

# Dancing About Music

*How does consciously moving while playing help to interpret and communicate a piece of music?*



Research paper

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## Introduction

In April 2014 I played in *Kopernikus*, an opera by Claude Vivier. Being a production of De Nederlandse Opera, it was fully staged and costumed as one might expect. This opera is written for seven singers, and seven instrumentalists. The instrumentalists' parts are equal in importance to those of the singers'. Both groups are on stage for the duration of the performance, and are required to play or sing the entire work by heart. Half of the libretto is in a fantasy language, and there is no defined role or character for each singer. This makes the instrumentalists and singers even more equal in my opinion: each group must express themselves using only sound and movement, as the singers do not have the advantage of a libretto that provides material on which to build a character or narrate a story. For this reason, the staging was very movement-orientated. This provided us with one more way of expressing the musical content of the opera than we would normally be accustomed: in addition to our instrument and our facial expressions, we could now use our whole body to express ourselves and the music. This was very liberating for my fellow instrumentalists and I, since we've always been taught to keep 'unnecessary movements' to a minimum while performing.

We would start each day of rehearsal with one and a half hours of 'movement,' led by our movement coach Miguel Ángel Gaspar. Here we developed a kind of movement language, but the exact execution of the movements differed per body, and therefore per person as well. For this reason, Miguel Ángel did not try to force us all to be in perfect synchronization with one another, as he instead wanted the movements to be and look natural. And what is natural is of course different for each individual body. With the exception of one 'dance,' there was no defined choreography throughout the entire opera. What Miguel Ángel did however, was challenge us to focus on and really feel what movements our bodies wanted to make while hearing or playing certain musical passages. As a result, everybody eventually came up with their very own movements.

There is one major solo for the violin in this opera. At first I had a hard time interpreting the solo because (at least for me), the direction and shape of every phrase in Vivier's music is not always crystal clear. When I started working with Miguel Ángel on the movement to go with this solo however, I found that focusing on my body's reflexes while playing the solo made its structure and phrasing suddenly very clear. Miguel Ángel would ask me to play a few bars, and see if I could identify small movements that my body wanted, or tried, to make. Once we had identified these 'reflexes,' he challenged me to make them into larger movements so that they became more visible and clear. We repeated this for the entire solo, and eventually made the movements into a 'dance': a series of connected movements. As a result, I now felt in what direction phrases were moving, whether these directional movements were (relatively) large or small, and where the musical high and low points of these phrases were. Apparently, it seems that I unconsciously already understood the music better than I thought, but consciously focusing on moving with the music is what ultimately brought this understanding to the surface.

*To watch a video of the violin solo in Kopernikus, please see 'Video 1' in attachment.*

Initially, the reasoning behind creating movement for this solo was to explain the music to the audience, while making it more visually interesting and appealing for them as well. For this reason I ended up using the movement as a way of acting out the music. As shown in Video 1, this meant not only moving my body in place, but using the entire horizontal and vertical space as well: by moving from right to left and from the background to the foreground; by using my fellow

musicians as props or stage décor and moving around them; or by alternating between standing up tall, sinking to the ground, and even sitting down. To convey my understanding of the musical character I was 'playing' to the audience, I used a combination of bodily movement and facial expressions. By changing the direction in which I was facing while I played, like by abruptly turning to someone on stage or by suddenly making eye contact with the audience for example, I was able to engage the audience in my 'story' while keeping their focus on me and on what I wanted to communicate about the music. I loved being allowed to act out my musical understanding, character, and message in this way: not only because it seemed fitting for an operatic work with such an abstract story, but also because I felt like an actor - only instead of using words, I was using sound and movement. Furthermore, I felt much more connected with the audience, and they with me, than might have been possible without using movement in this way.

Interestingly, if someone had told me from the outset that I was expected to play this sequence of notes while making these particular movements, I probably would have told them that it was impossible and that they would have to change the choreography. Because the movement originated from my own body however, and because I was only encouraged to amplify or exaggerate what I myself had come up with, the movements felt entirely natural and I found that I could move around much more while playing than I had ever imagined possible.

This experience impacted me greatly. I now believe that letting the body freely move as it pleases, while being very conscious about the movements the body naturally makes, could help many musicians to better understand, interpret, and communicate the music they perform. Especially in contemporary music, where structure and phrasing are not always immediately easy to grasp, moving could make an enormous difference in the process of getting to know and understand a piece. I think, based on my own experiences, that such an approach could also help people to feel much freer while playing their instrument. Furthermore, such conscious movements during performances could make the musical message of a given piece much clearer to performers and audiences alike. As an important note, I must emphasize exactly what kind of 'movement while playing' is meant here. I don't mean choreographed movement, but I also don't mean the kind of 'natural' movements that some very 'physically expressive' players make when on stage. The kind of movement to which I'm referring is created by focusing on the body's 'reflexes': a deep awareness of the movements your body already wants to make to certain music. In other words, you let the body improvise, but do it in a conscious way. You then remember the movements that came out of this process of 'conscious improvisation,' so that you can use them while performing to clarify your musical message.

