify my action.

London, S.W.7. SIR MALCOLM SARGENT.

- *Gramophone*, June 1955, p. 94

Performers using the *idea* of shape



Performers using the *idea* of shape



www.masterclassfoundation.org

Performers using the *term* 'shape'



Performers using the *term* shape



Documentary evidence

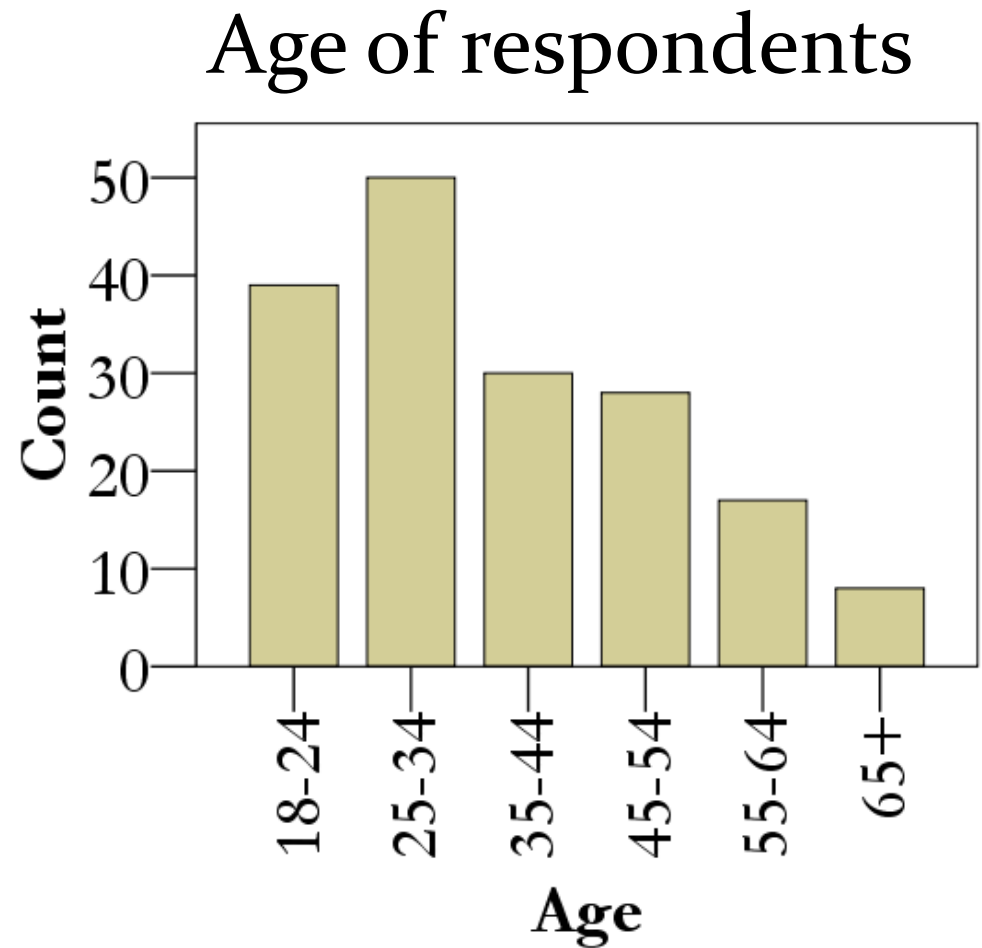
- Summary of findings:
 - Spontaneous references to the term ‘shape’ and to the idea of shape
 - Links between music and movement
 - Shape in relation musical form/structure
 - Shape in relation to expression

