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Attention and Comprehension in Music Listening: 18th Century Music for Modern Listeners

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Attention and Comprehension in Music Listening

Musical comprehension employs both bottom-up acoustic cues and top-down schematic knowledge. We investigated whether attentional resources are recruited at moments of perceived musical change during listening. Participants listened to three 18th-century musical excerpts while completing segmentation and continuous slider tasks during eye-tracking. For segmentation, listeners indicate when they hear the beginning of a new musical idea; in the slider task, they continuously track perceived tension changes in the music over time. We measure pupil diameter as an index of cognitive load and attentional effort, using the [gazeR](#) package. We isolated phasic responses via epoch-locked baseline correction.

We predict systematic relationships among segmentation agreement, changes in musical texture or style, and physiological arousal. Preliminary data suggest that listeners' segmentation responses cluster around major musical transitions, indicating shared sensitivity to structural boundaries. Full data collection will test whether style-specific and domain-specific musical content modulates attentional resource allocation beyond acoustic features alone.