

Toward the Live Concert: Mediation and Mediators in Early Childhood Music Education

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Abstract: Using existing theories relating to mediation culture in early childhood music education, this paper explores a model of live music encounters for children ages four to six, the mediation process of preparation for live concerts, and the means of communication and mediation during the performance itself. The description of the model through an examination of the mediation and the mediators’ aims and functions in the preparation prior to the final concerts, is based on the cultures of learning/teaching the pre-concert instructional materials, and on the degree of communication with the musicians during the concert performance.

Keywords: live concert, mediation and mediators, performer and audience

“Music is an accumulation of mediators: instruments, languages, sheets, educators, performers, scenes, media, and so on. There is no musical object in itself; music must always be made again.”

(A. Hennion 2002)

Music performance: a social phenomenon

The live concert is a social phenomenon, manifested through the multiple relationships between performers and audience. Recent research about the degree of communication between the performers and the listening audience indicates gaps between the expectations and goals of the main “actors” for the concert audience. In this context, examination of the mediation process—led by teachers, performers, and practitioners—indicates that the audience’s familiarity with the repertoire does not guarantee their full enjoyment during the concert (Hennion 2002; Sloboda and Ford 2012).

In order to deconstruct our taken-for-granted practices of mediation, two central questions emerge:

1. What do children hear and appreciate, rather than what can children hear and appreciate, through an effective culture of learning-teaching interaction in kindergarten classroom, led by mediators-teachers, performers and practitioners?
2. What is the artistic/human dynamic arising from attending a performance? What are the social ramifications of listening to soloist musicians or performing ensembles?

I have been privileged to observe and closely follow the stages of mediation taking place in leading up to the live concert, as well as observing those for whom the mediation is enacted. Along with this, I have been aided by colleagues who likewise observe the preparatory encounters prior to the concerts and the concerts as well, in order to hear their impressions, their advice or recommendations, and especially to limit, as much as possible, the influence of my presence that was liable to cause or contribute to an intrusion that would not be the norm for situations without my presence in real time. The “viewpoint from inside,” the documentation of everyday discourse and interviews, undoubtedly transformed me into an observer participating in the research objects’ setting, without a pretense of neutrality.

Mediation and mediators

The role and function of mediation and mediators in music education is drawn from Vygotsky’s theory of adult guidance (or in collaboration with the adult)—both in one-to-one and in collective teaching or tutoring situations—and from Bronfenbrenner’s ecological approach of “circles” that surround the child in an interdependent system of contexts. Both emphasize that children learn through interactions with their social environment, and that such interactive and engaging activities are important for fostering children’s learning-related social skills (Copple and Bredekamp 2009).

Here the question arises as to the degree of the student’s independence in tutoring frameworks. Does the authority of knowledge in constructivist classrooms still rest heavily upon the teacher’s own fund of knowledge and experience, and not in children’s own insights (Dewey [1902] 1957). In terms of constructivist approaches, the process of mediation and mediating thinking is both something they construct within themselves and socially constructed, involving an integration of individual cognitive processes and social processes, and based on a conception of knowledge as a shared process of inquiry and meaning-making. The mediation of meaning, the attribution of affects and values, must be a need to share feelings in an emphatic way, to ensure the penetration of internal barriers (Egozi and Feuerstein 1986).

In Vygotsky’s educational philosophy, the connection and interaction of human rationality and the external world is reflected in the social collectivity as a qualitatively different entity from the total sum of isolated individuals. (Hua Liu & Matthews, 2005). Vygotsky also insisted that teaching should be tied more closely to the level of potential development than to the level of actual development. In his words, “the only ‘good learning’ is that which is in advance of development” (Vygotsky 1978, 89; Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, and Miller 2003). This insight—that good teaching should always help students advance to the next level of development—has been incorporated by many constructivist teachers. For Paulo Freire (Freire and Shor 1987), problem-posing education, as opposed to the “banking concept of education”, does not consist in the

transfers of information but in developing the students’ consciousness or critical thinking skills, which means that the mediator/teacher/mentor is no longer the only one who teaches, but one who also learns through the dialogue with the students. Similarly, in this model the students take on the responsibility not only to learn but also to become co-teachers in the learning process: “Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: “teacher-student” with “students-teachers” (Freire and Shor 1987).

