

"Performance Practice: Music after 1600." By Howard M. Brown and Stanley Sadie

George Houle

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr>



Part of the [Music Practice Commons](#)

Houle, George (1991) ""Performance Practice: Music after 1600." By Howard M. Brown and Stanley Sadie," *Performance Practice Review*: Vol. 4: No. 1, Article 7. DOI: 10.5642/perfpr.199104.01.7
Available at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr/vol4/iss1/7>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Claremont at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Performance Practice Review by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie, eds.: *Performance Practice: Music after 1600*. Vol. 2. Norton/Grove Handbooks in Music. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1989. xi, 533p.

Performance Practice, Vol. 2: Music after 1600 is a valuable but somewhat uneven collection of essays that presents a multiplicity of viewpoints within a vast field of inquiry. Some essays lead a performer through a musical problem and demonstrate how it might be solved, for example Robert Levin's excellent "Instrumental Ornamentation, Improvisation and Cadenzas" in the classical era. Some serve as a simplified and abbreviated introduction to a broad topic, for instance Peter Walls's and Robin Stowell's essays on "Strings," and Alan Lumsden's and David Charlton's discussions of "Woodwind and Brass." There are also highly complex excellent studies of intricate special problems of interest to scholars or professional performers such as Cary Karp's "Pitch" and Mark Lindley's "Tuning and Intonation" in the baroque era. The orientation of the book as a whole is academic rather than practical, and the notes and bibliography may sometimes prove to be more valuable to scholars than the text.

Many topics are discussed in the introductions to the baroque era (by Eleanor Selfridge-Field), classical era (by Neal Zaslaw), and romantic era (by Kern Holoman). Topics include performance locales, social context, performing editions, the change in music patronage in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and the ease of travel in the 19th century that led to greater consistency in performance styles. Readers are well introduced to the sources of information on which the study of performance practice relies. "Authenticity" as a stick with which to beat living tradition is thankfully absent, although Kern Holoman writes "the proximity of the nineteenth century ensures that the central task in the study of its performance practice is to separate, among all the lore we have inherited, the practices that have survived unsullied from the past from those that have been corrupted by the vagaries of changing taste and fashion." Performance practice helps us to distinguish characteristic techniques and styles of performance, but we are better off with rhetoric less heated than this.

The primary task facing students of the performance practice of the 19th and 20th centuries is to choose significant information from an overwhelming amount of evidence. Will Crutchfield's essays on "Voices" (Chapters 15 and 21) are excellent examples of the state of research in

19th-century performance practice. They are admirable for their selection of telling examples presented with graceful clarity.

Instrumental performance practice is rather unevenly treated, with by far the most extensive consideration given to keyboard instruments. Peter Williams's essay on baroque keyboard instruments displays an admirable knowledge of repertory and reflects considerable performance experience.

Malcolm Bilson's discussion of keyboards in the classical era is deeply informed about the repertory and its performance on period instruments, and reflects his sensitive analysis of the music itself. Bilson may be wrong about the development of instruments (see Robert Winter's essay pp. 346-350 and Laurence Libin's comment in *Historical Performance 3*, Spring 1990, p. 25), but he is informative about performance style and inspiring about the music. Winter's discussion of "Keyboards" is entirely about the piano in the 19th century and is highly informative about the mechanism, its effect upon technique, and changes in piano sonority. The 19th century organ is thoroughly discussed by Wayne Leupold, but it might be questioned whether this topic deserves such an extensive essay in this collection.

Stringed instruments are treated in half the space given to keyboards by Peter Walls (baroque era) and Robin Stowell (classical and romantic eras). This small allotment of space cramps the discussion so that the reader can gain only the sketchiest of ideas about bowing technique in the baroque era. Woodwind and brass instruments are courageously tackled in even less space by Alan Lumsden (baroque era) and David Charlton (classical and romantic eras) and the information they offer is valuable but sparse. Bibliographies and reference in the end notes help somewhat by referring the reader to more detailed discussions, but few references are given for the wind instruments. Percussion instruments and performance rate only one brief paragraph.

Chapter 7, "Pitch," by Cary Karp, is a tightly reasoned exposition of the complex and contradictory information on pitches used in 17th- and 18th-century performances. The rich and confusing descriptions and drawings in Praetorius's *Syntagma Musicum* are his starting point and furnish the basis of comparison for subsequent information on instrumental pitch in the 17th and early 18th centuries. The precision of his logic and the interpretation of evidence is exemplary; this is the best and most thorough discussion of this topic in print, but it is unnecessarily demanding of the reader. We are led through the essay with no idea of

what might be an absolute pitch in vibrations per second until conclusions are drawn. The reader will do well to peek at these conclusions first and pencil in the numbers at the beginning of the article. This is an important study of a very different character than the other summarized and abbreviated essays.

