



# Examine the Relationship Between the Composer, Performer, and Audience

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**Abstract:** This article explores the underlying relationship between composers, performers, and audiences. By examining separately how these three entities interact to create, interpret, and experience music, the process analysis of music composition, performance, and audience reception highlights how each factor influences and is influenced by the others. By analyzing this triadic relationship, this article reveals the collaborative nature of musical experience, showing how composers, performers, and audiences work together to shape the meaning and impact of music in different cultural and historical contexts.

**Keywords:** composer-performer relationship, audience engagement, musical communication, music philosophy

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## 1. Introduction

The relationship between the composer, the performer, and the audience has always been a question worthy of deeper reflection. When people listen to concerts, they often have some questions, such as whether the composer and the performer are in a command and obedience relationship? Do the performers want to show off their superb skills or do they want to convey the emotions of the composer to the audience through music? Is there any relationship between the composer and the audience, or communication? What exactly does the audience exist for? What exactly can music bring to people? Hesse (2018: 310) suggests in “Narziss und Goldmund” that thinking does not resort to imagination, but to concepts and formulas. It is true that scientific disciplines such as mathematics and physics have absolute truth, a fixed formula, and a definite answer. Music, on the other hand, is actually an abstract concept, and there is no single interpretation of a musical work (Rosenblum, 2007: preface). The identity of the composer, the performer, and the audience will be different, and the corresponding things and essence is seen will be different. In order to understand the essence of these problems, we can only understand people’s roles and behaviors when they participate in music (Small, 1998: 8). Therefore, this essay will explore the relationship between these three by discussing the roles played by each of them.

## 2. The relationship between the performer and composer

For most students studying classical works, the teacher will strictly require the student to play according to the signs on the score. I still remember what my undergraduate professor told me: be as faithful to the score as you are to your lover. This is similar to the idea put forward by Benson (2003: 5) that “...our conception of the role of a classical musician is far closer to that of a self-effacing servant who faithfully serves the score of the composer.” All the signs that the composer has written out on the page of the score must be done to the best of the performer’s ability, because everything that is instructive to the performer is written in the score by the composer (Sessions, 1971: 72). And there are many ways of getting this information from the score, for instance when a composer of Bach’s time was writing, he was thinking more about the conditions of the time, he did not spend time speculating about Romantic fantasies, or even imagining that his music would be transcribed on a Romantic grand piano in the future (Haynes, 2010: 78). From this, we can see that the most direct way is to go to study the background of the time the work is in, the music style and preferences of the composer, and even what kind of instruments people played in that era, and so on. Whether it is a work several years ago or hundreds of years ago, it is well documented. However, at the same time, there is also a lot of uncertainty, especially the further back you go, the more you will find that some of the information is not clear or lack of records; at this time, it is necessary to study some scholars’ books or articles as a supporting material reference. The performer can obtain correct guidance by studying the historical context, manuscripts, correspondence, recordings, interviews, and other reliable approaches, so as to be as close as possible to the composer’s wishes.

However, there is an important point to be noted here, namely that the performer cannot mechanically perform the composer’s work. This would be no different from the automatic pianos that have been invented (as an example, the STEINWAY & SONS SPIRIO), it is even more “perfect” - it can be played without missing a note and without missing a rhythm.

In today's increasingly technologically advanced society, people use artificial intelligence to replace repetitive and non-creative work in order to reduce time and labor costs and improve work efficiency, such as the auto smart robot floor cleaner, keyless connected smart door lock, self-service checkout counters in supermarkets. Despite even today, we do not see robots or intelligent pianos giving concerts (at best, they "play" at piano exhibitions). One of the main reasons why machines still cannot replace humans in musical performance is that performers are flesh and blood beings, capable of perceiving emotions, whereas machines can only perform according to the instructions they are fed. The biggest difference between humans and intelligent machines is that humans can think, they have their own mental world. Performers do not just reproduce the notes and notations on the score, they are often creators as well, their performance is a secondary creation of the score. The performer's whole task is to discover the musical cues in the composer's text and to use his imagination and individuality (something that the machine does not have and that is different for everyone) to fully express the piece (Sessions, 1971: 78). On the other hand, the role of the performer and the nature of the actor is to a large extent similar. The actor needs to understand the emotional changes of the character in the context of the plot and interpret the character through his own interpretation; the performer needs to understand the composer's intentions through everything in the score, study the background of the piece, combining their own experience and feelings, and experience the emotional changes. Perhaps influenced by the venue, the instrument, the journey, or even the weather, what the performer performs each time is different from the last one, each interpretation of a piece of music is in fact full of surprises and expectations. While remaining faithful to the composer's score, the performer also has to discover his or her "performance personality". As Sessions (1971: 78) puts it: without fidelity a performance is false, without conviction it is lifeless. Only in this way can the performer achieve maximum empathy with the composer and be able to render what is on the score.

