

# PLAYING WITH HISTORY

*The Historical Approach to Musical Performance*

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*Joining the historical performance debate*

HINDEMITH AND ADORNO, AND SOME PRELIMINARY  
ANTINOMIES OF HIP

Some of the parameters of the debate over historical performance were set many years before the movement became a truly public phenomenon in the late 1960s. For instance, the commemoration of the year of Bach's death in 1950 occasioned diverse opinions on the way his music should be performed: the prominent composer and performer, Paul Hindemith, advocated the wholesale restoration of the instruments and performing practices of Bach's own age:

We can be sure that Bach was thoroughly content with the means of expression at hand in voices and instruments, and if we want to perform his music according to his intentions we ought to restore the conditions of performance of that time.<sup>1</sup>

Here we have the fundamental assumption that a composer fits effortlessly and contentedly into the culture of his own age, that what he got coincided with what he wanted, and that a restoration of contemporary performing conventions will thus coincide with the composer's intentions. Given that Hindemith himself was one of the major composers of the age, the suggestion that we might wish to follow the composer's intentions must have carried some considerable force in 1950. Both Hindemith's historicist attitude and his productions of early music were of tremendous influence on Nikolaus Harnoncourt who, perhaps more than anyone over the next twenty years, made the case for HIP.<sup>2</sup> He was recording with early instruments by the early 1960s and his countless essays from this pioneering period did much to popularise the virtues of associating earlier music with its original performance practice. More importantly, he was perhaps the first to stress that music and its performance before the nineteenth century involved a different

aesthetic attitude, one stressing the speech-like and rhetorical aspects of music. Each musical style and period before 1800 had a different ethos that brought with it different conceptions of performance, and it is thus wrong to think of changes in performance and instrument construction in terms of a necessary ‘progress’.<sup>3</sup> Both in his rejection of the status quo and his early alliance with Hindemith, Harnoncourt’s case is symptomatic of the association of HIP with a particular strand of modernism. Indeed Harnoncourt was one of the first to suggest that his historical reconstructions represented a ‘modern’ adventure and not simply a direct return to the past.<sup>4</sup> Behind much of his work as a performer and writer lies the sense that we have been in a prolonged state of cultural decline, one that HIP – by re-introducing us to conceptions of music more varied than our bland present – may rectify. In this pessimistic diagnosis of the present Harnoncourt comes remarkably close to Theodor W. Adorno, although his remedy is radically different.

Adorno in 1951 poured scorn on historical reconstruction: only the ‘progressive’ modern performance resources (indeed the modern arrangements by Schoenberg and Webern) could reveal the full import of Bach’s music which stood head and shoulders above the pitiful concerns of its own age. Speaking at a time when the early music movement was still in its infancy, but when western Germany was undergoing an enormous process of rebuilding and restoration, he suggests that:

the neo-religious Bach is impoverished, reduced and stripped of the specific musical content which was the basis of his prestige. He suffers the very fate which his fervent protectors are least willing to admit: he is changed into a neutralized cultural monument, in which aesthetic success mingles obscurely with a truth that has lost its intrinsic substance. They have made him into a composer for organ festivals in well-preserved Baroque towns, into ideology.<sup>5</sup>

Adorno’s specific comments about the levelling proclivities of ‘historical’ performance and the inadequacy of the older forms of performance sound very much like the types of criticism that became familiar over the next decades from musicologists such as Paul Henry Lang and musicians such as Pinchas Zukerman.<sup>6</sup>

Mechanically squeaking *continuo*-instruments and wretched school choirs contribute not to sacred sobriety but to malicious failure; and the thought that the shrill and rasping Baroque organs are capable of capturing the long waves of the lapidary, large fugues is pure superstition. Bach’s music is separated from the general level of his age by an astronomical distance. Its eloquence returns only

when it is liberated from the sphere of resentment and obscurantism, the triumph of the subjectless over subjectivism. They say Bach, mean Telemann and are secretly in agreement with the regression of musical consciousness which even without them remains a constant threat under the pressures of the culture industry. (Adorno, 'Bach Defended', p. 145)

