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What Makes a Good Musical Improviser? An Expert View on Improvisational Expertise

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Abstract

This study presents an expert view on musical improvisational expertise. A group concept mapping procedure was used to identify key characteristics of such expertise among a group of 26 renowned musical experts. Multivariate analyses, including 2-dimensional multidimensional scaling (MDS) of unstructured sort data, hierarchical cluster analysis of the MDS coordinates, and the computation of average ratings of 169 statements resulted in a 7-cluster concept map. The cluster self-regulation was located at the heart of the cluster map and was, therefore, regarded a core constituent of improvisational expertise. The other clusters were basic (musical) skills, affect, risk-taking, creation, responsivity, and ideal. Implications for instruction, limitations of the study, and future research are commented upon.

Keywords: improvisation, expertise, concept mapping, music, instruction