Some considerations for the preparation process prior to the live concert

As opposed to the traditional hierarchy in music education and music instruction between theoretical and applied, or active and creative fields, I consider the practice of listening attentively to live music to be a dynamic, constructive process: a creative mental process equivalent in value to music-making (performance and composing) (Peterson 2002).

Listening requires skills that focus on the sound’s sources, remembering them, and responding. It is not a natural gift that follows upon the ability to hear, but rather an acquired skill that must be honed in order to be developed. It does not happen in an isolated, atomistic instant, but rather it has a history and is reflective (Shepherd and Devine 2015; Alcazar 2010). This latter is also the ability of listening to build itself as the framework of its own activity, based on the music events in a given piece and on the individual or collective representation or creation of a response.

For musicians, the knowledge of musical form (i.e. the structure or plan along which a piece of music is constructed) is essential both for analysis and in performance. According to Delalande (Thoresen 2007; Hlavaty 2018), taxonomic listening is manifested through the listener’s tendency:

- To distinguish sufficiently large morphological units such as sections or chains, and to make a mental list of them;
- To qualify these, but just enough to distinguish them from each other;
- To notice how these units are arranged in relation to one another;
- To try and memorize all these data.

Differing from listeners with a musical background or musicians, taxonomy for young listeners or an adult audience without a music background, musical experience, or guided listening, is anchored in the ability to absorb pieces or briefer segments of compositions which are connected to each other at the end of a process of exposure to the composition. The times of becoming familiar/ “making the acquaintance/friends” with the composition through mediation and different grasps of learning, expose a wide range of approaches – beginning with that of the vertical and more rigid, and to that which enables dialog and creative expression.

The mental process of audition, i.e. the representation into which the aural images of music are unscrambled, is a multifaceted one (Lewinowitz 1998). Audiation is paramount in importance because it is basic to all types of musical thinking. The question is what people hear, rather than what people can hear, through an effective interaction between the music mediators and the child.

It is worth recalling the following aspects of the process of listening to recorded or live music:

- Perception: the ability to interpret information which our various senses receive from the environment;
- Discrimination: the ability to notice, compare, and distinguish similarities and differences in sound;
- Memorization: grasping the temporal order of auditory events;
- Recognition: the ability to interpret and give meaning to the musical events.

Ninety-five percent of non-musician listeners chose instrumentation/timbre over melody and harmonic accompaniment as the salient cue for recognition. Musicians always chose melody and harmonic accompaniment over instrumentation. These findings indicate that untrained listeners do not share, or perhaps do not use, the same cognitive schemata as those used by trained listeners (Wolpert 1990).

In light of these data, the process of mediated listening includes different versions of a same piece (live performance or recorded instrumental piece), unaccompanied song (i.e., voice only) and an accompanied one (i.e., voice and instrumental accompaniment), identical melodies played with different instrumentation, and melodies varying in harmonization, instrumentation, and the discrimination of simultaneous melodies (Wolpert 1990). The different versions of the same piece allow equipping the young listeners with some remarkable abilities to perceive, distinguish, and focus on some aspects of music while at the same time selecting and filtering out “irrelevant” information, or to perceive simultaneous events as independent parts of a whole (Crowder, Serafine, and Repp 1990; Ilari and Sundara 2009). This process addresses aural skills and aesthetic emotions, different networks of association which are a part of mental processing, an experiential level of fantasy, and taste as “an overall patterning of an individual’s preferences” (Hargreaves and North 2010).

Aims of and process toward the live concert

The “IPO-KeyNote” model can be expected to be of value on the following levels:

- To create a receptive audience of sensitive music lovers and potential performers, developing them as a future audience for music in particular and the performing arts in general;

- To enable and facilitate an intimate meeting between performers and the younger audience;
- To develop a sense of empathy and identification with the performers (mediators between the kindergarten pupils and the world of music), sparking the idea that “someday I too can play and sing;”
- To be part of a heterogeneous community, as they, the kindergarten pupils, experience a consolidating act: sitting together in the civic auditorium and actively listening to a shared repertoire they’ve acquired, allowing the building of a collective memory during and after experiencing the concert (Lichtensztajn 2010).

