Conference report SysMus 2016

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Abstract
Each year students from all over the world come together to share and discuss their knowledge on varying topics from the field of systematic musicology at the SysMus Conference. The 9th edition of this conference series, organised by students for students, took place in the idyllic town of Jyväskylä in Finland, and therefore for the first time in SysMus-history in one of the Nordic Countries. The 2016 conference was organised by student chairs Joshua Bamford and Susan Johnson with tremendous support from Birgitta Burger as supervising chair. With its international community and critically acclaimed researchers, SysMus 2016 proved to be a fruitful and exciting gathering.

Keywords
Conference report, music and health, music psychology, student conference, systematic musicology

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From students for students: About the SysMus conference series
Richard Parncutt and Manuela Marin established the conference series in 2008 with the idea in mind to give students who are at the beginning of their academic career the opportunity to learn and strengthen essential skills in a professional, but also not too formal, environment. Masters and PhD students—in some cases even bachelor’s students—get the chance to gather first experiences in giving presentations in front of peers and colleagues, writing conference papers, or even organising a conference. Additionally, they get the opportunity to network with other researchers, which is more important than ever in such an interdisciplinary field with researchers distributed all over the world. In order to facilitate the intellectual exchange between aspiring and established researchers, and to promote an intergenerational dialogue, a constant element of this conference series are keynote presentations held by two or three influential researchers from various, mostly interdisciplinary, areas of systematic musicology. This three-day conference encompasses a range of topics combined with social events for the attendees. With invited keynote speakers, paper presentations, posters, and workshops they are a busy couple of days but will leave you feeling inspired and with many new friends.

SysMus 2016
This year around 50 participants presented their projects in the form of a poster or a presentation. The number of participants at this conference is kept deliberately low in order to enable an active exchange of ideas where all students can participate.

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of systematic musicology, the subjects presented were diverse, covering a wide array of methodologies and ideas from academic disciplines in social sciences, health, and more scientific data driven approaches. At this year’s conference, a tendency towards the topic of music for health was visible, one of the main research areas of the hosting university. Therefore, it was not surprising that the conference opened with a keynote by medical doctor Ralph Spintge who spoke about the aspects of music in medicine.

Keynote presentations
During his talk, Dr Spintge discussed the use of music in a clinical setting, focusing on pain management through music. He described several studies he has conducted on the anxiolytic (i.e., anxiety reducing) effect of music against pain and stress in surgery and obstetrics (see

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For these studies, specific musical stimuli have been developed and used as a therapeutic supplement to traditional medicine.

The second keynote presentation was given by Professor Mari Tervaniemi. In her presentation on “Music in our life: Learning and re-learning” she talked about two current research projects and their preliminary findings. In a longitudinal study, Tervaniemi and her team have looked at the impact of music learning on brain functions in humans from foetuses to school-aged children (Tervaniemi, 2017). Furthermore, she presented data of music rehabilitation from neurological and dementia patients (Sihvonen et al., 2017).

Justin London gave the final keynote of this year’s conference and introduced his talk with the words “whatever you know about musical tempo, I promise you, after my presentation, you will know less about it!” – he kept his promise. London questioned the prevalent knowledge on musical tempo and discussed novel perspectives for how musical tempo can be viewed. Multimodal aspects, amongst others, play a significant role in the perception of musical tempo (London, Burger, Thompson, & Toivianen, 2016). The perception of tempo can thus change when in addition to the musical stimulus a visual stimulus is presented. London concluded that tempo can be seen as an indicator for the energy needed for producing music or moving to music.

Posters, presentations and workshops
The course of the conference was straightforward for the most part. Each morning started with a keynote, and then continued with a paper session consisting of four paper presentations. After the lunch break on day one and day three, participants who had presented a poster had the opportunity to give a four-minute elevator pitch to promote their work. While poster presentations have been a more-or-less stable component of SysMus, these speed talks were a novelty. Unfortunately, this opportunity was mainly used to provide a condensed version of the poster content and elaborations on methodology, followed by a teaser that for the actual results one is invited to visit the respective poster. This cliff-hanger method seems to be very common, but overall it would have been more interesting to hear more about the theoretical framework and aims of the study during these four-minute presentations. On the other hand, the very fruitful discussions during the poster sessions, that often got extended until the end of the following coffee break, have proven once again that poster presentations should be perceived as equally valuable as oral presentations, even though posters seem to still be regarded as less popular.