Where talking about music can sometimes fall short, I believe dancing about music could be a wonderful solution. Indeed, this is of course a 'play' on the infamous (though unattributed) quote asserting that, "Talking about music is like dancing about architecture." Performers have many complex though often tacit ways of talking about and understanding music, but perhaps actually *dancing about it* is a way of bringing these unspoken modes of knowing and doing to the foreground. While looking at a sheet of music therefore, instead of asking yourself how or what you feel in a certain passage of music, you could instead just actually feel it through your body. This will bring to the surface a very personal and honest interpretation: one that you may not have realized was already there. This approach provides a new way for musicians to let their musicality speak.

There are two elements of the bodily movement approach to performance that I will explore in this paper:

1. How can focusing on moving consciously benefit the performer?
2. How can focusing on moving consciously benefit an audience?

My focus however will be primarily on the first question, because I began this research by hoping to find a way for my fellow musicians and I to improve our performances. Interestingly, I discovered that very little research has been done on this topic. The articles I did find are mostly concerned with studying the bodily movement that already exists with musicians: the kinds of naturally expressive movements that I've listed above, and that I'm not so keen to examine. These studies do provide a nice background on the origin of the movements we unconsciously make as performers, but they also show that there is still room for an exploration of the performative benefits of moving consciously.

While researching this background literature, I did however come across quite a few articles discussing the effect of performers' bodily movements on audiences. These articles state that a performer's movements are of great significance to an audience's understanding of a piece of music. This only strengthened my theory regarding the benefits of the bodily movement approach to performance, while becoming the guiding research question for this project: if movement helps an audience to understand the music, there is a fair chance it also works the other way around and helps performers understand the music better as well. Furthermore, and as we saw in the video of the violin solo in *Kopernikus*, movement can also help to bring performers and audiences together in the musical space, time, and act of performance; where they don't just understand the *music* better as a result, but perhaps each other as well.

In addition to this background research, I will further explore my research question in a more personal way, via a case study in which I create a series of movements for Lera Auerbach's *Lonely Suite* for violin solo.

## Background Literature

Many studies have shown that performers' bodily movements are very clarifying to an audience in terms of the structure of a musical piece and its phrasing. This raises the question therefore, of why more musicians don't use movement to clarify these musical parameters for themselves. It seems very plausible that if it works one way - for audiences, it could also work the other way – for performers. In other words, if seeing bodily movement explains the music to audiences, couldn't performers let their own movements explain the music to themselves?

### I) Movement and Meaning

There appears to be a strong connection between movement and intended meaning. We use movement to express ourselves all the time: to give silent signals, to reinforce the words we are saying, and even when we are on the phone and the person we are talking to can't see us. It's in our nature. In the background literature on this topic I found a few interesting examples that illustrate this connection between movement and meaning, and how movement is our most sincere and honest way of communicating.

An initial indication of the importance of movement for how people naturally express themselves is the fact that they use gesture when they speak, whether or not the person to whom they are speaking can see them - like during a telephone conversation for example. These movements help us to formulate our thoughts into utterances. This is in fact an example of how we let our bodies non-verbally 'dictate' what we actually want to express verbally. With particular reference to the guiding research question of this paper, Jane Davidson asserts that these non-verbal speech-accompanying gestures "are critical parts of the representational system of verbal communication": principles that "ought to [also] apply to the representation of music and its communication."<sup>1</sup>

It is thus suggested here that we can use our body's gestures and movements in much the same way, in order to 'formulate our thoughts' about music: only in this case, not to formulate them into verbal utterances, but rather into meaningful sounds.

Another striking example of how gestures are our most direct way of expressing ourselves reveals itself in the fact that while speech errors can sometimes occur (when we don't say what we really mean), gestural errors virtually *never* occur. For example, when you ask someone for directions and they accidentally say 'left' when they actually mean 'right,' their accompanying hand gesture will almost always have been made correctly, with the right hand.

This phenomenon may also occur in music. For example, a pianist's head may trace through the air in a way that mimics a very smooth legato line, and yet the notes they play may not sound nearly as smooth nor as expressive.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the body is already translating and communicating the performer's musical intention, even in cases where their ability to technically

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<sup>1</sup> Jane W. Davidson, "Bodily Communication in Musical Performance," in *Musical Communication* ed. David J. Hargreaves et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 222.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

execute that intention is not yet fully formed. When studying a piece of music therefore, focusing on the body's movements could be a way of revealing a clear and sincere interpretation without allowing technical problems to get in the way and cloud one's intention.

Physical metaphors are also commonly used in reference to music. People often speak of a 'flowing legato' or a 'moving performance,' for example. Experts in the fields of philosophy, music psychology, and neuroscience all agree that these metaphors are helpful aids that assist us in relaying how we experience music. It seems plausible therefore that these movement metaphors can be powerful tools in the development of musical performances, for performers, teachers and students alike.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as Davidson again suggests:

Focusing on the body as the source of musical expression implies that musical expression is a means of communicating basic qualities of human nature to one another, qualities which emerge out of movement and which are translated and abstracted into musical forms. Indeed, the rhetoric surrounding music reveals that musical expression draws heavily on the body as a metaphor – for instance, 'it was a moving performance,' or 'her singing really uplifted me.'

Elsewhere, Davidson points out how some experts, like Ray Jackendoff for example, have even suggested that the motion metaphors we so often give to music ('the music ran along') may actually have a bodily origin, in that they activate movement and physiologies of balance in our bodies.<sup>4</sup> Here, Davidson is linking the examples I provided just above. When we make music, we try to communicate certain 'basic qualities of human nature'; the same qualities we communicate verbally while engaged in a conversation. Research has shown that spoken word and bodily movement are intimately connected. But because we try to communicate the same kinds of qualities when we make music as when we speak, it seems likely that we can also use our bodily movement and gestures in much the same way in performance.

