

## Affect of Sound Painting Lesson in Increasing the Motivation for Listening to Aleatoric Music

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**Abstract:** Along with current music's gaining spectral aspect and the terms of aleatory and improvisation's taking their place more compared to past; the fact that the music is listenable brings along discussions. In music education, besides theoretical and practical lessons, it is one of the elements affecting the success that students listen to music and understand, analyze and interpret it. This research is a descriptive study aiming at determining whether the lesson of Soundpainting is effective in music students' habit of listening to aleatoric music. In order to gather data related to the research, students are asked to listen to aleatoric music pieces in the beginning and end of the semester and at the end of this phase, structured interview is applied on them. As a result of the research, it is observed that listening to aleatoric music is quite challenging; however, thanks to Soundpainting lesson, it has become easier to listen and more comprehensible.

**Key words:** Listening to music • Aleatoric music • Soundpainting

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### INTRODUCTION

**Aleatoric Music:** Aleatoric music is a modern experimental music approach in which uncertainties or coincidences are used intentionally. "Alea" in Latin: tossing the dice. In aleatoric music, "uncertainty" feature of rhythmic values and pitch selection is related to the composer. Vocalization of the piece, on the other hand, is related to the vocalist's decision: for example; number or order of section, duration of pitches and notes are left to the vocalist [1-9].

Kütahyalı [6] explains Aleatoric music and its features as follows; in modern music, one of the most interesting developments seen after 1945 is that the term of aleatory is involved in the art of music; thereby, a new current known as "Aleatoric Music" came out. (Fr. Musique Aleatoire: Alea in Latin: Derived from the words; Luck, Fortune). In fact, this term was not new. Renaissance composers used to leave the selection of instruments in a piece to vocalists and vocalists used to flourish this piece with some notes. In Baroque period, when figured bass was performed with Organ or Cembalo; particular aspects such as tone and playing methods were left to the vocalist; thereby to aleatory.

Aleatory was also used in the same understanding in 20<sup>th</sup> century; it was not a new music technique or

language. Its prevalence was sometimes extreme; however, aleatory was not dominant on a whole piece; such a thing was not requested. Regarding this subject, Ernst Krenek said: "Aleatory and inspiration is related. Both cannot be audited and predicted". Prominent representative of the current; American composer John Cage stated that "there is no such an irrational thought as to ask everything to be same all the time" and tried to gain significance on his view on the subject [6].

One of the most important features of aleatoric music is that an aleatoric piece cannot be predicted. Interpretation of sounds, durations and silence, which were determined by aleatory, were left to the performer. "To the watching and listening of a performance determined by aleatoric composition, how the performers use their freedom and the result of this is also added. Besides the audience, the same case also applies to the composer; because he also cannot know the result of what he created" [3].

The term of Aleatoric music, defined by Boulez as "controlled aleatory", in which the overall is determined and the details are left to aleatory, also applies to Soundpainting, which is a multi-discipline universal composing language becoming widespread for its application.

**Soundpainting:** Soundpainting is a composing sign language, which came out and is developed at the end of 70's for musicians, dancers, actors and visual artists by Walter Thompson, an educator and composer from New York. In other words, Soundpainting is communication between composer-chef and society [2]. "Soundpainting is a sign language. You give sign to the society and they respond with sound. You determine the next instruction based on the response. Soundpainting is a dialogue between you and the society" [10-12].

Soundpainting signs are separated into categories in terms of action, conceptual and physical; such as who, what, how and when. Today, there are more than 1250 actions used to display a performance. These actions bring clarity to performers regarding many subjects such as when to begin and stop, what musical dynamics to use and with what to relate. By this means, chef/Soundpainter also forms his/her composition. From this point of view, it can be said that Soundpainting is the instantly developed composition of chef/Soundpainter [2].

Movements of the Soundpainter act as a catalyst for the creation; it is not limited to process presentation and structural models and stylistic requirements are primary. In soundpainting, musicians and dancers are directed towards an interactive and cooperative condition through various movements; in some performances, audience is a part of the performance. Active components of different medias are in the beginning of this process. In the center of Soundpainting lies a sphere where the performers from different disciplines can and should establish a dialogue [7].

