Experimenting with music

IB DP Music Experimenting with music full package

Experimenting with music

- tell the difference between practising and experimenting;
- design an experiment that changes one musical variable at a time;
- keep audio and written evidence and reach an honest verdict;

Experimenting with music (2)

- run experiments in creating and in performing, in two areas of inquiry;
- write a **rationale** and a **commentary** for each experiment.

The experimental loop

- **Question**: what does a held low C (C3) change?
- **Trial**: record the melody alone, then with the held C3 below it. The melody, rhythm and tempo stay fixed.
- **Evidence**: two recordings, labelled take 1 and take 2.
- **Verdict**: the **texture** has changed from **monophonic** (one line) to two parts. The harmony has changed too: over the low C, the E4 now sounds like the bright **major third** of a C chord, and the D4 sounds like a passing note that wants to move on. The melody itself did not change at all. Next step: try a held A2 instead, which should make the same melody sound like it is in A minor.

Accent and metre: a second experiment

- **Question**: if eight equal notes in a bar of 4/4 are accented differently, which grouping do listeners hear?
- **Trial**: play the eight notes twice. Version A **accents** every second note: **1** 2 **3** 4 **5** 6 **7** 8. Version B accents notes 1, 4 and 7: **1** 2 3 **4** 5 6 **7** 8.
- **Evidence**: recordings of both, and five classmates asked to tap along without seeing the score.

Accent and metre: a second experiment (2)

- **Verdict**: in version A, all five tap in twos. In version B, four of the five tap an uneven $3 + 3 + 2$. The listener follows the **accents**, not the bar lines.
- **Question**: does slowing the song down change the job it does, or only its surface?
- **Evidence**: the original and the half-speed version side by side, and a classmate's description of each.
- **Verdict**: the call-and-response pattern survives, but the strong beat on which workers would swing their tools now comes too slowly to work with. The song's rhythm is tied to the work it organised. This finding belongs to a second area of inquiry, **music technology in the electronic and digital age**, and links to **sociocultural expression**.

The report: rationale and commentary

- a **rationale** : why you did this experiment, the question you asked and what led you to it;
- a **commentary** : what the evidence shows, element by element, with references to the exact recording and timing.

Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *Music guide* (first assessment 2022).
- S. Reich, *Writings on Music 1965–2000* (2002), on *It's Gonna Rain*.
- J. Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage* (1993), on the **prepared piano** and *Bacchanale* (1940).
- N. Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music* (2004), on the **tresillo** and the habanera.

Common errors

- Submitting practice ("I played it ten times and got better") as an experiment. An experiment asks a question.
- Changing several things at once, so nobody can tell what caused the difference.
- Throwing away failed trials. A clear verdict on what did not work is still evidence.

Common errors (2)

- Writing the **rationale** after the result, so it reads as hindsight.
- Commenting in general words ("it sounded better") instead of naming the element and the timing.
- Covering only one area of inquiry, or only creating or only performing.

Key terms

- **Experiment**: a trial that changes one musical variable to answer a question.
- **Variable**: the one thing changed in an experiment, such as **texture**, tempo or **accent**.
- **Metre**: the pattern of strong and weak beats.

Key terms (2)

- **Tresillo**: a $3 + 3 + 2$ grouping of eight equal pulses.
- **Prepared piano**: a piano with objects placed on its strings to change its **timbre**.
- **Rationale / commentary**: why the experiment was done / what the evidence shows.

Check yourself

- 1.
- Explain the difference between practising and experimenting. 2.
- A student changes the tempo and the instrument at the same time.
- Why is this a weak experiment? 3.