The kindergarten classroom, a congenial setting free of external distractions from unfamiliar stimuli, is a suitable locale for initially experiencing the process of listening to recorded music or participating in a concert while engaging in unmediated viewing of the performers. In the kindergarten milieu, there is an excellent likelihood that the young pupils will adopt “live” music as an additional mother tongue, without any prejudicial preconceptions (Lichtensztajn 2014). Listening attentively to a live concert stimulates an intangible reality that immediately strikes a chord in the young listener, while compelling him or her toward metaphorical understandings whose source is in the child’s cultural context and psycho-physiological experiences. The measure of the young listener’s enjoyment during the concert depends, therefore, on having engaged the child’s cognitive-emotive domain through the repertoire studied before the performance (ibid).

The IPO KeyNote program for compulsory kindergarten

This program for children ages four to six started in Tel Aviv in 2012. It was an initiative of the Tel Aviv-Jaffa municipality, launched by its Department of Preschool Education, as pertinent to the municipality’s central goal of support for the arts and cultural enrichment.

There are 95 kindergartens located throughout the city, for populations of varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Among the pupils are native-born Israelis, children of foreign workers and refugees, and those in special-education frameworks. The program includes an extensive number of kindergartens and a limited number of preparatory meetings:

- Seven encounters with a mediator /facilitator from the KeyNote staff of leading music educators;
- One encounter with the KeyNote program mediator /facilitator and an IPO musician;
- A concluding concert in the civic auditorium with ten musicians and one mediator from the Keynote staff, now in the role of animateur/moderator.

The focus of the sessions is always on the specific pieces to be performed later by ten IPO musicians at the final concert. The aim is to expand the kindergarten’s “soundscape” and to define the live concert in such a fashion that allows a framework of musical constructs from different cultures as well as the exposure to the ways through which music learning occurs.

The mediation model toward the live concert (see Table 1) has been designed to provide children with exciting and creative experiences. This model combines the different mediators interacting with the children, with different versions of the same piece or song.

There are five mediators:

1. The KeyNote team of mediators/facilitators who teach the repertoire from recorded music and short live performance excerpts
2. The teaching staff in the kindergarten, who replay the recorded repertoire for the children according to a strategy guided by the facilitator/moderator.
3. The family members at home, who according to assignments listen to the repertoire together with their child.
4. The orchestra musicians in intimate encounters in kindergartens, in which one musician plays the themes and prominent motifs for the entire piece.
5. The orchestra as a performing body for the final concert in the auditorium with a facilitator now in the role of animateur/moderator.

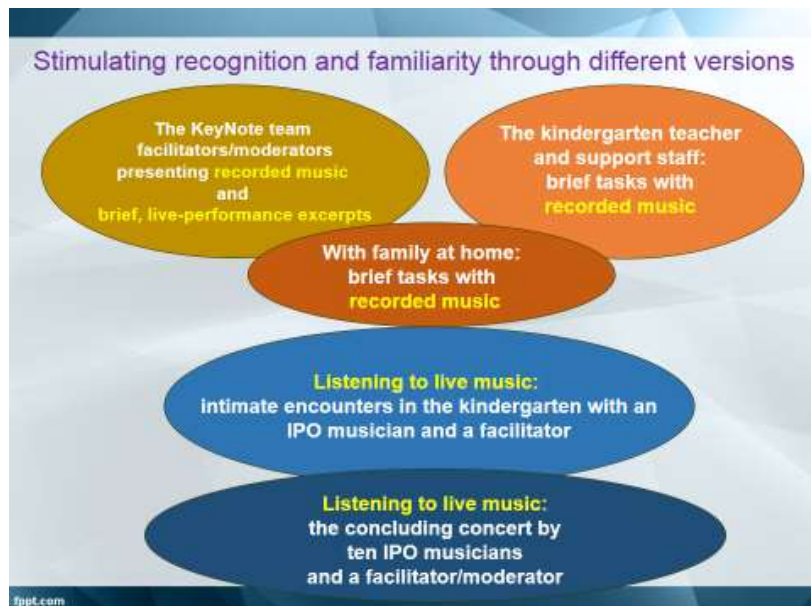


Table 1. The mediation model toward the live concert

The performer and the audience - Getting involved in the concert as a social and artistic challenge

Now, let us imagine the intimate encounter with IPO musicians in kindergarten environment and later on in the concluding concert at the auditorium: Which visual and aural characteristics are emerging from the musicians on stage? Here we have solid fundamentals of cooperation and reciprocal consideration.

