

Performance as a Research Instrument: An Example from the Western European Baroque

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Abstract

In this paper, I discuss performance as a research instrument in Western European classical music. I describe considerations and process leading to my performance of Corelli Op. 5 no. 12 "Follia" in the Indonesian Chamber Music Festival 2011 at ISI Yogyakarta Concert Hall. Corelli's Follia (La Folia), as it is commonly known, is a canonized work which opens many professional violinist's recital programs. Its real identity has become marginalized and transformed through rather blind reliance on 19th-century editions by violinists who wished to adopt it to "mainline" romantic concepts of style and performance. This process of adaption has been characteristic of European classical music for centuries. Works of earlier times were reshaped both in performance and in print editions to fit prevailing musical tastes. I chose to approximate an appropriate ensemble with modern instruments. Using a constructivist approach, I employed aspects of Baroque performance practice, especially in ornamentation and embellishment, along with manipulation of rhythmic elements and in a more spontaneous, and consciously contemporary manner. I take the opportunity to contribute to productive dialogue regarding the role of performance at Music Department, the Faculty of Performing Arts, Yogyakarta Indonesian Institute of the Arts, and qualitative research. I seek to open up our discourse to a wider understanding beyond the persistent positivist continues to approach the academic world in Indonesia as the only platform for research theory and method. I suggest that this performance, as any other is an informed adventure across time and space and that ethnomusicology and music are no longer separate worlds.

Keywords: *performance, violin, Baroque, Corelli.*

Abstrak

Dalam artikel ini, saya membahas pertunjukan sebagai instrumen penelitian dalam musik klasik Eropa Barat. Saya akan menjelaskan pertimbangan dan proses yang mengarah pada pertunjukan karya Corelli Op. 5 No. 12 "Follia" pada Chamber Music Festival 2011, di ISI Yogyakarta Concert Hall. Karya Corelli, Follia (*La Folia*) seperti yang umumnya dikenal, adalah karya yang sering digunakan sebagai pembuka program-program resital biola profesional. Identitas asli karya ini ternyata telah termarginalkan dan tertransformasikan oleh keyakinan buta pada edisi-edisi abad ke-19 oleh para pemain biola yang berkeinginan untuk mengadopsinya pada "alur utama" konsep-konsep romantik dalam gaya dan pertunjukan. Proses adaptasi ini telah menjadi karakteristik dari musik klasik Eropa selama berabad-abad. Karya-karya terdahulu digubah kembali baik dalam pertunjukan maupun dalam edisi yang sesuai dengan selera musik yang ada. Saya memilih untuk mendekati ansambel yang asli dengan instrumen-instrumen modern. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan konstruktivis, saya menggunakan aspek praktik pada pertunjukan Baroque, terutama dalam hiasan dan hiasan, bersamaan dengan manipulasi elemen berirama dan secara lebih spontan, dan secara sadar kontemporer. Saya mengambil kesempatan di sini untuk berkontribusi dalam dialog produktif mengenai peran pertunjukan di Jurusan Musik, Fakultas Seni Pertunjukan, Institut Seni Rupa Yogyakarta, dan penelitian kualitatif serta untuk membuka dunia akademis kita hingga pemahaman yang lebih luas. di luar pendekatan positivistis yang membatasi yang tetap ada di dunia akademis sebagai satu-satunya modus untuk teori dan metode penelitian. Saya menyarankan agar jenis pertunjukan ini adalah petualangan informasi melintasi ruang dan waktu dan bahwa etnomusikologi dan musik tidak lagi merupakan dunia yang terpisah.

Kata kunci: Pertunjukan, biola, Baroque, Corelli.

Introduction

For those of us reared primarily in the mainline vocational tradition of Western European classical music as conceived and transmitted through conservatory-style settings, performing music as a mostly art of repeated execution of a known canon of great works by selected composers. While we are often told by teachers that our goal is to "bring out what the composer intended," Curiously we are also often taught to play without thinking very much about many aspects of the music which might consciously or unconsciously diverge from the passively formed abstract concept of the piece. We imagine ourselves (our bodies and our instruments) as a magical medium through which the artistic product of the exalted composer passes through to provide what aspires to a virtual spiritual experience for the listener. We are taught to believe that notation both transmits the perfect form of the work and preserves it for eternity. Yet we work with the often heavily edited notation (at least in the Baroque period) which has been changed or expanded upon, with accompaniments which have been realized for the romantic styled piano. And many of us do not ever question the oral/aural traditions which we absorb as students of a particular teacher or teachers in the way we interpret and play these works, the performing practices which have themselves also changed over time.