Questionnaire

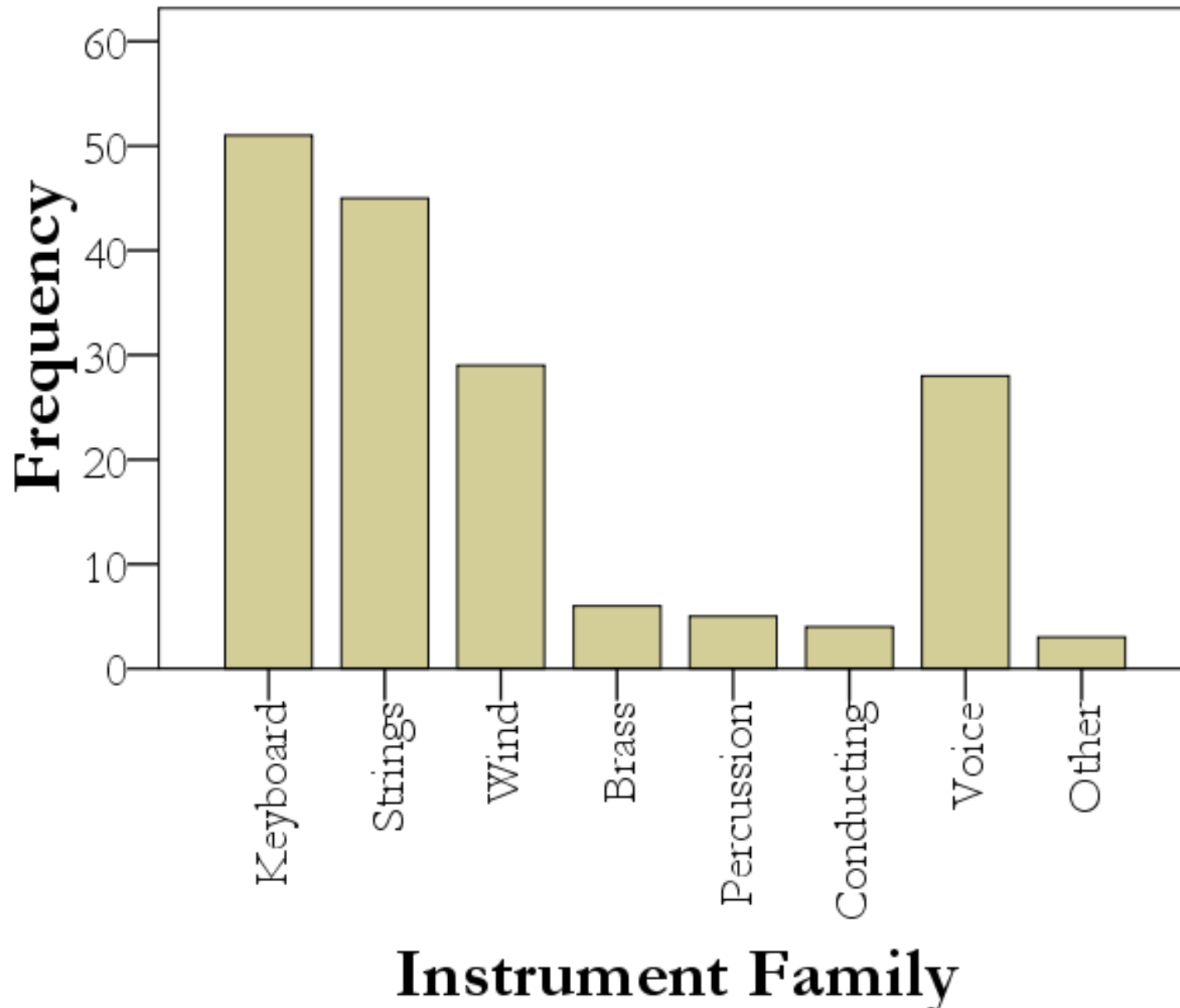
- Open-ended and closed-response questions
- Administered via Survey Monkey
- Snowballing

