

From Page to Stage: Using Music Theory to Electrify your Performances

Dr. Michelle Cheramy
Professor of Flute (with a side of theory and aural skills)
Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland Canada
mcheramy@mun.ca

Listeners' emotional reaction to music is governed by their expectations about what is going to happen.

A Strategy for Riveting Performances

- think about the “systems” of your piece: how are these systems supposed to work?
- if the system is hard to understand, look for patterns, think about what has been established as “normal” in the melody/harmony/rhythm
- what parts of the melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic structure of your piece stray from expectations?
- you have two tools to use to highlight these exceptional moments
 - TONE dynamics, color, vibrato
 - TIME rhythmic pushing or delay of beat arrivals, slight manipulations of lengths of notes.
- decide how you will use your tools to heighten tension, thwart and then reward your listeners expectations, and create stunning performances!
- some things to consider:
 - dissonance, large and small scale (the gravity of the tonal solar system)
 - small scale/local: pitches foreign to key, foreign to prevailing harmony
 - larger scale: non-diatonic chords
 - large scale: tonal areas
 - weak vs strong metric placement of unexpected events
 - melody: exceptions to general contour direction?
 - inertia: listeners expect what has happened before to continue to happen
 - patterns: are any established and then disrupted?

More Reading

Huron, David. *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.

Levitin, Daniel. *This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession*. New York: Penguin, 2007.

Salimpoor, Valorie and Robert J. Zatorre. “Neural Interactions that Give Rise to Musical Pleasure.” *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity and the Arts* Vol. 7 No. 1: 62-75 [2013]