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<sup>3</sup> Jane W. Davidson and Jorge Salgado Correia, "Body Movement," in *The Science & Psychology of Music Performance*, ed. Richard Parncutt and Gary McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 237. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195138108.003.0015, accessed October 24, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Ray Jackendoff, *Consciousness and the Computational Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), 131, in Jane W. Davidson, "Communicating with the Body in Performance," *Musical Performance – A Guide to Understanding*, ed. John Rink. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 145. <https://books.google.nl/books?id=xaYxRe-5ztIC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>, accessed October 4, 2015.

## II) Moving to Benefit the Performer

In the available literature on this subject, I found four arguments for using movement in performance:

1. It is technically necessary in order to produce sound
2. It is used in order to communicate with co-performers
3. It works in a clarifying capacity for the audience
4. It is used for musical expression

No matter what instrument you play movement is always required in order to produce sound, though musicians tend to try and make these movements as efficient (and as tiny) as possible so as not to disturb technical ability and fluency. In ensemble playing, movement is used when cueing in order to align players' parts: both in terms of simultaneity (starting and ending notes at exactly the same time), and in terms of intent (creating a unified/coherent musical message amongst co-performers). While the nature of argument number three as listed above will be examined more fully in chapter VII, below I will discuss argument number 4: how movement can be used for musical expression, and how this can benefit performers.

As early as in 1938, German pedagogue Alexander Truslit wrote about music and movement. One particularly nice detail I came across while reading his work is that a German word for emotion is *Gemütsbewegung*. Here, *Gemüts* means 'of the mind,' while *Bewegung* means 'movement.' Thus here, in the German language, one already sees this connection between emotion and movement. As Truslit states: "Musical motion is internal and encompasses the whole human being. It is not only an emotion, but also a true motion sensation...Musical motion can be likened to an invisible, imaginary dance."

Truslit asserts here that we experience musical motion internally: not only psychologically, as emotion, but also physically, as 'a true motion sensation.' Most interestingly of course, given my research question, he also compares this experience to an invisible, imaginary dance. I think that a performer can use this imaginary dance as a tool by making it visible, thereby making her internal experience of the music clearer. Indeed, Jane W. Davidson uses Truslit's assertions to support her claim that, "real or imagined motion is necessary to generate musical expression."<sup>5</sup>

Davidson has carried out substantial research on bodily movement in musical performance. From her findings we can see just how important movement is for performers. In one small-scale study for example, she demonstrated how pianists were unable to play with optimal expression if their bodies were in any way constrained during the learning or performing process.<sup>6</sup> As Davidson concludes, "finding the right mental and physical intention, and allowing that to be freely communicated through the body, seems essential in the production of a fluent and meaningful performance."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> B. H. Repp, "Music as Motion: A Synopsis of Alexander Truslit (1938) *Gestaltung und Bewegung in der Musik*," *Psychology of Music* 21 (1993): 48 - 72, in Davidson and Correia, "Body Movement," 247.

<sup>6</sup> Jane W. Davidson and Jeremy C. Dawson, "The Development of Expression in Body Movement During Learning in Piano Performance," in *Conference Proceedings of Music Perception and Cognition Conference*, ed. David Wessel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 31.

<sup>7</sup> Jane W. Davidson, "Communicating with the Body in Performance," in *Musical Performance – A Guide to Understanding*, ed. John Rink. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 147.

What I found especially interesting about these findings is Davidson's emphasis on the importance of movement, and being able to move freely, during the learning process itself and not just during performance. This seems to fit with my belief that focusing on the body's natural movements while learning a piece of music can help to amplify expressiveness while also helping performers to find a more sincere interpretation of a given piece of music. Indeed, as asserted elsewhere by Davidson, Pitts, and Correia:

As music education practitioners ourselves, we have found that musicians of all ages can gain a deeper understanding of the music they play if they embody it, through gestures and movements that connect with the direction and intention of the music. By moving with the music, there is a union of bodily and musical energy, generating expression that comes from the self and is truly communicative.<sup>8</sup>

In another study, Davidson and Correia uncovered a relationship between movement size and the intensity of musical expression. This study tracked how individual points of the body move in space while a pianist was instructed to perform the same piece of music with three different expressive intentions: deadpan, normal, and exaggerated. Results showed that the more exaggerated the expressive intention, the larger the movements made by the pianist became. This suggests a direct correlation between movement and expressive intensity, since the more exaggerated performances were regarded as sounding as well as looking more expressive.<sup>9</sup>

Musicologist Stephen Snook also believes music is given expression - or intention - if it emerges out of bodily gesture and sensation. While it is true that over the centuries we have become aware of structural devices that are perceptibly expressive in music, there is much music in the contemporary repertoire that does not have such a clear syntax.<sup>10</sup> For this reason, Snook has suggested that contemporary composers wanting to write new works should concern themselves with creating a 'choreography' of a performer's movements, rather than attempting to create a score in the traditional sense.<sup>11</sup> According to Snook therefore, it would be easier for composers to explain what they want to say with their music and how their music should be played by explaining it in bodily movements, rather than explaining their intentions conventionally via dynamics, slurs, articulation, and accents.

