

INVESTIGATING THE COLLOQUIAL DESCRIPTION OF SOUND BY MUSICIANS AND NON-MUSICIANS

Jack Dostal

Wake Forest University, United States of America
dostalja@wfu.edu

ABSTRACT

What is meant by the words used in a subjective judgment of sound? Do musicians, scientists, instrument makers, and others mean the same things by the same expressions? These groups describe sound using an expansive lexicon of terms (bright, brassy, dark, pointed, muddy, etc.). The same terms and phrases may have different or inconsistent meanings to these different groups of people. They may even fail to be applied consistently when used by a single individual in various contexts. We would be better able to relate scientific descriptions of sound to musical descriptions of sound if the words used to describe sound had less ambiguous interpretations. To investigate the use of words and phrases in this lexicon, subjects with varying musical and scientific backgrounds are surveyed. The subjects are asked to listen to different pieces of recorded sounds and music and are asked to use their own colloquial language to describe the musical qualities and perceived quality differences in these pieces. Some of the qualitative results of this survey will be described, and some of the more problematic terms used by these various groups to describe sound quality will be identified.