Whatever we might think of Adorno's views today, he does raise some important questions that proponents of HIP frequently miss. He sees the fledgling movement to restore older instruments and performance practices as part of a wider cultural malaise in the wake of the depersonalising forces of industrialism and late capitalism. Instead of setting up a form of resistance to contemporary society, as was done by the increasing isolation, introspection and complexity of the Second Viennese School (Adorno's ever-pessimistic hope for the future of musical culture) the culture of restoration resorts to a facile objectivity that does not even notice the subjective challenge posed by great modern art. As mass culture becomes ever more superficial it substitutes the fetish for historical detail for a profundity of which it is not even any longer aware. Adorno is clearly representative of a form of musical modernism that sees the avant-garde as absolutely crucial in somehow revealing the truth of our desperate condition. Pessimistic though his tone may be, he evidently still believes in a form of progress, that music culture and composition must move forward, however bleak the prospects ahead. Perhaps this is more a sense of irreversibility than of progress as such.<sup>7</sup> But, whether this is progress or irreversibility there is clearly a fundamental antipathy between the modernism, as represented by the Second Viennese School and Adorno, and any culture of restoration, such as HIP. Hindemith and Adorno not only represent the two poles of opinion about HIP, they also show how the movement, in its post-war form, sits both within and without the culture of modernism.

As I hope to show in the following chapters, Adorno was surprisingly accurate in diagnosing a move away from a culture of progress and ever-renewing modernity towards one based more on restoration and recycling. Much that was profound or challenging may well have been lost in the process. But, given what I perceive to be crucial shifts in cultural consciousness, it is impossible for us to know what we have lost. Indeed to resort to Adorno's particular brand of modernism would itself be a sterile form of resurrectionism, since we have passed the historical moment from which he was talking and cannot authentically restore his ideals. The various forms of historical restoration, of which HIP is an obvious component, are, I believe, an 'authentic' expression of our

contemporary cultural condition bringing new experiences and insights into our world. Most importantly, this lies largely in the realisation that the culture of inexorable technological progress is itself an historically conditioned phenomenon, that conserving what we already have or might already have lost is now at least as essential as forging new paths into the future unknown.

Adorno's later writing reveals what perhaps lay behind his strident antipathy in 1951. In his typographical sketch opening his *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, those associated with HIP (at least as it stood in 1962) are christened 'resentment listeners'.<sup>8</sup> This category comes at the very bottom of the ranking of those constituting the culture of classical music, just above the 'jazz listener'. What is immediately striking is how Adorno relates the early music culture to totalitarian politics: the resentment listener normally sympathises with orders and collectives, together with the political consequences (p. 10); all expression and individuality is to be expunged, 'the gypsies are to croak now as they did before, in concentration camps' (p. 11). This culture yearns for the pre-individual state (witnessed by its penchant for Baroque music, which Adorno considers – apart from Bach – as a form of levelling mediocrity)<sup>9</sup> while it cannot escape its own post-individual state. Its process is 'formally comparable to the fascist manipulation that invested the compulsory collective of the atomized with the insignia of a precapitalist, nature-grown "people's community"' (p. 12).

Indeed, during the 1930s in Germany both the ecological movements and the popular youth movements in early music had been strongly infiltrated by the Nazis (see p. 210 below), so it is easy to understand Adorno's personal position. Yet Hindemith too had been a refugee from the same regime and he – together with several others in the same circumstances – did much to cultivate the early music culture of American campuses. Here there was no inkling of the political associations that had arisen in Germany and, more often than not, the American culture of HIP acquired liberal connotations. This would seem to suggest that a culture dedicated to restoring practices from a past age does not, by definition at least, seek to restore the political circumstances of that age. The notion of a 'lost innocence' can serve a number of political ideologies – sometimes fanatically – but we should refrain from prejudging all forms of restoration as inescapably reactionary.