Of course, we are not living in eighteenth-century Italy, and a memorable performance of Follia is hardly a 'séance to bring back the ghost of Corelli.' In the global/"global" world and (post) postmodernity in which we live and work, any interpretation of a work may be attempted and subjected to question. How we play in fact becomes the most important feature of the performance. As performer-researchers, we are seeking and showing our own musical selves. In the words of psychologist Kenneth Gergen:

Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. Each reality of self-gives way to reflexive questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of another reality (Gergen, 1991: 7, cited in Kramer, 1999).

If we can agree that music can (and perhaps must) mean something because we make it so, meaning arises from this strange ongoing process of recreating the reality of Corelli's great music in a totally different time and place.

Discussion

1. The Early Music Movement and Change in Performing Practice.

Around the middle of the twentieth century, the Early Music movement started. [Early Music is] A term once applied to music of the Baroque and earlier periods, but now commonly used to denote any music for which a historically appropriate style of performance must be reconstructed on the basis of surviving scores, treatises, instruments and other contemporary evidence. The 'early music movement', involving a revival of interest in this repertory and in the instruments and performing styles associated with it, had a wide-ranging impact on musical life in the closing decades of the 20th century (Haskell, 2011, "Early music." In *Grove Music Online*).

In its beginnings, it seemed to resemble a quasi-religious fundamentalist movement in search of a purist ideal, as musicologists sought to recover the real sound and meaning of Baroque music. There was an interest in using violins and other instruments in their original setup, with lower bridges and gut strings tuned as much as a whole step lower than the modern A of 440, with a rather dry approach to performing. In the

past half-century, Baroque performance has been transformed, evidenced by the wide range of performers and recordings now available worldwide. Many approaches exist, including using modern instruments played with elements of Baroque technique. Performing this music is very much an exercise in constructivist methods which seek to mediate between the past and the present to produce an interesting performance for today. Philosophically, we negotiate new meaning for these older works in the spirit described by Richard Taruskin:

I am convinced that "historical" performance today is not really historical; that a thin veneer of historicism clothes a performance style that is completely of our own time, and is in fact the most modern style around; and that the historical hardware has won its wide acceptance and above all its commercial viability precisely by virtue of its novelty, not its antiquity. (Taruskin, 1988:152, quoted in Shelemey, 2001: 9)

2. Transmission and Reading Baroque Notation.

Western European classical music or any music for that matter can only be partially transmitted through notation. Among many classically trained musicians one encounters a *tacet* lack of awareness that much of what is learned in performing practice is passed on in oral tradition by teachers, and aurally acquired through listening to many performances of the same work by different performers. Baroque notation often appears deceptively simple and sparse. Composers like Bach (who were also performers) sought greater control of the musical product and began to fix elements such as trills, mordents and other ornamental elaborations which were during the Baroque were to be spontaneously added in performance. Late Baroque

composers started to produce their own tables of how to play ornaments in the same vein. Improvisation continued into the classical period and the concerto cadenza was purportedly improvised by composer-performers until the 19th century. Mozart published some of his cadenzas for his piano concerti, surely in the interests of advising on the style he preferred, as did Beethoven. A major turning point of this process is the fully composed cadenza in Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, though many composers left the cadenzas up to performers well to the end of the nineteenth century.

The elevation of notation as the primary vehicle of transmission created another powerful hegemony: that of the editors, which has led to yet another field of contested power. The edition and the Urtext movement makes the editor a powerful conduit of power in the product-oriented field of musical performance. I believe that the emergence of music printing, which Corelli himself capitalized on, and the development of recording technology caused music to increasingly be conceived concrete, autonomous, commodifiable object.

Recordings can be thought of as a heightened form of notation, more complete than the two-dimensional graphic nature of traditional Western notation. Digital media of all types (audio and visual) create a world of virtual music. What we hear is often processed through several gateways, from the microphones used, the original recording equipment, the original recording space, and situation, through another transformation from one sound format to mp3, mp4, FLAC or numerous other compressed media, across the internet, through our computers and through the headphones and sound equipment we use. We tend to disregard the implications of this trans-electronic, transnational product flow. However, when we seek to produce an acoustic performance in real time

with our own real bodies, we need to be aware of the transformations that occur through these processing steps. The very sound of the instruments, and the Baroque approach to sound and sound production, in this case, is going to be an important focus of interest.