A fine intellectual precision is also evident in Mark Lindley's discussion of tuning and "intonation," — perhaps most American musicians would more readily use the word "temperament" in this context. This is the most demanding chapter in the book, more readily understood by musicians versed in mathematics, but only fully comprehensible if the sounds represented by mathematical ratios and clever diagrams can be heard and compared. I confess that I would have been totally lost in the logic of this essay without the sounds of the dual-temperament Fisk organ at Stanford to use as a basis of comparison.

David Fuller's "The Performer as Composer" is excellent, yet its title creates expectation at variance with the contents. It is not about the improvisation of cadenzas, the nearest that performers come to composition, but rather the supplementation and interpretation of written notation. This essay gives a brief account of what performers need to know and an excellent list of references to primary and secondary sources. Professor Fuller is particularly helpful to students in summarizing the frequently polemical articles and studies surrounding the interpretation of dotted notes, the French trill, metrical inequality, triplets against duplets, and other passionate controversies. One might wish for an exposition of 17th century notation (of which many performers today are much in need) as well as some guidelines on how the music might be edited.

Differences of opinion and interpretation are frequent between chapters of the book. Mark Lindley's carefully reasoned and fully documented discussion of keyboard fingerings (Chapter 9) presents an impressive amount of information to aid in making choices in fingerings, but Peter Williams dismissed the topic with the somewhat irrelevant observation that "'old fingering' is often a phrase misused today in so far as there was no single 'old fingering' and a doctrinaire approach (quite at variance with the ineradicable pragmatism of good composers) can all too easily result from a belief that there was."

There are notable omissions; recitative is mentioned only briefly in the section on "Voices" in the classical era, and baroque recitative not at all, although the essays by Ellen T. Harris (baroque) and Will Crutchfield

(classical era and the 19th century) illuminate other aspects of operatic performance practice. One large topic that is not considered is conducting and its influence on performance practice, particularly in the later 19th and 20th centuries. Dance is only mentioned in passing (and is not included in the index). The index is inadequate for many topics. Rubato, for example, is not indexed, although we might like to know that Wayne Leupold's helpful discussion of it is buried in his essay on the organ in the 19th century (page 378), Will Crutchfield has a few comments on page 451, and another discussion can be found on pages 472-74 in the chapter on the early 20th century.

There are a few errors. Mode 4, on page 20, is the hypophrygian, not "E-phrygian," on p. 92 Ganassi should be credited with organizing the Venetian wind band instead of Dalla Casa. F-flat is found at 12 o'clock in the semicircular diagram near the bottom of page 169, and it should be E-flat. The oboe's range (p. 254) was established as extending to f" long before 1813, no oboist can forget the high f's in Mozart's oboe quartet of 1781. Henri de Busscher's name is misspelled on page 469, and his influence on performance goes much beyond the years (1904-13) he played in the Queen's Hall Orchestra in London, during which time he was the model for Leon Goossens. He was the unforgettable oboist of the Los Angeles Philharmonic until the 1950s. He was also my teacher.

It seems to me that Alan Lumsden has wrongly interpreted the strength of wind articulation syllables (p. 81), *ta* is stronger than *ra* only in speaking. When these syllables are used in performance on brass or woodwind instruments, *ra* is expelled with the force of the breath and *ta* has only the force of the tongue. What is "tremolo" on the trombone, mentioned on page 94?

Some of the accomplishments and pitfalls of the study of performance practice are made evident in Chapter 22 on music between 1900 and 1940, by Robert Phillip. He has taken careful note of scores, period method books, stylistic classifications, and esthetic criteria, and then examined contemporary recordings. Vibrato that is scorned in method books can be discerned in performance, tempos that are carefully specified in the notation are ignored, phrasings marked in the parts are altered or omitted. Differences exist even between a composer's statements and the recordings he supervised. What does the diversity of performance practice in our recent past indicate about the statements, teaching, and performances of earlier eras from which we have so much less information and no recordings?

Performance practice is not the same as performance, a point that is not clear to many musicians today. Performance practice, a study of the way music is and has been performed, offers a statement of ideals, perhaps even an unrealizable vision of what performance might be. Performance itself is quite another matter that involves endless learning and practice in order to make beautiful sounds perfectly in tune, and the intellectual and emotional force to bring forth touching and supple music. A performance must, above all, satisfy, move, and captivate its audience, even if it means that an ideal is modified or abandoned. Historical performance practice is an important component of performance today and can no longer be ignored by a professional musician. The essays in *Performance Practice 2* are a valuable introduction to this important and richly diverse field.

George Houle