So far then, we have the modernist–antimodernist identity of HIP, together with the reactionary–liberal dichotomy, both of which suggest that the culture of HIP is not so simply explained as it might first appear.

These two issues form major threads throughout the present book and receive a more thorough examination in the last two chapters.

THE HIP CULTURE OF THE 1980S – THE DIAGNOSES  
OF LAURENCE DREYFUS AND ROBERT MORGAN

Laurence Dreyfus, building on some of the implications of Adorno's view, gives the most perceptive critique of HIP from the vantage point of the early 1980s, thus a full decade after it had become a major component of public musical culture. He also introduces several themes that become central to the debate as it accelerated over the next fifteen years. From the outset, he poses a question that is crucial to the present book (one that has perhaps received less attention than it ought in the meantime) namely, why the historically 'correct' performance of music should become such a particular issue in the late twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, we learn that it is wrong to view it purely as a 'thing' since it is definable only as a social practice, the tacit assumptions and activities of a range of people.<sup>11</sup> And, as is taken up in the last chapter of this book, it is not just a matter of looking at the people producing the instruments, texts and performances but also at the consumers and audiences without whom the HIP movement could never have been a commercial concern in the first place.

The commonplace assumption that HIP resulted from 'progress' in musicology is simply inadequate, particularly since there has been an increasing rift between HIP and post-war musicology (Dreyfus, 'Early Music', p. 311). As Joseph Kerman observed around the same time, musicology has many things to do other than provide material for performers: history and criticism are the disciplines he mentions specifically in 1985,<sup>12</sup> but, by the end of the century, this list would have expanded almost beyond recognition to cover the whole gamut of cultural and critical studies. A recent and seemingly comprehensive study of the entire field of musicology (1999) contains no chapter on HIP as such and remarks that it is 'Modernist, and – as an intellectual concept, perhaps – exhausted . . . it proved impossible to find an author who could feel that there was something useful that could be said beyond a summary of conclusions of arguments current in the 1980s.'<sup>13</sup> Performance is more important as an element of musicology than ever, but now more as a feature of the ontology and receptive traditions of works, institutions or performing communities, or as a counterpart of analysis. Nevertheless, Kerman's assumption that most outsiders would normally associate



musicology with the music they hear at concerts and particularly with the unearthing of older repertoires, probably still holds true.

As Dreyfus argues, musicologists have taken particular relish in debunking the claims of HIP's often spotty and inadequate scholarship. But he also shows how this criticism often covertly defends the supposed monumental and unified institution of western music against the revolutionary force of HIP. He outlines the fundamental opposition that early music is supposed to make to the 'self-aggrandising individualism prevalent in Mainstream musical praxis' (p. 299), something that was to become far less the case in the later 1980s and 1990s, as HIP threw up more and more of its own self-aggrandising figures. Instead of reaching some sort of spiritual understanding with the composer, HIP in its orthodox mode of the early 1980s dealt mainly with empirical evidence, thus substituting objectivism for subjectivism, relativism for critical appreciation, precisely as Adorno had complained: 'Objectivity is not left over once the subject is subtracted' (Dreyfus, 'Early Music', p. 300). It is thus easy to brand the movement as profoundly puritanical, relishing its very denial of the subjective and emotional.

Yet even from Dreyfus's 1983 standpoint it was evident that the best performers (he names Gustav Leonhardt) used their history in startlingly imaginative ways. What was so beneficial about HIP was the fact that the best performers had to rethink their entire interpretative strategy, thus challenging the assumed 'natural' expressivity of the mainstream. In a deeply prophetic statement, Dreyfus notes that successful HIP does not (indeed, I might add, cannot) return us to the past 'but reconstructs the musical object in the here and now, enabling a new and hitherto silenced subject to speak' (p. 304). This realisation of the *present* significance of HIP had already been acknowledged by some of the more perceptive writers of the 1950s,<sup>14</sup> and also became a central point of Taruskin's critique around the same time as Dreyfus. It relates to one of Taruskin's more surprising claims, that HIP is a symptom of late twentieth-century modernism.

