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Performance Practice: Criticism, Summary, Discovery

What should be the predominant considerations in a periodical devoted to musical performance? Three would seem to have particular relevance, criticism, summary, and discovery. The concerns will be to raise the level of criticism, to provide a clear picture of the field in general, and to encourage new investigation. Overarching these is the goal of bringing performers and scholars closer together. Performers certainly need to become more fully aware of the advantages of historical performance. And scholars need to take cognizance of the important role they can play for performers in reassembling the performance aspects of past works.

Criticism

Reviewers (of concerts or recordings) have until fairly recently paid little attention to performance practice considerations. The intrinsic qualities of musical works and the performer's sensitivity to these qualities have been central, and for critics, performers, and audiences alike they have encompassed a total musical experience. Criticism, moreover, has been largely intuitive without much reinforcement by technical detail.

It is against this background that performance practice has come onto the scene, seeking to broaden criticism by its emphasis on a quite different consideration, that of ascertaining what were a composer's original sounds and playing techniques, what kinds of instruments were

utilized, the manner of ornamenting, etc. These aspects must have initially seemed to critics — and to many performers as well — to be rather peripheral to, if not actually a distraction from, the experience of a musical work.

But all this is now changing. As historical performance has begun to take hold in concert life, it has become increasingly apparent that a faithfulness to the composer's original means of expression allows something of the work's innate expressivity to come through that would otherwise not be present. The process is akin to restoration in the visual arts, which sets about to remove the incrustations of time from a painting or sculpture, except that in music such "accretions" are to be found in the residue of performing traditions that have grown up around and obscured a composer's original version.

Musical restoration, however, is more challenging than is the returning of an art work to its first brightness. Music is more ephemeral, and the qualities that were once present in an original performance are not easily reinvoked. Indeed, what may initially have been most compelling and expressive are those very aspects that were most quickly forgotten, the subtle shadings of dynamics or nuances of rhythm, that which was most taken for granted in a given time. Contemporaries spoke of *bon goût* or *affettuoso*, probably with such subtleties in mind, without however explaining just how they were to be achieved. Joseph Kerman (*Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology*) groups them under the general concept of "interpretation," that which is in some manner expected in all performance, but which has always been too intrinsic or personal to be indicated in the music. Herein lies the main gap between criticism and performance practice, between the critic's recognition of what is subtly communicative and the historian's attempt to rediscover the minute and since-forgotten aspects that contribute to this communicativeness.

Summary

This seems a propitious time to commence a journal devoted to performance issues. The field has expanded enormously over the past two or three decades, creating a need to sum up and consolidate, and to provide an idea of where we now stand. Performance practice has undergone some decisive changes during the past few years and the perspective of the 1980s is rather different from what it was a generation ago.

The 1960s and 70s was a time when performance practice came into its own (academic surveys were being established and collegia beginning to spring up). It was also a period of unprecedented fact gathering, and for a time considerable emphasis was placed on rules and procedures based on the authority of theoretical writings (Robert Donington's *Interpretation of Early Music* was a landmark). Often, too, the rules were given a quite broad application (a correlary may be seen in the practice of using "historical" instruments for a wide variety of early music examples). In the 1980s, however, a more discerning attitude has begun to make itself felt. Evidence is being more carefully weighed for its appropriateness, and the focus is narrowing, with the facts being directed to select groups of works, or even to individual works (A. Peter Brown's book on *The Creation* is reviewed in this issue).

The need has been to bring the abundance of new findings to the attention of performers as well as to make them more readily accessible. A convenient means, it would seem, is through annotated bibliography, which allows the user more easily to select items of interest, and to bridge the foreign-language barrier. *Performance Practice Review* will offer annual annotated surveys, the first ("Performance Practice Bibliography, 1987") at the close of this volume. In them the books and articles of a given year (and some from previous years) will be arranged according to historical periods and indexed by topics. A further resource will be a set of essays concerning "The Current State of Performance Research," each devoted to a particular area of study. In the present issue Albert Cohen allows us to look into recent writings concerning the French baroque and Malcolm Cole into those concerning the Classic period. Both afford worthwhile points of departure for performers and researchers who are inquisitive about these topics.

Discovery

There is also a need in a periodical of this sort to encourage discovery and to initiate fresh approaches and new interpretations. The four essays in the present issue share a common thread. Each of them challenges previously-held notions, which in the authors' estimations had been too-much dominated by particular theoretical evidence. Frederick Neumann (responding to two of his critics) makes a fervent plea for a less rigid realization of 17th and 18th century ornaments. Hendrik van der Werf, dissenting from earlier solutions to medieval rhythm, lays aside both the equalist and proportionalist positions, favoring in their place a fuller sensitivity to the rhythmic implications of the text. Mark Lindley searches out alternatives to Brenton Fisk's Renaissance and baroque

schemes of tuning for the new Stanford organ, proposing a temperament "midway in character between the French and German styles," one that in his view will achieve a more euphonious effect and be more nearly in accord with the way a good deal of early organ music sounded. And Erica Heisler Buxbaum, commenting on Stravinsky's "definitive" tempi, reveals that the composer's own remarks lead us to less certainty in the performing of these tempi than we formerly assumed we had.

What are some of the more promising areas of investigation for performance practice at this time? Four in particular might be singled out.

- (1) *First-hand experience with historical instruments.* Performer-scholars, playing on replicas or preserved instruments, are discovering ways of executing passages in earlier music that have hitherto been problematical. Fenner Douglass, for instance, has shown that the trying out of ornaments on 17th-century French organs has been more instructive than reading what theorists had to say about these ornaments.
- (2) *Reexamining the music itself.* Researchers are finding that the original sources can disclose many details about performance that have previously been overlooked. Object lessons have been provided by Neumann's scrutiny of the Mozart autographs for evidence concerning ornaments and Étienne Darbellay's examination of Frescobaldi's prints for information concerning articulation.
- (3) *In-depth exploring of archival and literary sources.* Past records, correspondence, epics, etc. are yielding up numerous secrets concerning such matters as types of singers, numbers of voices, and whether or not singers were accompanied. Christopher Page and David Fallows have pointed a new direction in these matters.
- (4) *Establishing links with ethnic research.* Although ethnomusicology has looked at performance practice rather differently (as Gerard Béhague has shown us in *Performance Practice: Ethnomusicological Perspectives*) — ethnic researchers prefer to observe performance within a broader, socio-cultural context — it would seem that much is to be learned about historical practices by observing performers in other cultures, even though the connections cannot be established with

certainty. One thinks here of Heinrich Bessler's suggestion that modern-day Catalonian shawm bands may represent a throwback to the 15th-century *alta cappella*. And ethnic music's acceptance of a number of equally valid versions (in contrast to historical musicology's search for the composer's "best" version) is an approach espoused by van der Werf in this volume.

These are but a few of the possibilities. *Performance Practice Review* looks forward to other, equally promising ventures.