The FAV Corpus: An Audio Dataset of Favorite Pieces and Excerpts, with Formal Analyses and Music Theory Descriptors

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1. Introduction

• Why do we like the music we like?
• Surprisingly little research on this question

Sloboda (1991): Asked participants to identify musical passages causing strong physiological effects; identified specific music-theoretic elements (i.e. sequences, appoggiaturas)

Gabrielsson & Wik (2003): Research on the effects (emotional, cognitive, physical) of “strong experiences” of music

Our study differs from previous work:
• Systematic, survey-based approach to music preference (rather than exploratory approach)
• Focuses on passages of music that are strongly liked (rather than causing chills or other physiological responses)

2. Method: Participants & Data Collection

• 140 undergraduate students at University of Rochester (New York) were given a survey about their favorite pieces and excerpts
• ~85% were music majors (Eastman School of Music)

The survey asked each respondent to identify “three of your favorite excerpts of music…in any style and from any time period” (providing a URL)

Then to “identify the 15-second excerpt that’s your favorite” from that piece (providing timepoints)

The survey also asked, “Why do you love the excerpt? Try to be as specific and detailed as possible (music theory terms are encouraged but not required).”

3. Results: Stylistic Content of the Corpus

• We categorized each excerpt as classical (50%), pop (41%), or jazz (9%)

Most popular artists/composers in survey —>

Classical selections were dominated by a handful of composers, while jazz & pop selections were diverse

4. Discussion

Summary

• In our study, 140 students (mostly music majors) identified three of their favorite 15-second passages of music; and gave comments explaining what they love about it

Comments focused on energy gain, build-ups, groove, crescendo, and simplicity

Takeaway: listeners’ favorite musical moments may involve energy gain or “build-up”, have low complexity, crescendo, and a good groove

5. References

(See paper for full references list)