I find this to be an interesting thought. While I have hypothesized that by focusing on movement performers will be able to achieve a clear interpretation of their own more easily, and will

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<https://books.google.nl/books?id=xaYxRe-5ztIC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>, accessed October 4, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Jane W. Davidson, Stephanie E. Pitts and Jorge Salgado Correia, "Reconciling Technical and Expressive Elements in Musical Instrument Teaching: Working with Children," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35/3 (2001), 59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3333609>, accessed October 4, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Davidson and Correia, "Body Movement," 237.

<sup>10</sup> Jane W. Davidson and Jorge Salgado Correia. "Meaningful Musical Performance," *Research Studies in Music Education*, forthcoming.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Snook, *Kinesthetic Analysis in Post-Tonal Instrumental Composition* (PhD dissertation: University of Sydney, 1998), page number not provided by authors, in Jane W. Davidson, Stephanie E. Pitts and Jorge Salgado Correia, "Reconciling Technical and Expressive Elements in Musical Instrument Teaching: Working with Children," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35/3 (2001), 59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3333609>, accessed October 4, 2015.

be better able to express and convey their musical intention, Snook argues something similar for composers while also implicitly confirming my hypothesis where performers are concerned. While composers are perhaps less concerned with trying to *find* a convincing interpretation, they are certainly trying to *convey* their musical intent. Expressing ourselves and explaining our musical intent is however a difficult thing to do by using words or (musical) symbols alone. Snook's assertion that composers can more easily communicate their musical intent by explaining it in terms of movement thus seems to correspond with my views on this matter.

Using movement as a tool could be beneficial in any repertoire. When studying a work with a highly familiar musical vocabulary and a long performance history, like a Beethoven sonata for example, most musicians will instantly (or at least fairly quickly) achieve quite a clear idea of the structure and phrasing of the piece. Applying a movement-based approach however could make musicians much more consciously aware of these elements, while paying attention to and amplifying their bodies' natural movements and gestures could personalize their interpretation of such a familiar and oft-performed piece. I do think however, as observed above by Snook, that there is even more to be gained when using movement as a tool in the study of contemporary repertoires. When a given work's musical vocabulary is unfamiliar to the average musician, and when that work's performance history is much shorter, it can feel as though one's interpretation and understanding of its structure and phrasing must be built from the ground up. I believe however, as was my experience with *Kopernikus*, that a movement-based approach can in such cases bring to the surface a musician's instinctual and deeper understanding of the music, unfamiliar though it may be, revealing musical ideas that were achieved perhaps not from the ground up but rather from the *inside out*.

### **III) Getting Familiar with Moving**

In order to be able to use movement as a tool, it is important to first become comfortable with moving your body. If a performer lacks experience in this regard, it will of course be difficult for them to use movement as way of expressing themselves. , Before trying to use movement as a tool in musical performance, I think that it is very important to undergo this preparation, to lose all reluctance or shyness associated with moving your body, and to get an idea of what kind of movements you can make - from the smallest movement of one toe, to moving your whole body through space.

While looking through various exercises from the field of Dramatic Arts, I recognized many of them from the work I did on *Kopernikus* with our movement coach Miguel Ángel. These exercises are referred to as 'exercises to discover your body through music,' and they begin with only small movements of isolated body parts before proceeding to larger movements spread throughout the entire body, and eventually throughout the entire performative space as well. Here is an example of one such preparatory exercise from the field of Drama:

Focus: Getting out of the head and into the body.

Facilitator: Find yourself a comfortable space. You can be sitting or standing. I'm going to put on some music and at some point it's going to enter your body someplace, it could be your hand or your foot, I don't know. Just let your body respond until all of your body is moving, just in your own space. Use the music to explore ways in which your body can move, think about stretching, bending and lifting until you feel your whole body is being used as it responds to the music. As you're moving, notice your body's limitations and don't overextend. The lights are low so this isn't about watching anyone, but finding yourself in the music and the music in you.<sup>12</sup>

This example was developed as a group exercise, but of course you can also do it by yourself. The accompanying instructions explicitly tell you to only use instrumental (classical) music, as opposed to vocal music for example, so as not to be 'distracted' by concrete input from text.

In another exercise, participants are asked to create a sequence of movements to accompany a fragment of music, and then to 'perform' this sequence for the rest of the group. Participants are asked to focus on timing and concentration, and on making their movements as large and expressive as possible so that they can be more easily 'read' and understood. Reflective questions that are then asked afterwards include: "How did participants use movement to suggest a story, or a theme, or a feeling?" and "What qualities of movement were present (strong, soft, bold, subtle, expressive, mechanical, etc.)?"<sup>13</sup>

Davidson and Correia have devised a method for applying such exercises to music:

Based on drama-style exercises, here music students are asked to express different characters, affects, or states of mind suggested by the narrative of the piece they are learning. They do this first through physical gesture and then in the production of musical sounds.

Working on the Intention of Each Musical Phrase:

Once engaged and acquainted with the style and the overall atmosphere of the piece, the students are then asked to find action metaphors for each phrase or effect, thereby building up a nonverbal narrative in which every passage of the piece becomes meaningful and thus communicable through movement or physical gesture.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Monica Pendergast and Juliana Saxton, "Exploring Movement through Music," in *Applied Drama: A Facilitator's Handbook for Working in Community* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 80. <https://books.google.nl/books?id=Nq5wVCjF3KoC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>, accessed September 20, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>14</sup> Davidson and Correia, "Body Movement," 247.