Studying Western classical music in many respects is studying history. We are taught to conceive of the music through established canons of repertoire organized into fundamentally main style periods (cumulatively called the Common Practice Period) emphasizing canonized works mostly from 1700 to 1900. Resistance to returning to earlier performing practice is still hampered by the mistaken belief that across history music and its performance "improved" over time. In fact, history is specifically distorted in other ways in standard Western classical training. Research into performing practice has shown us that composer-performers and performers who weren't necessarily composers were still ornamenting in real time into the twentieth century. They also actually were changing and/or adding ornaments, embellishments, even whole new sections to piece. In each new period, older music was reinterpreted with newer instruments, current performance practices, and representations in notation to adapt them to the then current tastes and aesthetics. A well-known case is that of nineteenth-century theorists changing accidentals in Bach's music to correct what they held to be errors in light of their contemporary abstract notions of theoretical correctness (see for famous extra bar example in WTK I Preludium, Mülleman, 2012)

3. Historical Sources

Moving towards qualitative methods, meaningful performance (covering all aspects of preparation leading to a public presentation of a work) requires us to inves-

tigate aspects of the music from several perspectives, including those outside of the specifically musical aspects of the music. The artistic performer leaves the comfort of his favorite musical routines and looks into the perspectives which other disciplines can bring to the problem. In any performance, we are finally presenting a momentary product, a product in production which is the result of available knowledge gained through the study of the context of a piece, and our own current intuitions regarding what the piece actually is in our own hands. We construct a work in mediating past with the present.

Corelli worked in the service of churches, courts, and patrons, and like all Baroque composer-performers, he was expected to produce music for specific situations quickly and efficiently. Violin technique was developing as he himself performed in a live process, and he would hardly have had time to write it all down even if he had wanted to. He never intended to write every detail of the music down as the Baroque Italian style of music where spontaneous embellishment of musical lines in solo works, especially slow movements, was expected. He created musical lines which would facilitate his extemporal ornamenting quite naturally. We have an easy guide to how he ornamented from a publication of his sonatas in which he himself provided examples of how to play his slow sections (See the reprint edition by Joachim *et al.*, 1890).

Illustration 1.

Ex: Etienne's editions with Corelli's approved ornamentation suggestion.

We have numerous treatises written by Baroque composer-performers, which

give us plenty of information regarding how the music was actually played through the ways in which it was learned. Perhaps the most famous are those by Quantz, Geminiani and C.P.E. Bach. Geminiani is mostly a practical method, while the other two are both instructional and more academic are intended as practical manuals for the study of the instrument giving specific instructions and examples on how to ornament with the marvelous great detail of performance practice in all its aspects.

Corelli's *Follia* op. 5 no. 2 is not a typical sonata, nor is it a strictly a solo work for accompanied violin. It is a set of 22 variations set as a duet for violin and cello with harpsichord continuo, based on a sixteen bar traditional bassline melody and chord progression. The original notation for *Follia* provides the conventional solo line and a bass line with figures. The bass line with figures is intended for a keyboard instrument, harpsichord or organ, or any other chording type instrument like the lute. Performance conventions included cello or contrabass doubling the bass line since the harpsichord of the period did not have a strong bass resonance. The harpsichord player would have improvised the left hand based on the figured bass indications for correct chord changes.



Illustration 2:
Original publication (Gertsch, 2014).



Illustration 3.
Variation 2: showing the dialogue between violin and cello.

4. Performing *Follia*

Performance can become both a research instrument and the medium of presenting results. We recognize that music is an embodied process. The body can conceive as a recording instrument (Samudra, 2009). We make music within the capabilities and limitations of our human bodies. Many of the lessons learned in performing this music are learned in the actual performance of the music based on applying ideas and concepts from studying earlier sources like Quantz and Geminiani.

I have been exploring Baroque performance practices since the 1970's, and many of my past students at Music Department, the Faculty of Performing Arts, (*Fakultas Seni Pertunjukan* abbreviated as the FSP), Yogyakarta Indonesian Institute of the Arts (*Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta*, or known as the *ISI Yogyakarta*) are well acquainted with work we did at *Akademi Musik* with Baroque style. For this performance, I chose to approximate the original ensemble with modern instruments violin, cello and an electronic keyboard set to a harpsichord stop. The sound of the harpsichord, lacking the dynamic range of the modern piano, continually comes through the texture of the sound with its plucked string sound, and easily moves to the background by default when the cello is in a prominent position.

We kept the tuning pitch at 442 with the modern instruments with 'modern strings'. We did not delve into setting period tunings on the keyboard, which is a possibility with many keyboards today. Given time this might be interesting. A 'modern' bow on the cello was held several inches higher than the usual position. I used a period reproduction bow also with a Baroque hold. This produces a more sense of balance, especially for the violin, with quicker response. It also enabled more clean articulation of characteristic dotted rhythms, more micro-dynamic nuancing, and even allows for faster tempos. Both stringed instruments approached the issues of basic sound production as *mesa di voce*, where all strokes long and short were possible according to the duration was played with a *crescendo* and *diminuendo*. While the older upward curved bows would produce this naturally as part of the stroke, we can realize these swells and recede on each stroke by speeding up the bow towards the middle of notes and slowing to the end.