Questionnaire: results as of 24/02/10

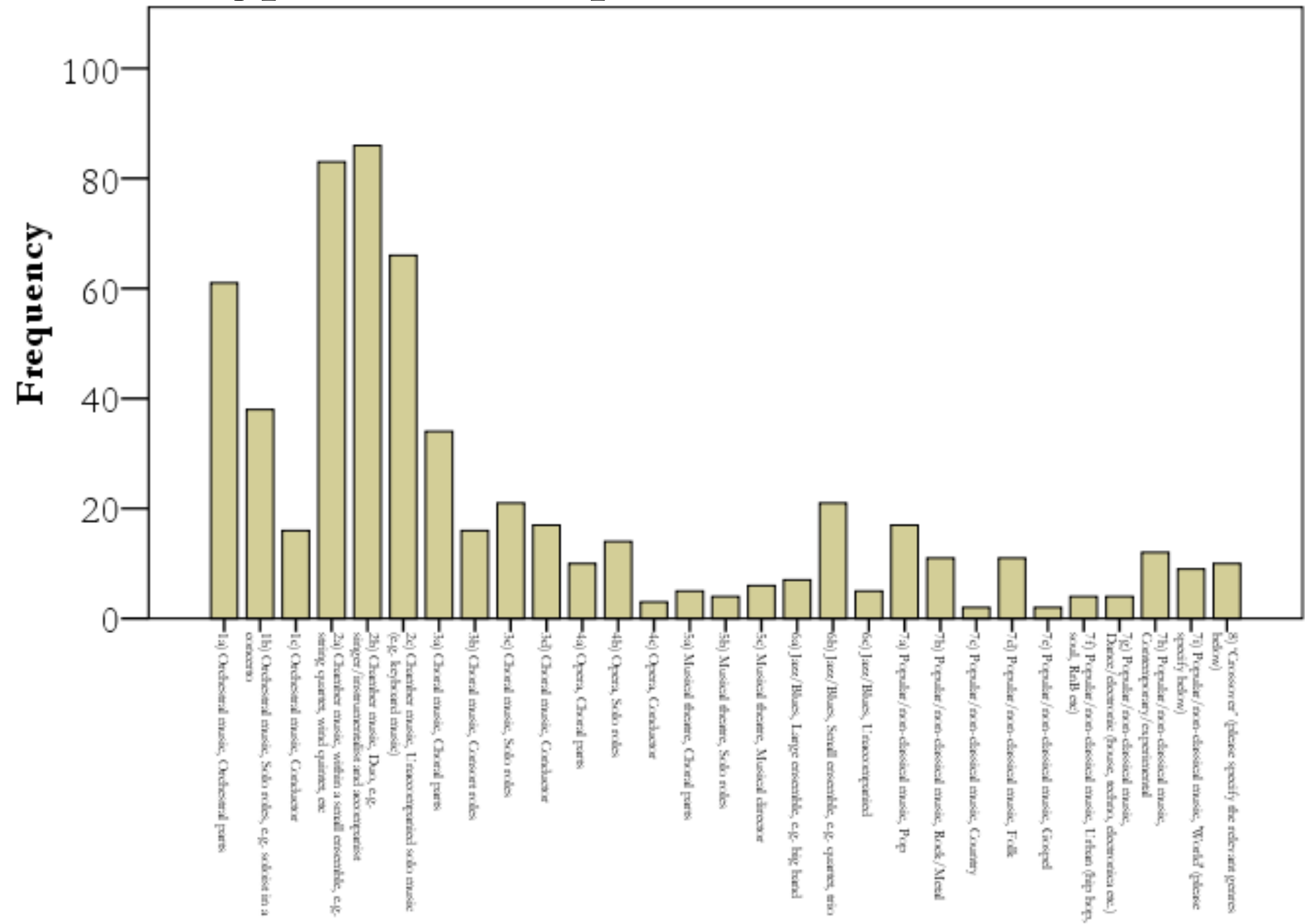
- 172 completed questionnaires
 - 43% male
 - 57% female



Respondents' instrument family



Types of music performed



How would you describe your status as a musical performer?

Musical occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Student	44	25.6
An amateur, intermediate-level performer (none, or a very low proportion of your income comes from performing activities; you are a capable player, but not of professional standards)	25	14.5
An amateur, professional-standard performer (none, or a very low proportion of your income comes from performing activities; you are a highly capable player of professional standards)	44	25.6
A professional performer (a substantial part of your income comes from performing activities)	61	35.5
An instrumental or peripatetic teacher (teaching mostly beginner or intermediate-level pupils, e.g. of up to ABRSM Grade 8 standard)	33	19.2
An instrumental or peripatetic teacher (teaching mostly advanced pupils, e.g. of above ABRSM Grade 8 standard)	24	14

Thinking about shape

- 90.1% (154) of respondents think about shape when thinking about how to perform music
- 83.8% (140) of respondents think about shape when talking with others about how to perform music

Links between music and shape

- ‘Phrase’ or ‘phrasing’ (48 references)
 - ‘shape can help define a phrase and make it sound different than any other part of the music.’
 - ‘how one treats series of notes to make a phrase; the contour of that phrase, and its relation to other phrases ...’
 - ‘phrasing and its constituent parts of the dynamic and temporal shaping’

Links between music and shape

- Form or structure (41 references)
 - ‘It is also possible to think of higher structural levels in terms of shape - the shape of a section, where repeated material is used and how a section or movement is structured, its shape/narrative/form.’
 - ‘I think shape also comes into play when referring to form; how the music is structured’
 - ‘Music needs shape, or else it makes no sense: one must clearly define the structure of the piece one is playing.’