As it is expressed, Soundpainting is an answer given by performers to the signs by Soundpainters. Even though Soundpainter makes the same sign every time, the answer will always be different. It is completely a surprise and cannot be predicted. Thus; we may also call Soundpainting as "Aleatoric Music".

Without a doubt, it requires systematic work to be successful in Soundpainting works, to develop new musical ideas and to create accurate sentences. Students may be shy and reluctant in the beginning; this case should be comprehended and they should be encouraged. Just like improvisation, Soundpainting is also a matter of process. Progression in this process should begin with simple melodic and rhythmic structure and get more complicated, including long sentences. According to Rabinof (8), a successful improvisation requires true habits as of the first lesson.

"What is important during Soundpainting work is to have a good communication with the group. With this communication, movements can be comprehended and

applied better by everyone. In order for this to be acquired, Soundpainter/chef should be clear and should have determined with which sentence structure s/he will show to the group" [2].

**Soundpainting and Music Education:** As an extension of improvisation, Soundpainting, just like improvisation, requires certain background in an instrument. Thanks to this background, performers can give meaning to signed movements and perform as good as possible. However this method can be used in any chamber music in music education, particularly in instrument and voice training. It is possible for a student who has just taken up a new instrument or a group with different instruments at the same level to make Soundpainting together. For that, it is enough to have taken basic hearing and theory courses. By this means, student can use the intervals, sounds and rhythm structures and relate with the signed functions [2].

According to Co'kuner [2], for students, making Soundpainting means freely communicating with their instruments. Mostly, in instrument training, there are a lot of rules that should be followed until the student reaches the level where s/he can express himself/herself and while these rules develop the students in terms of technique, they also limit them and thereby students do not know what to do when there are no notes in front of them. At this point, students find a chance to freely act in terms of recognizing their instruments, overcoming their fears and developing their musical ideas thanks to Soundpainting [2]. As for improvised music, it can be said that it is a process when a performer adds from his/her own experience to the music type s/he performs in terms of his/her technical talent and musical background. "One of the indicators of technical talent and mastership in an instrument is the talent of improvisation. It is a high ranked process to perform first musical ideas and to express it with an instrument and it requires the mixture of knowledge and talent. In many cultures, first music-making activity is improvisation with rhythms and melodies[13]. In West Europe music tradition, baroque period, improvisation was considered as a very valuable talent for many performers (1600-1750). However, since those days, classical music re-gained value according to the improvisation ability and many famous musicians such as Mozart and Beethoven were considered as high improvisers. Today, improvisation abilities are expected to be applied as a style in folk, country, rock and jazz music types" [11].

Derek Bailey tells in his speech that what prevents improvisation is the education system;

*"We talked to Stevens about those who do not improvise and mentioned that they are usually the musicians who are prevented to improvise due to their education. Because of the education which brings the manner prohibiting to improvise. Due to the education If somebody says to me "I can't improvise!"-- and they could be somebody with the biggest chunk of classical training imaginable in their background -- I would find that very inspiring. Because I know that within a very short time they will be doing it and saying "Oh, is that it?" And then they will do it again." [1].*

A performer, who also takes place within the society, performs in accordance with the displayed signed and becomes a part of the group. However; a soundpainter/chef may sign a performer to freely improvise and in this case, the performer forgets all the rules and improvises based on his/her experience. Here, what is written in notes and rules become invalid. This is one of the most efficient processes of Soundpainting [2].

#### **Importance of Listening to Music in Music Education:**

There are unwritten, certain manners required for music students to become a good musician besides fulfilling the expected manners in music courses. These manners can briefly be summarized as; listening to music, following the concerts, participating in the workshops related to the field, following social and occupational music news within the social area.

Among these manners, listening to music is known to have positive impact on the success of students. While listening to music supports student's development of musical ear, it is also important in terms of recognizing the period, style and structure of a work during instrument education and for the works to be performed accurately.

Just like the training of musical ear, listening to music should be conducted in a certain order, within time, by learning and internalizing. In order to listen and understand particularly Classical Music, it would be beneficial to follow chronological order.