### **3. The relationship between the audience and performer**

Small criticises this view (1998: 5): which is seriously held by many musical scholars and even musicians: only those who can read a score have access to the inner meanings of music. Definitely, in order to thoroughly understand the notation of a piece of music, one needs to be able to read the score and be able to perform the piece. However, the nature of music is to share emotions with the audience, and in some performances, the audience is able to feel the inner emotions that the music is trying to express. Some people who have not been exposed to music often think that music is played for professionals and cannot be understood, so rarely do they actively go to concerts, or would rather spend money on going to the movies, shopping, or drinking than going to a concert. If one compares classical concerts with pop singers' concerts, it is not difficult to find that the interaction of the classical concert is intensely little, it can be said that there is almost no interaction - the audience sits under the stage, applauds, listens, applauds, and then ends to leave. There is no interaction between people, and they must even speak quietly, the only time to relax during the entire concert is the 10-minute intermission. This is a kind of ritual that the concert needs to observe, and it is also a kind of restriction, which makes people less willing to take the initiative to listen to the concert. Christopher Small concluded that this is because it is not in line with people's ideal interpersonal relationship, so they will feel uncomfortable with the social relationship in the concert hall (Small, 1998: 15).

There is also a sociological explanation here, that is, concert audiences cannot independently choose to watch works like audiences in galleries. They are basically trapped in their seats at a fixed time and passively accept tonight's repertoire, because they cannot change the repertoire (Why do we hate modern classical music? | Ross, 2021). Therefore, it seems that more and more people think that this is an "advanced upper-class activity", and the performers are played for judges, masters, professors, and music majors. There is no hierarchy in the appreciation of music, it is a way for people to understand themselves and others. The performer happens to be the perfect bridge, a medium of communication between the composer and the audience, and combines the composer's intentions with his own understanding to pass on to the audience. Herbert (2012: 21) believes that not all audience members are the same: some are regular concert-goers with a good knowledge of music; others will be less knowledgeable. Even so, this does not prevent people from coming to the concert to experience the emotional ups and downs that music brings to them. The purpose of the audience watching the performance is not for the sound, they come to experience the restlessness, emptiness, silence, surprises that is still in remembering, the process of being moved by music, joy, learning, and confusion (Godlovitch, 2002: 144). And all these imaginary spaces and details can be conveyed to them by the performers. Christopher Small proposed that as long as the performer can do his best to show a piece with love and the skills he possesses, he can create the meaning of the piece, no matter how ordinary the piece is (Small, 1998: 7).

### **4. The relationship between the composer and audience**

As Rousseau (2015: 190) mentioned in "Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men":

When it comes to the discussion of human nature, the true philosopher is neither an Indian nor a Tatar, not a Genevaian nor a Parisian, but all humanity. This is similar to the relationship between the composer and the audience we discussed. The composer is like a representative of a certain group of people at a certain period of time, able to compose musical pieces by observing certain groups of human beings or the natural environment around them, combining them with his own thoughts and emotions. This kind of music can also be said to be the product of a certain period or a certain era. On the other hand, the result of these observations is actually imitating, just like sometimes students will imitate videos of their favorite performers, or even Liszt's "Tarantella" (imitating the folk dance in Naples, Italy, where there is a legend of a poisonous spider that, once people are bitten by it, they can only dance frantically until they are exhausted), then to Debussy's estampes, Messiaen's prelude, imitating the exotic place, natural environment, or architecture and so on. As we all know, for most people, marked music is completely meaningless because they do not know how to read music (Herbert, 2012: 7). In this case, the composer himself and his pieces are actually partners in dialogue with performers and listeners (Benson, 2003: 17). The composer and performer are the characters that dig out all the information hidden in the music score and show it to the audience.

## 5. Conclusion

Music is an activity, something that people do (Small, 1998: 2). In this kind of activity, composers, performers, and audiences are indispensable. The composer describes all things that can be imagined, imitated, and borrowed into music through his observation of human society and his own feelings. Because only the image created by the artist can exist forever, in addition, everyone's life is constantly changing and passing, until the final demise (Hesse, 2018: 256). Mozart also proposed that a convincing performance is one that gives the impression that the music was composed by the performer himself (Haynes, 2010: 86). The performer determined the composer's intentions, respected the marks on the chart, and performed, and at the same time used his own experience, inspiration and passion to create a convincing performance. Audiences can only find a connection with the music as they enjoy it. Finally, the audience will feed their emotions back to the composer and performer, either with thunderous applause, or shed tears, or talk with the creator, and so on. Therefore, what about music, is not only a simple relationship between composer, performer, and audience, in other words, the three participants are actually playing music together at the psychological level. It is precisely because these artists are trapped in a pain from which they can never escape, and they have to struggle with it with all their talent, and that is why their works move us so deeply (Lin, 2015: 93), and this is exactly the meaning of the existence of composers and performers. Composers, performers and audiences find inspiration in each other's lives, which is why so many classics are performed today and never get old. No matter how many decades or even centuries have passed, the composer's score is like a treasure map, which brings new inspiration to the performers and at the same time attracts many performers to challenge and complete them, striving to present them perfectly to the audience; the musical character image they created together and their musical ideas hidden in the scores are still shining there, which can still bring touch and life insights to inspire all those who are performing, learning, and hearing them.

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