From the other side, we can appreciate the young listener’s recognition stage and the sense of familiarity with the repertoire, and perhaps also the rate of perception of unity and change. Now the listeners are placing the repertoire and its different environments reception in meaningful categories.

However, being familiar with the repertoire does not guarantee full enjoyment during the concert. This audience of listeners holds high expectations as to the performers’ physical presence: their body movements, hand gestures, their attitude towards the audience, their facial expressions, their way of sitting or standing on stage, and the like.

Recent research about the degree of communication between the performers and the listening audience indicates gaps between the expectations and goals of the main “actors” at the concert (Sloboda and Ford 2014). The approach of the performers reflects particularly high-quality playing as well as maximal and successful coordination. Performers regarded sound and the coordination of sound as the most important cue of communication. The dominance of the audio cue in inter-performer communication is that auditory information is prioritized over visual information in terms of synchronization among performers while playing pieces without significant temporal changes (Repp and Penel 2002). Simultaneously, orchestral musicians have described a lack of creativity in their work when required “to produce unspectacular but efficient performances day after day, night after night” (Cottrell 2004)

Sloboda and Ford (2014) argue that classical musicians are not focused on audiences:

The audience is not the most important issue in classical music. Rather, it is the work. So far, we’ve mainly considered the relationship between the performer and the audience, but more important than that to classical music is another relationship, namely the performers’ relationship, or sense of duty if you like, to the composer and the work.

Both performer and audiences came to concerts primarily, not to have a relationship with each other but to realize a relationship with the composer and his great works. The performer became a medium, the conduit for the voice of the composer. Even today, performers are said to have given good performances if they have effaced themselves and brought out the composer’s intentions.

The IPO musicians participating in the KeyNote program in kindergartens play a part integrated into the mediation process (see Table 2 below).

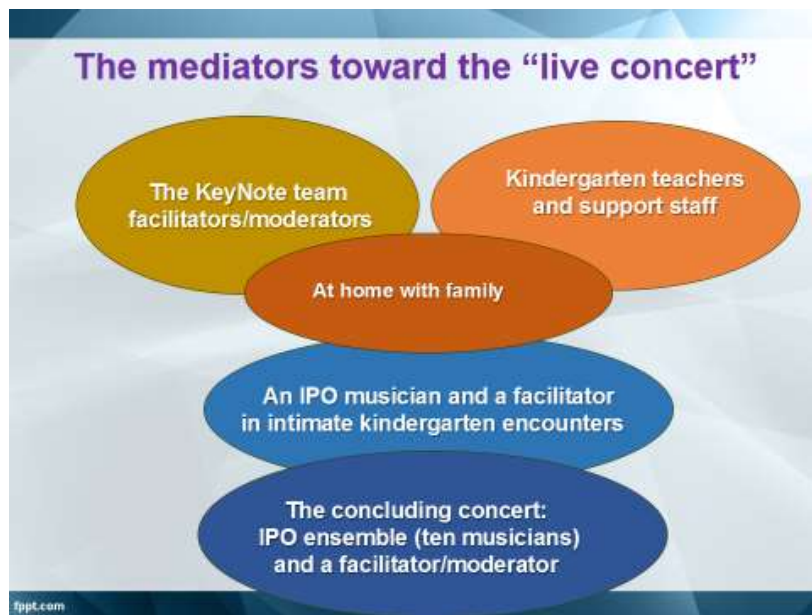


Table 2. The mediation process towards the live concert

The following set of questions with a selection of responses from the IPO musicians allows a characterization of their conception of their role in the Live Concert. Their responses were listed, recorded, and documented in a conversational framework, and sometimes in brief interviews held during the program activity in the kindergartens. The responses shed light on the musicians’ perception of their role in the mediation process. The abbreviated selection here is a sampling representing the various positions and attitudes of the musicians, including men and women, Israeli-born or immigrants, who have participated in the program since its 2012 inception in kindergartens.

1. What were your expectations of the visits to the kindergartens for the preparation sessions?
 - First and foremost, to meet the educational staff for whom it is important to inculcate children with the beauty of art.
 - To meet children who have been well-prepared for the encounter, children who are waiting to finally meet real musicians.
 - My expectation of the morning encounter in the kindergartens was that of curiosity. Quiet, and a little advance knowledge on the children’s part.
 - My expectations were that the children will be attentive listeners and with a reasonable extent of familiarity with the material to be played.
 - I’m emotionally charged to begin the KeyNote encounters. For me this is a pleasure. While the children learn from us about playing instruments and music, still I feel that I always learn no less than they – about imagination, listening, appreciation, sincerity.

