

Stylistic Feature Mapping for Music Performance

In the late 1970s, the Royal College of Music in Stockholm (KMH) started professional performance programs for musicians outside the domain of Western Classical Music, including e.g. Jazz and Swedish Folk music. In the beginning, it was regarded an opportunity for informally trained musicians in these genres to receive proper music education.

However, it soon became clear that these students, in order to develop their artistic practice within their own genres within the domain of academic music performance training, needed terminology, concepts and methods for to describe the values, aesthetics, expressions, musical structures, instrumental techniques etc. of importance in their musical practice.

In the clash between musical styles developed outside of the music academies and the art music with its rich history of prescriptive descriptive concepts, there was a need for communication of expressional qualities between different musical styles - and this need for revealing the tacit knowledge of non-academic performers were in particular prominent in Folk Music. An artistic research project was initiated, conducted between 1983 and 1987 (Ahlbäck 1987), with the aim to study, document and describe performance style and techniques in Swedish fiddle music from a performance perspective, however making style comparisons possible.

One outcome of the project was a system for description and mapping of performance style qualities, and this 'style mapping model' originally developed for fiddle music emerged into a more general model for describing performance style qualities that has been used in artistic reflective training and in thesis work at KMH for more than 30 years, as a tool for developing, describing, documenting and communicating artistic directions and concepts.

This paper discusses the features of this model in relation to musicological and music psychological approaches to music expression and style and presents empirical results from the application of the system within performance training for over 30 years including over 250 students, as well as examples of influences on contemporary musical practice.

How has this approach been used for development of musical concepts in different artistic reflective works? What can be learned from applying this mapping system in the meeting between musicians with different musical values?



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Sven Ahlbäck is a musician, composer, researcher and professor of Folk music at Kungl. Musikhögskolan in Stockholm (KMH). Sven learned traditional fiddle playing in early age from traditional master fiddlers and is one of Swedens most influential folk musicians. He is also active as a composer and arranger. He has made ground-breaking research on folk music style, including tonality, rhythm and meter. His PhD thesis "Melody Beyond Notes" (2004) presents a model of cross-cultural cognition of melody from an MIR perspective. He is Swedens first professor in Folkmusic on both artistic and scientific merits, and has developed the folk music dept. at KMH since the 1990s and is long-term lecturer and supervisor of Artistic research at KMH. He has also founded the company DoReMIR Music Research that released the innovative notation software ScoreCloud. In 2019 he received the highest honor award by the Swedish Royal Academy of Music.