## IV) Alexandra Pierce on Deepening Musical Performance through Movement

Through the work of Jane Davidson, I came across that of Alexandra Pierce, who is Professor of Music and Movement and Emerita Research Professor at the University of Redlands, California. Pierce wrote a book (with accompanying online videos) that includes a method and various exercises designed to 'deepen a performance' through movement. Movement exercises have long been used in childhood music education, but Pierce's method is among the first to use movement as a tool for advanced musicians. As Davidson and Correia assert:

Recently, Pierce (1994) has made a significant impact in the United States by adapting Dalcrozian principles for work with advanced musicians. Her approach involves teaching rhythm by experiencing the beat of pulse of music through pendular, swinging movements away from the instrument. The point of an exercise like this is to embody the full motion required to produce the attack point on the beat. That is, the student can feel the approaching downbeat and the surrounding moments in the body swing. In this way, quite abstract musical ideas can thus be played out through the body. Although we cannot comment on the efficacy of Pierce's work or, indeed, that of Dalcroze and others, we believe that these teachers draw on principles based on the human body and human nature that can assist development of a deeper base from which music technique and expression can be explored and understood.<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately, I believe that Pierce's principles as described above correspond nicely with mine: movement enables musicians to fully experience music and to achieve an 'embodied interpretation' of that music. We do however, differ on a few points. For example, Pierce points out ten musical elements, each already possessing a distinct kinetic quality:

1. The relative harmonic completion of phrases and sections and the finality of a piece's cadential tonic are enacted by a balanced, alert, and muscularly-toned resting into the sound of resolution and completion;
2. Continuity within a melody is enacted by a sustained, smooth arm movement that follows its ups and downs with precision and with a fluency made possible by a flexible spine;
3. The deft initiation (ictus) of both beat and measure, together with their resilient follow-through, is rendered by weight-throws of arms and hands grounded in a stable base;
4. Coalescence into chords and middle ground rhythmic vitality can be explored in a restrained stepping of the roots of deeper level harmonies to articulate the durational pattern of their progression;
5. The span of the phrase (the elastic relationship between structural levels) reveals itself in the interaction between weighted, anchoring core movement (of the trunk and legs) and lithe peripheral movement (of the hands or mouth);
6. Climax, the organizing peak of phrase, can be experienced as the furthest outward stretch of a hand extending open or an arm drawing a large arc in space;
7. Reverberation allows gestures to flow through appropriately mobile joints, especially between phrases, and to rest into the very actions that produce the flow of music;
8. Juncture, the stillness between phrases, is embodied by gestures that shape the ending of one phrase, release (ever so briefly), and shape the beginning of the next;

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<sup>15</sup> Davidson and Correia, "Body Movement," 247. In the early 1900s, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze developed 'Eurhythmics': a method for the development of musical skills through kinetic exercises, with particular focus on rhythm and structure.

9. The affective life of a motif is characterized by a spontaneous, full-bodied gestural response;
10. Tones of voice, the shifting affects in passing musical events, are named with adjectives or adverbs, said aloud as if in the heightened expression of spontaneous speaking. Distilled and dramatized, the color of the vocal sound, along with the corollary face and hand gestures that accompany speaking, bring to awareness the aroused feelings of the music.<sup>16</sup>

Pierce's definition of the ten musical elements listed above and their associated movements, reveals her intention of providing a player, in advance, instructions on how to physically experience a given piece of music. Here, notated musical elements are understood as carrying pre-formed gestural implications. For an example of one of Pierce's 'melody' exercises, please see the following video:



Unlike my own approach, Pierce's method also seems to be rooted in issues of posture, especially given her assertion that, "the body at rest is in a resilient balance around the vertical axis of gravity and that this resilience can be maintained during actions that take the body off the vertical."<sup>18</sup> I wonder about how much of the posture-based elements of Pierce's approach would be applicable when moving horizontally and vertically in and around an entire performance space such as I experienced in *Kopernikus* for example. Furthermore, she adopts a rather theoretical approach, as shown for example by her linking of the body's balance in a field of gravity to a Schenkarian understanding of tonal music: "When the body, standing or sitting, is in balanced alignment around the vertical axis, it is on its tonic."<sup>19</sup> For all these reasons, I feel that Pierce's approach focuses too much on 'moving' as related to preconceived associations, a fairly static posture in one place, and theoretical music analysis practices, whereas my approach focuses more holistically on how musicians instinctively and personally express their interpretation through movement. As such, I'd hesitate to distinguish particular musical elements and their associated movements as Pierce does, as I feel that musical meaning lies in the *sum* of its constitutive elements, and therefore can only be fully experienced and felt as a whole. By using conscious movement as a tool, as described in previous chapters, my aim is to be able to focus on musical meaning alone, thereby breaking free from notation, theory, preconceived associations, posture conventions, as well as any input other than one's own instinctively embodied interpretation.

It is also important to point out how Pierce's method fundamentally separates movement from playing. In her exercises the student moves while someone else is playing the music. Clearly, such an approach is not directly applicable to a performer who wishes to use her own movement as an interpretive tool.