Today, among musicians and students, it is commented that music of our age or modern music pieces are too atonal, they are not comprehended well and that they do not sound nice. Cage interprets this thought; "It is known that the number of musicians interested in modern music are few. It is also known that modern dancers appreciate any sound or noise which can be produced for their performance" [4]. It can be said that in the foundation of these thoughts lies the fact that those people could not provide right time or environment to meet and understand these music pieces. "In order for

music to be understood or easily analyzed, there should be information regarding the elements of music, musical environments and composers. If a listener receives information about the tone color and technical features, style, aesthetics and musical history, s/he may listen to it by understanding" [5].

According to modern composer Hans Werner Henze (1926 -), there is no such a thing as a person who does not like music. "Those, who do not hesitate to express that they do not like music, most probably have not made much effort in this subject. It is the most basic principle to make effort to like any kind of music. However, particularly for Classical Music, it may require more effort than usual. For proper appreciation of the music, an eager listener should know the instruments in the music piece and other musical instruments besides a simple understanding of classical music. Listeners who know which instrument to look at during a concert would get more pleasure by what they hear" [5].

In the subject of listening to new and unusual music pieces, Watt says; "an unusual music piece, if listened carefully, arouses close attention. It is interesting that people should listen to any new music between two and five hours. Listening below that period would definitely be a waste of time; besides that, an ear develops by getting familiar with the different tone" [13].

One of the other acquisitions of listening to music is the development of student's aesthetic sense and raising students who question the music and know with what purpose to listen.

In addition to these ideas, Schellenber's views on listening to music can be mentioned; "Current findings indicate that listening to music leads to enhanced performance on a variety of cognitive tests; however, such effects are short-term and stem from the stimulation level of music and its spiritual impact" [10].

**Problem of Research:** Is the lesson of Soundpainting effective in student's willingness to listen to aleatoric music and comprehending it?

#### **Sub-Problems of Research:**

- What are the views of students regarding aleatoric music?
- What are the views of students regarding the lesson of Soundpainting?
- Is there any significant change in the tendency of students to listen to aleatoric music after taking the Soundpainting course?

**Purpose and Importance of Research:** Purpose of the research is to determine whether student's motivation and manner regarding listening to Aleatoric music indicated significant change after the Soundpainting education. Preliminary surveys show that studies on Soundpainting and its education are limited. It is considered that the studies regarding Soundpainting would contribute to the field.

**Premises of Research:** It is based on the premises that in this research, determined data gathering method and techniques are in accordance with the purpose of the research, that the data, gathered via related literature review, are appropriate and necessary and that the responses of sample group to the interview questions reflect the reality.

**Limitations of Research:** This research is limited with the students voluntarily participating in the research and financial opportunities, which can be provided by the researcher.

**Method:** The research is a descriptive study based on scanning and testing models for assessment in terms of general purpose and method. "Scanning methods are the research approaches aiming at describing a situation, in the past or still present, as it is. Research subject incident, person or an object are aimed to be described within their own condition and as they are. They are not tried to change or be affected by any means. There is something, asked to be known and it is there. What is important is to "observe" it in an appropriate way and to determine" [5].

**These Principles Are Conducted During the Research:** Subject-related studies and researches are examined, sources are determined, Aleatoric music pieces, determined in order to acquire data related to the research, are presented to the students before the Soundpainting course and their opinions are taken, later on, 14 weeks of Soundpainting education is provided and at the end, students are presented with different Aleatoric music pieces and following that, structured view forms are applied. Data, gathered as a result of the application, are transferred to the written environment, resolved and interpreted.

**Gathering and Resolving of Data:** In this research, data are gathered by applying structured view forms on the students, which have participated in the Soundpainting study group and structured view forms are interpreted according to the qualitative research techniques.

**Aleatoric Music Pieces Used in Research:** These are the Aleatoric music pieces presented during the research:

- John Cage- "Imaginary Landscape No. 4" for 12 radios (1951)
- John Cage- Thirteen Harmonies (1985)
- Pierre Boulez- Le Marteau Sans Maître - I/II/III-
- Stockhausen- Callithumpian Consort- Mantra-
- John Cage- Playing Amplified Cacti and Plant Materials With A Feather-
- Water Music - Tan Dun
- Piano Phase (solo)- Steve Reich
- John Cage - Sonata II For Prepared Piano
- Karlheinz Stockhausen -- Mantra.
- Pierre Boulez - Dérive 2 (Proms 2012)

**Research Universe and Sample:** Research universe is consisted of postgraduate and doctorate students of Ondokuz Mayıs University, Institute of Education Sciences, Department of Music Education.