While it is already clear that there is a fundamental antipathy between Adorno's modernism – which requires the constant taunting of a progressive avant-garde – and early music, Dreyfus notes their reciprocal negation of a comfortable present. Just as modernism purposely engages in defamiliarisation, HIP renders strange favourite masterpieces inherited from the past and, in consequence, often experiences exactly the same sort of sharp criticism from the conservative mainstream. Almost unintentionally, HIP performers become branded as dangerous,

counter-cultural figures. By overthrowing accepted models of musical taste, HIP threatens many of the supposed certainties of civilised society. Indeed critics both of the avant-garde and of HIP analyse the phenomena as though they were pathological disorders.

Yet early music performers are also counter-cultural in another, more conscious, way, which Dreyfus relates to the denial of envy. The practice of HIP (at least as Dreyfus saw it in 1983) builds purposely on the equality of its members, under no conductor, all sharing a number of performing functions, avoiding virtuosity, enjoying a cross-over between the professional and amateur world and thus experiencing a closer relationship with a like-minded audience and producing historically integrated – rather than sensational – programmes. He might well have added that many involved in the movement during the seminal decades of the 1960s and 70s were, in fact, counter-cultural in other ways, seeing in HIP a way of redeeming music from its elitist and hierarchical connotations. In an interesting – and perhaps underplayed – footnote, Dreyfus adds that much of the recent improvement in HIP standards resulted from an influx of conservatory-trained musicians, themselves eager to escape the rat-race of the mainstream.

It is worth outlining some of the interesting contradictions between the ‘purist’, non-hierarchical conception of HIP that Dreyfus so graphically formulates and the original historical practices with which it is assumed to correspond. First, it may well be that many forms of performance before the nineteenth century did not use a conductor in the modern sense. Yet most had a director (often the composer) who clearly had a status and will that dominated the other performers. Secondly, while performers were extremely versatile, they were often far more rigidly ranked than even a modern orchestra would require. Such ranking usually mirrored a broader social ranking and much of the music was written to confirm or exploit the hierarchical nature of society in general. Far from eschewing virtuosity, many forms of music making from the mid-sixteenth century onwards were extremely virtuosic, the technical agility required of singers in Baroque opera far exceeding that which became the norm by the twentieth century. And if velocity was not a feature of the performance practice there was often some element that sharply distinguished it from the amateur ethos outlined by Dreyfus: e.g. improvisation in Baroque and Classical keyboard performance, memorisation of an enormous corpus of liturgical music in the Middle Ages. Thus the stereotypical HIP milieu that Dreyfus describes tends to use an imagined utopian past as a way of criticising and ‘improving’ the present. The modern conventions of

safe, objectivist scholarship help sift out the diversity and messy realities of history and present the past as a potent social practice with a political relevance in reforming the present condition.

