College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Faculty Research Colloquium

January 28, 2021

Via Zoom

Presentations begin at 3:00pm.

**Pablo Mahave-Veglia** (Music, Theater and Dance) “The Cello Concerto by Leo Sowerby.”

The Cello Concerto by Grand Rapids native and Pulitzer-prize-winning composer Leo Sowerby (1895 – 1968) was premiered in New York 1934, but went on to disappear from the repertoire and is still unpublished. Sowerby went on to achieve great recognition in the field of Church Music, becoming the founder and head of the College of Church Musicians at the American Cathedral in Washington, D.C. There are technical, historical, and aesthetic reasons why this work has had no performances since its premiere, and I made it my sabbatical project to edit the one surviving manuscript and provide the context that places it as an important contribution to my instrument’s American literature.

**Kirsten Strom** (Visual & Media Arts)“Bomarzo: A Musical Tour of Italy’s Park of the Monsters.”

The central Italian town of Bomarzo is home to a uniquely bizarre attraction, known both as the Sacred Grove and the Park of the Monsters. Built in the sixteenth century by a Prince purportedly driven mad by the death of his wife, the park contains nearly forty massive sculptural “follies,” representing mythical gods and monsters, creatures of the land and sea, and harbingers of the underworld. Following a 2017 visit to Bomarzo to photograph’s the park’s many offerings, I used its sculptures as the basis for musical tour through the park in which each object has been translated and narrativized in an original musical composition. My presentation will function as an abbreviated version of the “tour.”

**Kody Wallace** (Music, Theater and Dance) “The Role of Gesture in Perceptions of Expressivity and Technique in Solo Vocal Music.”

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of spontaneous co-temporal gesture in the perception of technique and expressivity in vocal music performance by both performers and evaluators. Specific questions addressed were: 1) Does the use of spontaneous co-temporal gesture affect performers’ perceptions of technique and expressivity in solo vocal performance? 2) Does the use of spontaneous co-temporal gesture affect evaluators’ perceptions of technique and expressivity in solo vocal performance? 3) Does presentation mode (audio vs. audiovisual) affect evaluators’ perceptions of technique and expressivity in solo vocal performance?

Stimulus recordings were created that featured participant singers (N = 8) performing a short musical excerpt a cappella in two conditions: one with spontaneous, co-temporal hand and body gestures and another with no movement. Participant singers responded to a self-assessment inventory measuring their perceptions of technique and expressivity in both conditions. Singer participants also completed an open-ended survey that addressed their perceptions of how gesture impacts their singing, both in general and in reference to the research task. Outside evaluators (N = 82) rated either audio-only (n = 40) or audiovisual (n = 42) stimuli taken from the first phase of the study based on their perceptions of technique and expressivity. Evaluators were purposefully not directed to attend to gesture or movement.

Statistical analysis revealed significant differences in perceptions of expressivity and technique for both participant singers and evaluators. Participant singers rated their gestured performances higher for both technique and expressivity. Comments taken from the open-ended interview questions indicated performers felt that gesture assisted with phrase shape, articulation, dynamics, technical vocal faults, and alleviated some cognitive load during performance. Evaluators rated gestured performances as more expressive in both audio-only and audiovisual presentation modes (p < .001), and although the mean score for technique was higher for the gestured condition, the difference was not statistically significant.

While no significant main effect was found for presentation mode in the analyses of technique and expressivity, several interactions occurred. In the analysis of expressivity, performances with gesture were rated higher in the audiovisual presentation mode than audio-only performances. Conversely, un-gestured audiovisual performances had a lower mean rating than when in the audio-only mode. Also, while all performers were rated higher for technique in the gestured condition of audiovisual presentations, audio-only scores for the soprano and bass were higher for the un-gestured condition.

Findings from the present study suggest that spontaneous, co-temporal hand gestures appear to have a positive impact on perceptions of expressivity in solo vocal performance by performers and observers. Future research might investigate whether spontaneous, co-temporal gestures positively impact perceptions of expressivity with singers of different ability levels, singers in small and large ensembles, and whether gesture may positively impact music performances with added cognitive load.

Future colloquia are scheduled for:

Thursday, Feb 18

Thursday, March 18

If you would like to give a presentation at one of the five remaining colloquia, please send an email to [stavesm@gvsu.edu](mailto:stavesm@gvsu.edu) with preferred dates and a tentative title for your presentation.