Rhythm is an area where there is room for freedom of approach. Anyone who has tried to play a Baroque fitted instrument with a Baroque bow knows that the response on a lighter strung instrument is faster than the harder strung "modern" (late 19th century) instrument. Thus there is no basis for thinking that Baroque tempos were slower than later periods. In fact, they could have been and certainly were quite a bit faster. In Baroque performance practice, it is generally understood that notes are performed shorter than what is written, to something like half their written value. The exception is with sixteenth notes in fast passages, which on stringed instruments may end up actually being longer though still detached than eighth notes. The augmentation dot in the Baroque is most often construed as a rest and categorically not a prolongation of the main note. The second note of suspensions (consonant

and dissonant) is generally not sounded, a consistent relative of the augmentation dot. There is another performance consideration that relates to ensemble balance: the bigger the instrument, the shorter the performed notes. However, we do not (and never should) become slaves of a simple formula. Violins are capable of playing legato, and there has always been a close relationship with vocal style. Note length and articulation are an area where we may and did take liberties in the interest of expressive playing. Simply playing some notes longer can have a powerful dramatic effect. In at least one variation I asked the cellist to play pizzicato, another *ad libitum* technique which was mostly not notated but certainly freely used.

Another aspect of rhythm is in the approach to final V-I cadences. The idea of a *ritard.*, in this case, is a 19th-century idea. Especially in the case the many cadences in *Follia*, I tried to vary every cadence in some way without repeating exactly the same manner. I often make the point to my students that the "walking bass" of Baroque music is the source of Jazz practice, with only a rhythmic change called swing. We know from secondary sources that Baroque musicians often performed in general styles different from what was written, as in the practice of *notes inegales* (the truly respected ancestor of Jazz swing), double-dotting (performing single augmentation dots as doubles). Many performers hold the view that Baroque note values were all played at half their given value, such that eighth notes were often shorter than sixteenths on stringed instruments. The use of rubato is intuitively obvious in Baroque music, especially in the ornamentation of bare melodies as in my rendition of the opening theme. Playing with rubato style rhythm between the beats, as well as using silence produced by shortening notes seems entirely natural to the improvisatory nature of the performance.

Just because there are so few dynamic marks in the original notation does not mean there were none. Composers assumed performers (mostly the same person of course) would apply conventional dynamics where they were obvious without having to notate these. One of these is the so-called terrace dynamic, playing a repeated motive first forte than as an echoing piano. With all the interest in dramatic opera in the Baroque, surely performance was enlivened with accents, *crescendi* and *diminuendi* which were performer choices.

Overall tempos were left in many respects to instincts. Follia is both theme and harmonic progression which forms the basis for twenty-three variations. There are changes of tempo, and several changes of meter, deftly chosen by Corelli to provide variation in the midst of static harmonic repetitions. I allowed variations in tempo, even occasional *accelerandi* and *ritardandi* in small increments where they seemed musically sensible. Since there are so many cadences, nearly every cadence was subject to some sort of conscious style of execution. Sometimes this was a slight lift just before the last note, like catching one's breath. Sometimes there were none. No great *ritardandi* of the sort in so many romanticized editions of this work were done. Finally, the performance of the twenty-two variations was grouped with rests between several groups.

Conclusion

Further Adventures in Time and Space

A musical performance is, in fact, an adventure spanning time and space. We resurrect music through a notation from a period long ago historically, from a place different from the one we are in now. We combine hypothesis and fact drawn from period sources and seek to combine these with the inescapable fact of us as living beings in our

own total cultural context. The body serves as the research vehicle, the recording apparatus, and the performing instrument for realizing the sound event we call a performance. Such activities are hardly limited to Baroque period music. Similar approaches have been applied up to the end of the nineteenth century. Changes in instruments, bows, and strings all developed along with changing requirements in the musical styles over time. The actual products of this way of working call out the idea that it is more important how one does something, rather than the actual thing itself. Ornamenting skeletal melodic lines is a distinctive feature in much of the traditional music of Indonesia, and knowledge produced and understandings gained from investigating performing practices in both Western classical music and traditional music in Indonesia are likely to help better illuminate both. Studying music in its total context, and the understanding that it is inseparably a product of a particular social, philosophical, political, religious and cultural time and place, is wisdom gained from ethnomusicology. I think it is the time that music and ethnomusicology at ISI Yogyakarta properly should exist under the same roof, and swim in the same magnificent ocean of musical alternatives.

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