While Dreyfus attempts to explain how HIP happened by relating it to a form of discontent with – even protest against – an assumed norm, he does not fully address the issue of why it should have happened precisely when it did, why it became such a tremendous commercial success in the 1970s and 80s. Robert P. Morgan considers this wider cultural issue in his contribution to a valuable collection of essays, edited by Nicholas Kenyon in 1988.<sup>15</sup> He links the sudden widespread concern for historical accuracy with the contemporary situation in musical culture as a whole, characterised as it is ‘by an extraordinary degree of insecurity, uncertainty, and self-doubt – in a word, by anxiety’ (Morgan, ‘Tradition’, p. 57). He outlines a fundamental change in our conception of musical culture, from one based on unbroken linear tradition, which is not consciously aware of the great difference between that which has survived from the past and the present, to one in which the past has become an enormous ‘field of instantaneous possibilities’. One has complete access to a wide range of historical data, thus obscuring ‘the very distinction between past and present’ (pp. 59–60). Morgan goes on to observe a similar diversity in compositional style and the increasing multi-culturalism in the music scene. But this is possible ‘precisely because, and only because, we have no well-defined sense of the musical present’ (p. 66). On the assumption that the availability of all cultures is basically no culture at all, Morgan suggests that our greed for diverse cultures grows so far that we are even keen to assimilate the older versions of our own culture. The quest for historical ‘authenticity’ thus reflects the very absence of a culture we can still call our own. Adorno would surely have concurred with this, and also – for different reasons – Nikolaus Harnoncourt, who suggests that the historical approach to performance ‘is a symptom of the loss of a truly living contemporary music’.<sup>16</sup> HIP is thus to him a sort of last-ditch rescue attempt of western musical culture. As Hermann Hesse put it in the words of Joseph Knecht’s friend Plinio, in *The Glass Bead Game*, ‘our resigned sterility proves the worthlessness of our whole culture and our intellectual attitudes. We analyse the laws and techniques of all the styles and periods of music . . . but produce no new music ourselves.’<sup>17</sup>

Morgan suggests that while tradition flourished we were quite happy to adapt and arrange earlier music for our own purposes, but now everything must be restored since ‘we have no clear idea of what “up to date” means’ (p. 68). Just as many contemporary composers borrow multiple

languages from others, the historicist performer recovers old musical languages as if they were fossils, and the resulting performance automatically lacks 'the immediate, unreflected, and "natural" delivery of a native speaker' (p. 70). A similar nostalgic spirit informs house restoration and furniture, and some even seek to restore the songs and shows of the 1930s to their 'original' performance style (pp. 75–8). In sum, music history, like history in general is over, and with no purposes of our own we can no longer interpret the past, only passively reconstruct it within the culture of the museum. This 'cultural identity crisis' Morgan sees as having roots as far back as the seventeenth century, part of a long process of the divided self and the increasing loss of individual identity (pp. 78–81).

Morgan's pessimistic diagnosis has much in common with Roger Scruton's, as I discuss below, and also shares with Taruskin a concern for the loss of tradition that HIP seemingly implies. The 'end of history' hypothesis is convincing and his suggestion that HIP belongs within a larger culture of nostalgia that restores other artefacts becomes the subject of chapter 6 below. But where I differ is in rejecting the sense of pessimism he seems to present. Indeed, his very tone suggests a nostalgia for a past order that is precisely of a piece with the culture of restoration itself. While the HIP scholar/performer typically wishes to return performance to a lost Eden, Morgan, in turn, laments the loss of an age in which stylistic difference was unnoticed owing to the strength of one's own tradition. Both these facets of the past are, of course, equally unrecoverable.

While Morgan is quite correct to suggest that the access to such a wide range of historical data effaces the distinction between past and present, this was surely also the case with 'tradition' as he describes it. Within tradition one used whatever was deemed canonical from the past entirely for presentist purposes and consigned everything else to oblivion. Both modes – restoration and tradition – thus evidence different ways of 'misusing' the past. Perhaps it would be truer to say that restoration movements such as HIP themselves represent the culmination of a long tradition, one stretching back to the Renaissance. It was that era which first became conscious of the past 'as a foreign country', one that was admired as a corrective to the present condition.<sup>18</sup> By the end of the twentieth century the collection of 'differences' had become so great that it was no longer possible to be certain of *any* similarity between past and present; we had better preserve everything it is still possible to know or collect, 'just in case'. Moreover, as Daniel Leech-Wilkinson argues, it was only in the twentieth century that there were enough people with

the education, resources and money to make so much early music marketable, and recording technology has revolutionised the way music is used and the amount that is available.<sup>19</sup> Thus the interest in past music and practices, far from signifying a failure in the present condition, might actually reflect the luxurious possibilities opened up by modernity.