**Related Research and Press:** Helen Julia Minors, [7] in her scientific research paper, *Music and Movement In Dialogue: Exploring Gesture In Soundpainting* mentions the interaction of music and dance within Soundpainting performance and effects of Soundpainting movements on performance and performer behaviors.

Creator of Soundpainting universal live composing language, Walter Thompson's book *Soundpainting Workbook 1*, presents the philosophy of Soundpainting and first level used movements [12].

## FINDINGS AND COMMENTS

**Findings and Comment Regarding the First Sub-Problem:** 1st student tells about his/her opinion on the Aleatoric music; "I think there are no certain limitations. It is limitlessness within limitations, indeed. Result or process can be predicted but there are no certain judgments. Nobody tries to understand each other; they usually try to express themselves. For that reason, I believe that it has brought a breath of fresh air and freedom into music by leaving outside the box".

2nd student tells about his/her opinion on the Aleatoric music; "when I first listened to it, it felt very different as it did to everyone. However, this different style is interesting and pleasant. It carries the music into a fun and different aspect. I think it improves the habit of listening to music".

3rd student tells about his/her opinion on the Aleatoric music; "its impact on me is different in every other piece. While I like some of them, some felt meaningless".

4th student tells about his/her opinion on the Aleatoric music; "I think it provides an approach which is innovative, questioning the orderliness and make us realize that the concept of aesthetics in music should be reconsidered".

5th student tells about his/her opinion on the Aleatoric music; "I can say that listening and understanding is quite challenging. I think it is a music type which is better understood by the music maker rather than the audience".

When the responses of the students, in order to respond to this sub-problem, are examined, it can be said that at first, they consider this music as quite challenging to understand, without limitations, innovative and hard to listen. Moreover, it can be considered that the phase until aesthetic elements in music reaches Aleatoric music should be assessed.

**Findings and Comment Regarding the Second Sub-problem:** 1st student tells about his/her opinion on the Soundpainting course;

"Soundpainting was a course which I hesitated to succeed. The more I learned about it, the more I got interested and now I am much more interested in it. It is quite a creative study. It is an important course for students to recognize themselves and make music more freely".

2nd student tells about his/her opinion on the Soundpainting course;

"As soundpainting is a type which can be conducted by people, interested in music, at any age, I believe it improves the skill and musical communication. As it contributes to personal improvisation and composing development and as it is away from the stereotypes, it helps individuals to be more free and happier".

3rd student tells about his/her opinion on the Soundpainting course;

"Soundpainting is an unusual study; however when you conduct it frequently, it turns into a usual situation. I believe everyone can do it. Thanks to this study, my control over the instrument improved and I began to improvise. I was only able to play by notes. I began to conduct this study on my own students".

4th student tells about his/her opinion on the Soundpainting course;

"Soundpainting is a new language and it can unite many people from different disciplines. Besides improving different skills, it makes us reconsider the concept of music. The more I do it, the more I get interested. It improves creativity. I feel good while conducting Soundpainting".

5th student tells about his/her opinion on the Soundpainting course;

"It is amazing. It is an application, which improves the ability to focus, skill of improvisation and it gains a new aspect and language. Moreover, it also gains good experience in terms of groups study".

**Findings and Comment Regarding the Third Sub-Problem:** After the 1st student has taken Soundpainting course, has there been any significant change in their tendency to listen to Aleatoric music? Views according to this question are explained as:

"Yes. It was boring at first, but it is very different for me now; because in the class, it is very delighting to make this music by being a part of it. Thereby it makes the listening easier. I do not listen to it in my daily life; however, when I do research or when I wonder about something, I gained the habit to listen by understanding and interpreting better thanks to Soundpainting".

After the 2nd student has taken Soundpainting course, has there been any significant change in their tendency to listen to Aleatoric music? Views according to this question are explained as:

"As a result of the course I took, there has been change in the tendency of listening to Aleatoric music and it definitely made it easier to listen to Aleatoric music pieces. It gained me the ability to distinguish. I began to listen by understanding easier and clearer. And more importantly, I was pleased while listening to it. I began to get more interested. I had more points drawing my attention".