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<sup>16</sup> Alexandra Pierce, *Deepening Musical Performance through Movement: The Theory and Practice of Embodied Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 3 - 4.

<sup>17</sup> From <http://alexandrapierce.net/deepening/melody/>, accessed September 20, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Pierce, *Deepening Musical Performance through Movement*, 4

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

## V) How Moving Benefits an Audience and Co-Performers

Beyond sound and pitch production, it would appear that from a perceptual perspective, bodily movements can also assist the degree of coordination between co-performers while also aiding in the audience's comprehension of a given musical performance.<sup>20</sup>

As Davidson points out above, audiences can also benefit when musicians achieve stronger and clearer interpretations via the bodily movement approach to performance. Not only will the audience be *listening* to a more convincing interpretation of the music being performed, but the movements made by performers on stage also *visually* contributes to the audience's understanding of the music as well.

As mentioned earlier, Davidson has carried out substantial research on bodily movement in musical performance. She asserts that movement is highly important for performers, co-performers, *as well as* audiences, because "the movement information is fully available and used by the audience members in their assessment and understanding of a musical performance." She goes on to conclude that, "therefore it would seem that such movements are to be acknowledged and encouraged, rather than discouraged."<sup>21</sup>

Elsewhere, Davidson and Correia emphasize how much information audiences gain from the bodily movements of a performer when they assert that, "audiences can detect finely-grained information about musical expression (from timing, pitch, and dynamic modifications, to the structural features of the music) and intention (the emotional mood of the performer and the piece) from a musician's body movements when he or she is playing." They conclude that, "embodied musical meaning seems to be both perceptually available and comprehensible to audiences."<sup>22</sup>

By using movement-orientated exercises from the field of Drama, movement could also be useful for the context of ensemble playing. Indeed, many of these exercises are for two or three participants, and are intended for the development of one's ability to follow and identify a leader. When applying these exercises to an ensemble situation for example, the music an ensemble is playing at any given moment could be used as a starting point. By using these movement-based exercises as a tool for explaining how one feels and interprets a certain phrase, it is possible that the ensemble members could more easily get to know one another's interpretations. Furthermore, it seems the application of such exercises could increase the efficiency of ensemble rehearsal situations. As one exercise states: "One of the main concerns is to get the groups to work out their ideas physically, and don't let them sit and talk for too long."<sup>23</sup> Talking about one's musical ideas can often take up half of an ensemble's allotted rehearsal time, so it seems that such movement exercises may be able to help solve this and many other difficulties faced by ensembles.

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<sup>20</sup> Davidson, "Communicating with the Body," 147.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>22</sup> Davidson and Correia, "Body Movement," 247.

<sup>23</sup> Pendergast and Saxton, "Exploring Movement through Music," 86.

## **Case Study: Creating Movement for Lera Auerbach's *Lonely Suite***

My hypothesis that moving helps to interpret a piece of music comes from the experience I had playing *Kopernikus*. But it was only after the performances were over that I realized what had happened in terms of the process I had gone through and what impact that had had on my interpretation of Vivier's music. In constructing this hypothesis I therefore had to rely on my memory of how things had unfolded, and how our movement coach Miguel Ángel had guided me through using my body in order to arrive at *my* interpretation of the violin solo.

To complement the background research I carried out, and as detailed above, I set up a practical case study. Here, I could go through the same (movement) process again, only this time being conscious every step of the way. When I began this research project I felt as though I had a pretty accurate recollection of how working on and with movement had helped me to achieve a stronger and clearer interpretation of Vivier's music. During this case study, I hoped that it would become clear whether this process, as I had remembered it, actually works.

I came across a beautiful piece for violin solo by Lera Auerbach (1973), a Russian-born American composer. In 2002 she wrote *Lonely Suite*, which is subtitled *Ballet for a Lonely Violinist*. The work is a suite in six movements, each with a separate title:

- I. Dancing with Oneself
- II. Boredom
- III. No Escape
- IV. Imaginary Dialogue
- V. Worrysome Thought
- VI. Question

I could not help but think that the composer must have had some sort of association with movement in mind while writing this piece, seeing as how she subtitled it *Ballet for a Lonely Violinist*. When planning my case study, *Lonely Suite* thus immediately came to mind because of the movement aspect already present in its subtitle and in some of the titles of its constitutive movements. And being a 'recently' written (contemporary) piece for violin solo, *Lonely Suite* seemed like a fitting piece for this experiment - especially in light of Snook's assertions concerning contemporary composers, as discussed above. I think the effect of using movement could have more impact in contemporary music, as most players have less frame of reference in such repertoires with regards to performance history, style, language, and interpretation. A solo piece also seemed most convenient for this case study, since the kind of movement I want to research, and its effects, are very personal.

Using my recollections of how I worked on the *Kopernikus* solo, I divided the process of studying *Lonely Suite* while focusing on movement into the following stages:

- stage 1: Learning the notes, then memorizing them.
- stage 2: Focusing on/finding the body's natural reflexes/impulses to the music.
- stage 3: Enlarging these impulses into larger, clearer bodily movements.
- stage 4: Connecting these bodily movements into a kind of 'dance': a series of movements that could then be performed.
- stage 5: Reflection on this process and the impact that consciously focusing on bodily movement has had on the final performative result.