2. Is there a sense of empathy which arises between you and the children from the moment you enter the kindergarten?
 - Sometimes yes, sometimes they don't really relate to us. Again, it all depends on the kindergarten teacher.
 - Yes, empathy is generated.
 - The children very much promote empathy.

3. What can you say about creating your connection with the listeners in the kindergarten?
 - I always try to smile, to answer their questions about whatever they're curious.
 - My connection to the children is through finding a common language. To attempt getting into their heads and their thoughts, and to suit myself to this mentality – and by doing so, to transmit the knowledge I want them to acquire.
 - I always wait for total silence; I won't play until there's quiet, I'll speak in a quiet voice in order to obtain the children's complete attention. I'll circulate among the children if this is possible, and I'll use many hand movements.
 - It depends on the musical piece to be played. Sometimes I smile more than usual and make more eye contact.

4. What is the extent of your awareness of your means of expression during the encounter, compared with other performance frameworks?
 - They're no different from my means of expression when playing for different audience.
 - Expression in the individual encounter is entirely different from a larger gathering, and certainly from the concluding performance with the full orchestra.
 - In an individual encounter, I feel that the entire responsibility for the session's success and transmitting knowledge is dependent upon me. In larger gatherings with a facilitator present, the responsibility is more shared.
 - My means of expression are definitely different: more smiling, gentler and inclusive.

5. What about the nonverbal connection between you and the listeners during the performance?
 - Sometimes I can smile or be in eye contact with a particular child, but overall, I'm absorbed in the performance.

- The connection is created through playing the music: I try to play mostly from memory while looking the children in the eyes and seeing and responding to their reactions.
 - When it indeed is created: by means of a smile, of glances.
6. What can you say about the extent of your influence on the young listeners during a performance?
- In the explanatory discussions I try to be empathetic towards the children, and I believe this exerts an influence on them.
 - My influence is very strong. I see this by their reactions and their enthusiasm.
 - I have a certain degree of influence over the children, on condition that they are concentrating and ready. If a nonverbal connection has been made between me and the children, I'll know that I've succeeded in my mission.
7. How do you identify an emotional connection between yourself and the children?
- Based on the silence while I'm playing and the amount of questions that the children ask.
 - A connection with the audience is made through cooperation: joint activity and creating curiosity, and a willingness on both sides' part to know.
 - When I feel a strong urge to know what is happening in the children's heads, how they accept the music and the words and are influenced by them.
 - When there's a smile shared between myself and a pupil, and when I feel a great deal of caring about [the encounter] and a closeness also without words.
 - If indeed a connection like this is created, the children will come up to me at the end of the encounter, will want to touch the instrument, will tell me something about themselves, and they'll leave smiling.
8. Regarding your impressions and insights from your explanatory remarks: which indicators reveal the degree of interest that you arouse during your remarks?
- According to the silence during my remarks and the amount of questions the children ask.
 - The most significant indicator is the silence. Noise bothers me personally a great deal; in my opinion this attests to the fact that the children haven't had sufficient preparation.
 - The first indicator is silence. After that, the enthusiasm, and then the questions the children ask.
 - The extent of the children's concentration, and the expression in their eyes.

9. What characteristics and abilities are required of musicians to participate in kindergarten encounters?
- To relate seriously to every detail, having personal charisma, and a desire to influence.
 - The musicians must have an orientation toward preschoolers, patience, and a total lack of cynicism.
 - The required abilities are an openness of thinking and the ability to improvise, because sometimes it's necessary to make alterations on the spot and not stick to the original plan. Of course, excellence in playing your instrument and an inner urge of enthusiasm that will infect the audience.
 - I believe it's very, very important to speak to the children in their language: pleasant and clearly, close to their world.
10. Have you learned any new insights from the preparation encounters during the year? If so, what are they?
- I didn't discover anything new. I already have much experience in this area.
 - I've learned a lot from the encounters with the children. First of all, a lot of improvisation ability, because it's necessary to cope with different situations: when children create a disturbance, or you have to diverge from the written program. I'm learning how to establish a connection by creating a common ground. Sometimes it's difficult for children to relate to classical music, so I try to get them to connect through modern music, contemporary songs. Through television programs and sometimes even through sports.
 - It's always possible to learn something new, such as which words “speak to” children and elicit from them greater interest. However, as I've been taking part in projects of this sort for many years already and the interaction with children is very, very natural for me – I believe that on the whole I “hit the target” with my explanations and the language I use with children.
 - I've learned that body language needs to be different when playing for preschoolers. I've learned that the mediator needs to be highly experienced and prepared, that without preparation there's no point to the encounter. I'm convinced that these encounters contribute a great deal to the children.

