

Embodied Performative Knowledge as Crucial Analytical Tool

T. M. Scruggs
University of Iowa, USA

The learning process and the actual performance within the cultural context of a given music affords researchers insights otherwise unattainable. My field research on the *marimba de arco*, the “marimba with an arc” of western Nicaragua, has included a significant level of proficiency on the instrument. In this paper I first make several observations on how the special role of teaching and learning of a musical tradition affords unique insight into the “building blocks” of a musical system and allows for a testing of its boundaries. I then examine how the potentials and restraints inherent in the make-up of the human body impinge upon the structuring of musical production. My performance in traditional context revealed a link between the physicality of hand positioning of the mallets and a certain feature of the music’s melodic structure. In a further layer of bi-musical discovery, through accompaniment of the dance reserved for the *marimba de arco* my use of this stylistic feature revealed a specific kinetic relationship to the choreography, a correlation that subsequently helped to substantiate the repertoire’s previous improvisatory nature. This analysis, with its socio-historical insights, could only have flowed from a (literally) embodied understanding of the parameters of music performance.