Links between music and shape

- Dynamics (38 references)
 - ‘Can be used to ... reflect the shades of dynamic variation that come through in the playing’
 - ‘to dynamics - 'shape of dynamics' ’
 - ‘Shaping of individual phrases, but almost exclusively linked to dynamic (ie < >)’

Links between music and shape

- Pitch height or melody (32 references)
 - ‘the (melodic) rise and fall’
 - ‘Melodic rising and falling in phrases’
 - ‘When I think about the shape of the music I do it in two ways. Firstly, the profile of the line or melody: how long is it? Does it curve or arch?’
- Contour (30 references)
 - ‘the contour of that phrase’
 - ‘They must be shaped by rising and falling inflection and differences in tone and colour.’

Links between music and shape

- Shape as multi-faceted (22 references)
 - ‘All music has shape. Every note falls on a line that is either intensifying, releasing, or staying constant - these fluctuations create a shape. Dynamics, phrasing, articulation, timbre, rhythm, and pitch all modulate the shape, as do similar elements in painting.’
 - ‘Music is full of shape. The melodic shape, the dynamic shape, the shape of the notes on the page, the stylistic shape...’
 - ‘The link is everywhere, in structure, in melody, in dynamics, in character. In the end, musical notation is itself descriptive of shapes in music.’

Links between music and shape

- Shape as analogy or metaphor (21 references)
 - ‘If there is a link, it would be in how one makes metaphors for sound; “that's too vertical; that phrase is flat, play that with a rounder sound, make that edgy, etc...”’
 - ‘The idea of shape is a metaphorical device that can describe both physical sound and intellectual/emotional attitude.’

Links between music and shape

- Gesture/physical movement
- The score/notation
- Visual links
- Change over time
- Expression
- Direction or energy
- Feeling or emotion

Agreement statements

- 8 Statements with a modal response of ‘strongly agree’:
 - I use the word 'shape' when talking about music in preparation for performance
 - Thinking about music in terms of 'shape' feels natural or instinctive when preparing for, or during, a performance
 - I use the idea of musical shape
 - when practising alone
 - when rehearsing with others
 - when teaching
 - I think about 'shape' when thinking about how to perform
 - a whole movement of a piece
 - a piece of music as a whole
 - a musical phrase
 - Musical ‘shape’ changes with the tension or intensity of the music

Agreement statements

- 33 Statements with a modal response of 'agree' (selected examples shown):
 - I think about 'shape'-related metaphors, analogies or ideas when preparing for, or during a performance
 - Musical 'shape' is similar to a bodily gesture
 - Musical 'shape' is linked with the emotive or expressive attributes of the music
 - Musical 'shape' is related to a plot or narrative

Agreement statements

- Statements with a modal response of ‘strongly disagree’:
 - Thinking about music in terms of ‘shape’ feels unnatural when preparing for, or during, a performance
- Statements with a modal response of ‘disagree’:
 - Musical ‘shape’ remains unchanged over a piece of music
 - Musical ‘shape’ goes from right to left with time

Agreement statements

- Statements with a modal response of ‘neither agree nor disagree’:
 - Musical ‘shape’ moves outwards from a central point
 - Musical ‘shape’ has three dimensions
- Statements with a modal response of ‘This doesn’t make sense/I can’t answer this’:
 - Musical ‘shape’ moves inwards from peripheral points
 - Musical ‘shape’ has two dimensions
 - Musical ‘shape’ has four dimensions

Preliminary Conclusions

- The idea of shaping music, or linking music with shape, is commonly used, and ‘feels natural’ to many performers
- Musical shape is perceived to change over time
- Strongly linked to phrasing and form, but multi-faceted

What next?

- Interview study
 - Up to 30 performers, selected from the questionnaire respondents
 - Range of instruments
 - Range of responses

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