The poster sessions were followed by two parallel paper sessions. Smart time management and close proximity between the locations made it possible to switch rooms between the four talks each session had to offer. There were a total of 27 talks and 21 posters during the three-day conference.

On the second day of the conference the timeslot after the lunch break was filled with workshops. While workshops have been offered at SysMus before (Neumann & Bauer, 2014), the wide selection was a refreshing novelty and received positively, as it gave attendees the opportunity to choose workshops based on their personal interests. There were five workshops to choose from. The Motion Capture Workshop gave an overview about the work of the in-department, well-equipped, motion capture lab. The Music Information Retrieval Workshop gave an introduction to the MIR-Toolbox for Matlab (Lartillot & Toivianen, 2007), which has been developed at the Finnish Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary Music Research and has proven to be a very helpful tool for different stages of analysing various musical parameters. In the workshop Music Technology/Music Tower, novel technologies, developed at the host university, for learning and producing music were introduced. In another workshop participants learned about Heart-rate Variability and possible research applications. The focus on music for health was also included in the selection of workshops: one workshop introduced Vibroacoustic Therapy, which studies how sound vibrations in the low frequency areas can be used for music therapeutic purposes. Another workshop, called Active Music Therapy, dealt with discussions on the fundamental concepts of music therapy. All in all this was an impressive selection of workshops for such a small conference, giving very good insights on the research that is being undertaken at the institute.

Social programme and satellite event
SysMus 2016 did not only excel because of its variety and excellent organisation. One day prior to the conference the second Motion and Music workshop had been organised as a satellite event, giving an introduction to the motion-capture system as well as research on music and motion. For early arriving attendees and workshop participants – two groups that partially overlapped – a city tour through serene Jyväskylä was offered by the student chairs. The end of the first day of the conference was concluded with a welcome party, which gave attendees the opportunity to actively use the silent-disco system of the host department. This implicit introduction to synchronised dancing and social bonding turned out to be a major success, providing further evidence to research suggesting that synchronised movement to music facilitates social bonding (Bamford, Burger, & Toivianen, 2016). On the second evening, the conference dinner took place, a firm fixture since the founding of the conference series. The location was a bit further out and could only be reached by shuttle busses provided by the organisers. The bus ride took approximately one hour and the reward was a beautiful view as the restaurant was located at one of the stunning lakes.
Finland has to offer. The third day was concluded by a jam session with an open stage. During the closing sessions, the previous two SysMus conferences were criticised for the lack of *musicking* (Small, 1998) as a supplement to all the academic talking about systematic musicology. All participants were invited to hit the stage with their own instruments or the ones provided by the institute. This opportunity was taken up with excitement which lead to a rather groovy jam session. Even keynote speaker Justin London showed off his talent on the guitar several times throughout the evening.

**Summary and outlook**

SysMus 2016 was a very well organised and executed conference, offering a refreshing balance between formal and informal programme points. SysMus 2016 provided students with a unique opportunity to network with peers and colleagues. In its nine years of existence, SysMus has continuously advanced and is a fantastic addition to other conferences in the field. Students were also invited to submit their papers to be included in the Special Issue on the SysMus 2016 Conference of the journal *Psychomusicology: Music, Mind, & Brain*, which was published in September 2017 (Cohen, 2017).

The SysMus series was celebrating its 10th conference from 13–15 September 2017 hosted by the Music Cognition Lab at Queen Mary University in London. The next Conference for International Students in Systematic Musicology will be held in Belo Horizonte, Brazil from 6–8 June 2018. This will be the second time SysMus has been organised outside of Europe, and the first time it will take place on the South American continent.

**Contributorship**

DK, JA and PD all contributed notes and comments to this report. DK wrote the draft of the report based on these notes. JA and PD reviewed the draft, gave feedback and editing suggestions to DK. DK edited the first draft where necessary based in the co-authors’ comments. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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