

Abstract

This dissertation examines the concept of the canon in Western Classical piano music in practical and theoretical terms, located in South Africa with international reference. Performance-level music qualifications and international piano competitions are identified as institutions with the power and authority to influence the canon as they are two of the most important stepping stones to concert success for pianists. The repertoire prescribed by these institutions is analysed in terms of various categories drawn from research into performed music in both musicology and music history. This research investigates the extent to which the canon, and the historical approach to piano performance, is still prevalent in institutional performance syllabi. It then relates these findings to actual concert experience in South Africa and to the theory that has allowed this canonic music to become entrenched in performance repertoires.

The research design draws on both qualitative and quantitative methods, using interviews with leading South African pianists and reflection on my practice as a classical pianist. The research finds that the canon is still influential within the repertoire of these two institutions and that repertoire from the pre-1900 and twentieth-century eras is favoured over contemporary music, demonstrating that piano performance, as defined by these institutions, is still strongly located in a historical performance approach. Furthermore, these institutions are found, at times, to be out of touch with repertoire choice in actual concert experience in South Africa: they promote repertoire that has pedagogical value, but that is constructed in such a way that does not necessarily prepare pianists for concert performance.