After the 3rd student has taken Soundpainting course, has there been any significant change in their tendency to listen to Aleatoric music? Views according to this question are explained as:

"Yes, Soundpainting is within Aleatoric music in some aspects. Pre-planned and momentary decisions require us to be ready for unusual cases in music. While I am conducting Soundpainting, the sounds are not irritating for me; and Aleatoric music also feels more meaningful as it carries similar features with Soundpainting".

After the 4th student has taken Soundpainting course, has there been any significant change in their tendency to listen to Aleatoric music? Views according to this question are explained as:

"I think, listening to Aleatoric music is not easy in any way. Mostly, while listening to music, I think that a story is being told or connection is established with the audience. In aleatoric music, this connection is either presented in continuity or complete disconnection. It may be easier to only listen and not try to understand. As the samples and fictions in Soundpainting class changed my opinion on aleatory, I cannot leave myself to the flow of the incident and I find myself thinking every movement in my head. I do not know if this is good or bad. Although in a video, where two pianos, some electronic sounds and percussion instruments are used, seems like a complicated piece, I realize that in a short time, I recognize the integrity within the work. The sounds that would surprise me are part of this work and I accept that calmly. I believe such experimental studies may affect the human brain and how their aspect to music in a different way. This course has become a guide displaying how this product could create a fiction and that not only hands and sound, but many points in the body may concretely or abstractly affect the music. While implementing is sometimes more bearable and fun than listening, I believe that the course of Soundpainting gave me the opportunity to open my senses in different aspects".

After the 5th student has taken Soundpainting course, has there been any significant change in their tendency to listen to Aleatoric music? Views according to this question are explained as:

"Again, I can mention a positive impact in this subject. The last record I listened, for example. A fraz played with two grand pianos. With uncertain changes, it hypnotizes the listener for 14 minutes. I had similar effect in Techno music. Such effects bother my soul. I can listen to such music pieces when I enjoy being bothered. On the other hand, I can say that this music could find its place if it was presented with a video with views from space. Otherwise, watching two grand pianos played like that... I do not know whether my preparedness is not enough or I could not adopt this style... I could not understand modernism in plastic arts, too. However, I can never say "there is nothing to understand". All in all, there are many smart people involved in these works! There is, of course, a positive chance. Once I got curious, my awareness increased. Still, I do not think that I understand Aleatoric music. I do not listen to it on purpose. I will try to understand it when I hear, though. If it was earlier, I would most probably close it with my prejudice".

When the responses of students, regarding this sub-problem, are examined, it is seen that the lesson of Soundpainting helped the students with understanding and listening to Aleatoric music, although it is hard to understand and not easy to listen. With momentarily developing structure, its being unpredictable, communication between Soundpainter and the performers, the case that it uses any sound or silence as a material just like Aleatoric music, it can be said that Soundpainting takes place within Aleatoric music and that it helps in listening and understanding.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

In the light of acquired findings and data, it is considered that aleatoric music is different than the stereotypical daily music, it is innovative, hard to understand and besides that, it causes the concept of aesthetics and definition of music to be brought forward and reconsidered. It is also thought to get more interesting after listening to it for a while.

Soundpainting, which provide the opportunity of live composing to musicians with more than 1250 movements and which can be evaluated as aleatoric music, is said to improve improvisation skills, control over the instrument and to increase awareness by students. In addition to this, it is stated that Soundpainting studies have an important role in increasing one's self-confidence and that they get used to it while making it.

It is stated that the students, after taking Soundpainting lesson, could listen to aleatoric music more easily and could catch common points in their own works. It can be said that Soundpainting is on the same line with aleatoric music as the language of Soundpainting is open to surprises, it cannot be predicted and as it is unexpected. Thereby, as students learn the movements of Soundpainting and began to learn this language in time, aleatoric music also seems less strange.

According to the conducted research, it is seen that Soundpainting course and studies make it easier to listen to aleatoric music and that it makes music more understandable.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the subject of listening to aleatoric music, educators can help students by telling about this music and making them listen to samples.

Students who want to understand the new music should spend more time to know this music. Thus, as stated above, necessary time for understanding the music would be given.

Including Soundpainting lessons, both as applicator and applier, would help the students in the introduction to Aleatoric music. Thereby, there should be Soundpainting lessons and these lessons should take place within the program.

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