I will discuss the stages described above using the first twelve bars of the *Lonely Suite's* first movement (*Dancing with Oneself*) as an example. I am limiting my discussion of these stages to this movement of the suite because, aside from the obvious attraction of its title, I felt as though it would provide the clearest impression of the process I went through: the second movement for example, entitled *Boredom*, is purposely not very musically interesting; the third movement is technically very difficult, which I suspected would naturally limit the range of motion possible while performing it; and the final two movements are so simple that I didn't feel they would provide diverse enough examples of my approach.

**Stage 1: Learning the notes and memorizing them.** I think it is very important to have memorized the piece you are studying before moving on to stage 2. If you do so, as you continue you will be able to focus all of your attention on recognizing your body's smaller impulses, and on creating larger movements later in the process, without having to divide your attention between that and finding what note you will play next.

**Stage 2: Focusing on the body's natural impulses.** By going through stage 2 while playing the passage standing as still as I normally would in performance, and while focusing on my body's natural impulses, I identified the following movements (as shown in the first 30 seconds of Video 2):

Lera Auerbach: *Lonely Suite I, Dancing with Oneself*, mm. 1 - 12.

- One movement from the C downbeat of mm. 1, downwards to the G downbeat of mm. 2, and from there a bouncing upwards movement to the half note D-A interval in mm. 2.
- An upwards bouncing movement during the half note D-A interval in mm. 2, landing on the C downbeat of mm. 3.
- A slightly larger version of the movements in mm. 1 - 2 are used in mm. 3 - 4.
- One movement from the C downbeat of mm. 5 to the B in mm. 6: downward from the C downbeat of mm. 5 to the G downbeat of mm. 6, where it then bounces upwards to the B second beat of mm. 6, and then turns 'back' to the C downbeat of mm. 7.
- A movement from the C downbeat of mm. 7 to the F downbeat (or actually to the F-A-EbB gesture *together*) in mm. 8.
- A 'launching' movement in mm. 8 from the F downbeat to the EbB, then a movement upwards through the D and E, to the F# downbeat of mm. 9.
- One movement from the F# downbeat in mm. 9 to the Ab on the third beat of mm. 10.

- An upward movement on the F# downbeat of mm. 11, then already moving down again from the B to the G in that same measure.
- This downward movement then slows in mm. 12, while slightly turning away with the upper body.

These initial observations of my body's natural impulses tell me about the basic shape of this passage of music. They show how the music is divided into different phrases, how some beats are landing points where the music finds (relative) rest, and how the music bounces off of other beats, giving it velocity.

**Stage 3: Enlarging these impulses into larger, clearer bodily movements.** Over the course of the case study I noticed that the development of the various movements does happen in different steps (stage 2 through 4 as described above), but that the stages are not as clearly defined or separated as expected. For me, stages 3 and 4 in particular sometimes almost seemed to merge. In stage 2 I had only just learned the music by memory, and my goal was to just stand and play as 'normally' as possible without trying to make any extra movements - only being aware of existing natural ones. As soon as I decided to go on to stage 3 however, thereby letting my body move freely and even encouraging myself to reveal and express my body's natural impulses, things fluently progressed towards connecting these smaller impulses into larger and expanded movements. By the time I had identified one clear impulse and had enlarged it, it automatically led me into the next one, with these connected movements together forming a larger gesture. That this happened so naturally and so quickly could be because I had already previously experienced this way of using movement.

During stage 3 my movement developed as follows (as shown in the first 30 seconds of Video 3):

Lera Auerbach: *Lonely Suite I, Dancing with Oneself, mm. 1 - 12.*

- Although they are both 'heavy beats,' the C downbeat of mm. 1 became heavier in relation to the G downbeat of mm. 2. (While the same goes for the downbeats of mm. 3 - 4.)
- The half note intervals of D-A in mm. 2 and D-B in mm. 4 seem to have movement in them: here, I found myself transferring the weight of my foot from the whole foot to only the toes, thereby keeping the motion going forward. By shifting my weight in this way, a connection is made between the half note and the downbeat of the next measure.
- During mm. 5 - 8 the movement accelerates in a downwards motion, then slows down with an upwards motion but now with a larger amplitude in order to reach the B on the second

beat of mm. 6, and then accelerates again falling downwards into the F downbeat of mm. 8. (A bit like 'the pirate ship' ride in an amusement park.)

- A forward movement during mm. 9, then a retreating movement during mm. 10.
- During mm. 11 there is a hesitantly lifting movement, and the upper body is turned away in mm. 12.

**Stage 4: Connecting these bodily movements into a 'dance.'** I recorded Video 3 during stage 3, but as mentioned earlier it is already leaning towards stage 4 as most of the movements are already connected. Nevertheless, much has changed during stage 4, as shown in the first 30 seconds of Video 4. When I began working on this last stage I took off my shoes, as I had become accustomed to doing while working on *Kopernikus* with our movement coach Miguel Ángel. By not wearing shoes, and stimulated by the goal of creating a 'dance' to be performed, my whole way of moving suddenly changed. During the very first steps taken in mm. 1 and 2, I already noticed that I was walking differently: I was placing my feet on the ground in a more elegant way, much as a dancer would do. I was also paying attention to making clear lines with my body, and deliberately stretching or bending my legs and back. I was consciously making transitions either smooth or sudden, and I noticed that my facial expressions became more pronounced. Aside from the sounding musical elements in my performance, I was now also clearly very aware of the visual impact of my movements.

