

Abstract

This dissertation develops a phenomenology of expert musicianship through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates qualitative interviews with the Danish String Quartet with philosophical analyses drawing on ideas and theses found in phenomenology, philosophy of mind, cognitive science and psychology of music.

The dissertation is structured through the asking, analyzing and answering of three primary questions, namely:

- 1) What is it like to be an expert?
- 2) What is the general phenomenology of expert musicianship?
- 3) What happens to the self in deep musical absorption?

The first question targets a central debate in philosophy and psychology on whether reflection is conducive for, or detrimental to, skillful performance. My analyses show that the concepts assumed in the literature on this question are poorly defined and gloss over more important features of expertise.

The second question asks, as openly as possible, what happens in the consciousness of a performing musician. This leads to the construction of a taxonomy of absorption. This then allows for a reframing of the question of expertise that comes to involve phenomenological analyses of “passive synthesis”, “embodiment”, “intercorporeity”, “sense of agency”, and the emotions.

Finally, the third question targets the most challenging dimension of musicianship, namely deep absorption, which is seemingly experienced as a selfless or blackout-like state. The existence of such an experience challenges core philosophical conceptions of the nature of the self. I account for the conditions of the possibility of deep absorption and suggest that a detailed and comprehensive grasp of expert musicianship is best achieved through an understanding of the phenomenon that revolves around a changed sense of agency.