

What Makes a Performance Musical? – Jack Stamp

I believe this question has to be approached from two different perspectives: from the interpreter (conductor) and from the listener (audience member).

For me, a musical performance has an added dimension which is beyond “correctness or perfection”. I don’t believe all pieces, rather they be classical or popular, lend themselves to musical performances. However, I believe the same skills required to recreate a “musical” performance are the same skills required to perceive it!

A musical performance for me, synonymous with an aesthetic performance, can be desired, but not necessarily planned. For the conductor, all of the basic skills must be a prerequisite. However, this won’t guarantee a “musical” performance, it just “sets the stage” for the possibility of one.

Interpretation is the key ingredient to a performance being musical. Though age is not a determining factor in the ability to be musical, I feel that both musical and life experiences allow one the opportunity to create an aesthetic performance. Therefore, a musical performance is when musical skill and preparation are joined with one’s musical intuition and life experiences, creating a type of performance that can not be notated or repeated. In this setting, both the performer and conductor are partially swept away to a third musical dimension, a “different world” created by the composition. This is the responsibility of the conductor, to filter the music through their own experiences, judgment, and personality to allow the music to come alive in more than just a sonic presentation.

Finally, the audience member has to possess enough musical knowledge and musical awareness to experience an aesthetic performance. In many instances, the audience can add positive energy to the concert hall through their listening skills and response to the performance. In many cases, even the novice audience member, who can not tell you how it happened, are aware that something magical did happen when they experience an aesthetic performance.