**Stage 5: Reflection.** Focusing on movement has undoubtedly helped me to reach a stronger and more convincing interpretation of *Lonely Suite*. By defining and then following my body's natural impulses, I realized how I interpreted this piece in a way that was much more detailed and personal than might have been possible otherwise. This process made things a lot clearer concerning how different notes relate to each other: within larger phrases, but also within parts of those phrases, where it revealed to me how some notes were heavier or lighter relative to others. It also showed the varying character of the different phrases in the musical material: some were revealed as more innocent while others were more outspoken, and some changes in character were subtle while others were very sudden. Looking at the videos I feel that these movements show a clear and 'readable' interpretation.

Having gone through this process however, I now think that *Lonely Suite* may not have been the best choice for my case study after all, as I did not have any trouble whatsoever arriving at an initial interpretation of it. While going through the different stages of this movement process has certainly had a positive effect on my interpretation of this piece, in that it has clarified and strengthened my interpretation of it in a way and to an extent that was not available to me before I applied the movement approach, the overall impact of this approach might have been bigger had I used a piece within a musical vocabulary that was less familiar to me.

## **Additional Points of Discussion**

### **Pianists**

The majority of the studies examined above were carried out on pianists. Pierce's entire method is in fact based on piano playing, and she uses only piano music as examples. Her being a pianist could be the reason why she separates movement from playing. Sitting behind an instrument that stays in one stationary place is very restricting when it comes to moving freely. I therefore believe that more interesting results could be achieved in studying the effect of movement on musicians who play an instrument while standing up, and who are able to carry that instrument around a given space.

### **Undesirable?**

Most music teachers tell their students to avoid unnecessary movements, often meaning any movement that is not needed in order to produce sound. Their concern is that these unwanted movements might jeopardize technical efficiency and fluency. By focusing on movement and being very conscious of every movement you make however, I think you are less likely to make 'random' movements that could interfere with the technical aspect of your playing. Most students are unaware of the unnecessary movements they make that could negatively influence their playing and that are therefore unwanted. Using this movement-orientated approach of learning a piece of music could however suddenly make a student aware of the natural yet undesirable movements their body is making. Focusing on the body's impulses in this way could potentially make these kinds of unwanted movements disappear. If they are then still present, either during or after using the movement-based approach, the student will be better equipped to recognize them and to eliminate them.

While some teachers (and some musicians who have been taught by those teachers) may be a bit reluctant when they first hear of a tool that encourages the student to consciously move while learning and performing a piece, I believe that focusing on movement might in fact help them to get rid of unwanted and unbeneficial movements, and to instead focus on those movements that help them to achieve a more secure and sincere performance.

### **Contemporary?**

While the pieces of music that initiated my interest in this research project and that I used in my case study are considered to be 'contemporary' works, this should not lead to an assumption that using conscious movement is only useful for the learning and performance of contemporary music. I believe that focusing on movement in the ways that I have discussed and demonstrated can be very useful for both Classical and Romantic repertoires, or any repertoire whose language/vocabulary is more familiar to us for that matter. I do however still believe that the *impact* of this movement-based approach is greater in contemporary repertoires simply because, generally speaking, performers in these repertoires have a longer way to go in terms of reaching a strong, clear and honest interpretation.

In reviewing my case study I noticed that the word 'contemporary' in the argument above does not reflect exactly what I mean. Though it was composed in 2002, and thus met the criterion of being a 'contemporary' work, I ultimately found that *Lonely Suite* was perhaps not the best choice for

this study. This is because, though relatively recently-composed, its vocabulary did not seem completely unfamiliar to me, nor was the music itself difficult to grasp or understand. The impact of using a movement-based approach when learning and playing this work was therefore not as pronounced as it could have been in my opinion, nor as pronounced as it was with *Kopernikus*. This made me realize that when talking about the benefits of a movement-based approach as related to musical learning and performance, perhaps what is most at stake here is not *when* a work was composed, but rather the *familiarity* of a given performer with a work's musical vocabulary.

## **Conclusion**

Using movement is the most natural and direct way with which people express themselves. Elaborate research has been done on the connection between movement (gesture) and intention (meaning) in spoken language. The same principles and findings in these studies can be applied to movement and its connection to music. The method described in my case study makes use of this instinctual way of showing what we feel, and therefore leads to a sincere and convincing interpretation. In so doing, this process can be very clarifying for a performer.

Based on my research into the available background literature I can conclude that there is much to be gained by using conscious movement while learning and performing a piece of music. Indeed, various authors repeatedly emphasize the importance of this subject for musicians, and their hope that it will be further researched and developed within the context of musical performance. By way of my case study, I have indeed found that using movement provides a new approach to learning a piece of music and to developing a personal, sincere, and honest interpretation. Emerging from the unconscious, I strongly believe that an interpretation that has been reached through movement will translate strongest to a given audience.

The background sources surveyed have also proven the value of a movement-based approach for audiences. Translating these findings to the performer by way of my case study has confirmed my theory that movement is also invaluable to musicians. In addition to the obvious benefits for the performer as related to musical meaning and expression, benefits that are then shared by the audience, there is also the visual aspect of this approach to performing music with conscious movements: an aspect that is of great value when connecting, sharing, and communicating with audiences.

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