The view that HIP style will automatically lack the unmediated, unreflective delivery of a 'natural' speaker is, of course, the crucially contentious point. Dreyfus had already explored the notion that HIP could encourage imaginative performers to use history to discover new possibilities, new possible worlds of musical expression. And, by the late 1980s it was quite clear that HIP could engender its own traditions, albeit 'invented'. Given that (as Morgan stresses) constant change and adaptation is essential to tradition, and that the same is happening within the invented traditions of HIP, it is difficult to distinguish qualitatively between a tradition that is newly invented and one that appears to be continuous, without making claims for some mystical thread that validates the latter. It takes barely a single cycle of a generation to render any form of delivery seem unmediated, unreflective or even 'natural'.

Finally, there is the history of decline that Morgan outlines for the human subject, traumatically descending into the virtual loss of individual identity by the end of the twentieth century. This is surely back-to-front in suggesting that there used to be a strong sense of individual identity that began to disintegrate in the seventeenth century. It was, rather, in that century that Descartes first made it possible to conceive of human subjectivity in the modern sense, it was in the next that the concept of individual genius arose, and so forth. Thus the trauma that Morgan identifies in the present in fact represents the decline of a relatively recent and historically conditioned conception of humanity. Indeed, Arthur C. Danto views the 'end of art' (which is essentially coterminous with Morgan's end of history) in a much more positive light since it opens up new possibilities of cultural experience rather than necessarily evidencing a terrible decline.<sup>20</sup>

Morgan's final claim that HIP places older music in a museum (together with all the stuffy, nearly-dead connotations that may apply) is ironic, if we are to believe Lydia Goehr's later assertion that the entire bourgeois culture of western music as it arose at the turn of the nineteenth century is essentially a museum culture.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Peter Kivy, in his defence of the 'mainstream' practice of music against HIP's emphasis on original context (see p. 36 below) suggests that the 'museum' of the concert hall is still the best place for the masterworks of the western

canon. If both Goehr and Kivy are right then, HIP does not represent the internment of music in the museum but rather the transfer of music from one type of museum to another, perhaps to something akin to the 'living museum' which tries to show old artefacts in action within a convincing context (see chapter 6, p. 180 below).

Morgan's pessimism concerning HIP as the museum of a dead tradition turns to violent polemic with Roger Scruton, writing a decade later in 1997. To him the efforts of *Musica Antiqua Cologne* or *Concentus Musicus* have frequently come:

to cocoon the past in a wad of phoney scholarship, to elevate musicology over music, and to confine Bach and his contemporaries to an acoustic time-warp. The tired feeling which so many 'authentic' performances induce can be compared to the atmosphere of a modern museum.<sup>22</sup>

He uses the analogy of the painting, 'gaped at by weary multitudes' in a museum, as opposed to its proper place 'on the wall of a private house, where it can bestow joy and dignity on the life surrounding it'. This alludes to a political point, clearly evident elsewhere in his writing, that mass culture reflects the sorry decline of a sense of aristocracy within a developed bourgeois culture. Indeed, taste itself derives from 'the demands of privilege'. Following Nietzsche, democratic man is 'cultureless', failing 'to strive towards the inequality which is the mark of the truly human'; departing from Nietzsche, Scruton also relates culture to a necessary religious form which leads to 'a conception of the sanctity of places and times, persons and offices, customs and rites' (p. 505).

But surely HIP, particularly when it relates to specific royal customs and spectacles, such as have been reconstructed by *Les Arts Florissants* (such titles being 'twee extravagances' according to Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, p. 448) can enliven the experiential context of past music. On the other hand, many have criticised the concept of historical reconstruction, and the belief in the value of 'ensembles' (at its most politically charged, being the case of a painting, placed in the context of a country house, with the correct furnishings, and occupied by some descendant of its original owner) as perpetrating a political system of inequality that would seem so essential to Scruton. His direct reversal of this notion, namely that a museum culture, as evidenced by HIP, is the enervating corollary of a levelling democracy, helps substantiate the point I drew from Adorno's reflex action of disgust towards restoration culture: that the opening up of historical context implied by the very venture of HIP (and anything else connected with the culture of 'Heritage' and restoration)

does not automatically bring with it, or enforce, the original political connotations.