Some thoughts

The musicians' responses indicate differing stances and approaches to their personal grasp of their role in the preparatory encounter in the kindergarten:

- The musician who expects the kindergarten's educational staff to have established the preparatory preconditions in advance and considers this practically a required basis for successful communication.
- The musician who “learns the territory” and acts flexibly for the sake of creating a connection and interest.
- The musician who doesn't anticipate surprising situations.
- The musician who's prepared to be surprised in order to better understand the children's world.
- The musician who's supported by a facilitator/moderator in order to conduct a successful encounter.
- The musician who's aware of the differences between an audience of adults vs. a young audience, and consequently prepares for this by means of expression and body language.
- The musician who relates to the macro; that is, views the program as a gestalt of stages and way-stations, and expresses his or her faith in the power of persuasion.

The conception of the musician's role as mediating for the world of music and his or her own world, raises the question of the musician's capacity for openness and change through the music encounters in the kindergarten.

After dozens of preparatory sessions in the kindergartens led by a musician and a facilitator/moderator, and with the IPO KeyNote program having been implemented with thousands of elementary school students and high schools (since 2000), and later on in more than a hundred kindergartens, a significant number of IPO musicians are aware of the importance of nonverbal communication with young audience and of their role as mediators. The spread of awareness to the degree of communication had its impact especially in the intimate encounters at the kindergarten, before the closing concert at the auditorium.

The facilitators/moderators of the KeyNote program play a significant role in the mediation process between the musicians and the kindergarten students. The rehearsals which take place between the musicians and the facilitators enable the reinforcement of their connection, along with a mutual coordination of positions and views in preparation for their departure for the preparatory meetings in the kindergartens.

Along with this, the kindergartens' educational staff have generally expressed a measure of satisfaction about the encounters with the musician in the kindergarten, according to one main request from the pupils: that this musician will be part of the

orchestral ensemble in the concluding auditorium concert performance, which will take place some two weeks after the last encounter in the kindergarten.

In this paper, the narrative rests on an axiological view that questions of education and culture are wrapped in those of values (Jover 2002). In light of this proposition, my occasional conversations with the musicians before or after the concerts as well as while traveling together to the concerts, the brief questionnaires which at times were delivered orally, along with my observation processes – all these contributed to the plurality of narratives and allow fruitful dialogues in order to make a specific change in the everyday manner of perception, communication, and performance. This change involves how we perceive things in general, and not only music. It is concerned with a self-awareness of the contribution of the mediator's personal attributes and transformational style.

A final, closing metaphor

Western classical music embodies a kind of society that does not allow for mutual participation of all peoples because it is based upon works, not interactions;” in a more inclusive and creative society there shall be “no such thing as a musical work, [but] only the activities of singing, playing, listening [and] dancing. (Christopher Small, 2001)

Beside the mediating process in the ways of becoming acquainted with the repertoire—and in light of the perception, memory, and interpretation children's stages—the crucial test to guarantee enjoyment lies above all on the maximal manifestation of the nonverbal communication dynamics between the performers and the audience. Furthermore, it is to be remembered that in some way, the transition from the environment-circle of the kindergarten to the auditorium situates the individual pupil as an anonymous listener within an audience of about 300 participants. In such an environment-circle, the visual aspects of the performance personalize the music, drawing performers and listeners closer together in a shared experience.

Such a set of expectations and considerations as to the concert's success among its listeners, places the concert scene as the most complex mediation among the chain of mediations: being touched by this piece here and now, in a collective redistribution of creation.

In a metaphorical sense, the nonverbal communication dynamics during the concert has to do with a dialogue extended across a shared “table”, without hierarchy, in which performers and audience mutually encode and decode information, interpretation, and response. In this way, the road is paved for the live concert, in order to evoke inspiring and energizing artistic performance as well the repertoire's reception by the young listeners, with renewed interpretations and joy.

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