

Discussion

In this audio paper I have examined the idiolect of Charlie McCoy. By studying the practice of McCoy through transcriptions of his music supplemented with interviews, a deeper understanding of his idiolect and where it came from has emerged. The paper demonstrates how McCoy, after arriving in Nashville as a novice of country music, learned to play country music and to adapt the idiomatic features of the genre to the affordances¹ of the diatonic harmonica. McCoy adapted his blues-informed idiolect to correspond to the stylistic norms of 1960's Nashville produced country music. This transformation of McCoy's idiolect was achieved in two ways.

- 1) He learned the vocabulary of country music by listening to, and copying, other instrumentalists on the recording sessions he worked. He copied generic licks played on various instruments such as the pedal steel guitar, the fiddle, the dobro, and the guitar. He then adapted these licks to navigate the affordances of the diatonic harmonica. Examples of these adaptations are heard throughout the audio paper, e.g., *Orange Blossom Special* (fiddle playing), *The Real McCoy* (pedal steel guitar playing) and *Grade A* (guitar playing in the chicken picking style).
- 2) He learned from other session musicians, as well as producers, about the expectations regarding the role of the session musician, e.g., the concept of *less is more*. This is exemplified in the audio paper with the inclusion of *He Stopped Loving Her Today*.

In addition to exploring the idiolect of McCoy, this audio paper also concerns the beginning of my own journey toward a transformed idiolect. Through the process of transcription, imitation, creation and practicing I am finding out not only what has already been done in my field and who I am as an artist, but more importantly who I want to be as an artist; I am, in other words, developing my *hexis*. "...hexis is constitutive of artistic choice, reflection, and action. The artistic virtue that is embodied in the musician's hexis, is reflective of a broader aesthetic context and one's (artistic) goals in life..." (Coessens & Östersjö 2014). I view hexis as all my artistic choices and goals, which ultimately forms my artistic voice. These new insights into my artistic hexis were made possible through a thorough study of not only McCoy's practice, but also my own practice. Finding out what has already been done (the transcriptions and interviews), in combination with exploring how I can work with the affordances of the harmonica, has improved my own practice in a profound way.

As an artistic researcher, the musicality of the method was imperative. When making the interviews, the constant presence of a harmonica was, both for me and my

¹ The concept of affordances originates from James Gibson: "The *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill" (Gibson 1979). I apply the concept to the relationship between an instrument and a musician (De Souza, 2017; Gorton & Östersjö, 2016; Tullberg, 2021).

informants, invaluable. After all, when trying to learn more about something as complex as music, words only go so far. Due to the pandemic, these interviews were not made in person, but on Zoom. The sound quality was good enough to be able to play and listen to each other, but actually playing together was not possible. Had we been able to do that, the musical exchange would likely have been enhanced. Despite this limitation, I gained many new insights through the interviews, and more specifically from what my informants played during the interviews. There is a lot to be learned from not only what they played, but also how they played the various examples.

What they chose to play is of value since that indicates what they feel is important and significant to McCoy's idiolect. McCoy himself played examples from when he worked as a sideman (with Roy Orbison, George Jones, and Jerry Lee Lewis) when he wanted to exemplify various traits of his idiolect (blues influence, the *less is more* approach and pedal steel guitar influences respectively). The choice of examples from recordings when he was a sideman indicates the importance of the context when McCoy discusses his own idiolect. What and when he plays (or not plays) on a recording, is always dependent on the context, *what the song needs* as McCoy put it in the interview. When Greene and Caldwell played parts from McCoy's recordings it was more often from his own albums, which they both had studied extensively when learning to play country music on the harmonica. The examples they chose to play were not only exemplifying McCoy's idiolect, but also the parts of McCoy's idiolect that had influenced them the most. They played McCoy licks filtered through their own hexis, thus not only illuminating McCoy's idiolect, but also their own.

How they played the various licks and examples is also of significance. In McCoy's case, it reveals how his idiolect has evolved over the six decades he has been working as a session player and as an artist. E.g. when he, in the interview played the intro to "Candy Man", it was much cleaner than the original recording. Since "Candy Man" was recorded in 1961, McCoy's playing on that track represents how he played prior to being asked to play with not such a *funky tone*. However, when reproducing what he did on that recording on the interview in 2020, he instinctively plays with the clean tone which the producers later preferred and which he is known for today. Greene and Caldwell both played licks and parts of solos from McCoy's recordings, but did so very much with their own artistic voice coming through. The original McCoy licks or themes they played were quite often, perhaps unintentionally, enhanced with small variations and ornaments which are significant of their own idiolect.

In conclusion, studying the practice of McCoy through my transcriptions and the interviews (both what is said and what is played) has been my method to gain a multifarious understanding of the idiolect of Charlie McCoy. This method has also enabled me to begin my journey to transform my own artistic voice through transcription and imitation. Finally, by creating an audio paper with the aim of

providing a display of the results of the study, I have *played the interview* and *composed the results*.