RICHARD TARUSKIN AND THE PUBLIC EXPANSION  
OF THE EARLY MUSIC DEBATE

During the 1980s and nineties the field of ‘performance practice criticism’ became dominated by the powerful writing of Richard Taruskin, which culminated in the publication of his collected essays in *Text and Act* in 1995.<sup>23</sup> There have been several other fine writers on the subject – those, for instance, who appear along with Taruskin in a 1984 issue of *Early Music*, and in a volume by Oxford University Press in 1988<sup>24</sup> – but Taruskin’s voice has been the loudest, the most influential and by far the most thought-provoking. His strengths as a scholar come not only from his own past experience as a significant performer of early music, but also from the sheer breadth of his scholarly expertise and critical range.

Taruskin’s central argument (most comprehensively stated in his fourth essay) can be condensed into a diagnosis, a judgement and an axiom: his diagnosis is that very little historical performance is, or can be, truly historical – much has to be invented; that the actual styles of historical performance we hear accord most strikingly with modern taste; and that the movement as a whole has all the symptoms of twentieth-century modernism, as epitomised by the objectivist, authoritarian Stravinsky in his neo-classical phase. Taruskin’s concern with Stravinsky obscures the fact that very similar aesthetics of performance were promoted by Schoenberg and his students.<sup>25</sup> But this modification would only further support his judgement that historical performance practice, far from being intrinsically wrong, is, rather, a true and even ‘authentic’ representation of modernist thinking (needless to say, he would prefer it to move in what he sees as the ‘postmodernist’, ‘postauthoritarian’ direction). And the axiom on which much of his work hinges is that the methods we use to base and judge scholarship are not those on which we base artistic performance. Each may inform the other, but one cannot be reduced to the other. Thus the inclusion of a couple of essays addressing the question of editing help to consolidate one of Taruskin’s central points, encapsulated in the title: performance, of any kind, should be an *act* and not reduced to the status of a *text*. Performance is significant for its human component and not for its objective veracity. Taruskin’s view perhaps helps us understand the increasing rift, also outlined by Dreyfus and Kerman,

between mainstream musicology and the 'musicology' of those exclusively concerned with preparing their historicist performances. This distinction comes close to that posed by David Lowenthal, between 'History' and 'Heritage', the former concerned with understanding the past on its own terms, the latter more on ours. While I maintain that this distinction is fallacious, given that all forms of historical representation rely on fabrication and an inescapable presentist perspective, it does outline two essential poles in historical practice. Lowenthal's view that 'personal immediacy is a heritage hallmark' relates nicely to Taruskin's conception of the essential musical performance. By this token, HIP performers err when they consider their practice to be 'History' when it is really one of 'Heritage', that should consequently demand imaginative – rather than objective – recreation of the past.<sup>26</sup>

The relation between modernism and HIP was suggested in another way by Dreyfus, namely that the 'shock value' of HIP renditions of favourite classics drew much the same response as the more avowedly counter-cultural expressions of the avant-garde in the early years of the twentieth century. Taruskin relates HIP more to the chic modernism of Stravinsky, and not so much for its shock value but more for the actual style of its performance. Thus, if both Dreyfus and Taruskin are right, HIP is doubly unaware of its modernist credentials, its jarring effect for cultural conservatives on the one hand and its motoric aesthetic on the other. Taruskin's claim that many of the conventions of HIP performances were modern inventions had been brilliantly demonstrated empirically by Daniel Leech-Wilkinson's study of 1984 showing that various groups covering the entire historical range of HIP adopted similar mannerisms.<sup>27</sup> This observation might well relate to a wider phenomenon in late twentieth-century culture, with the increasing concern for 'minority heritage', the acceleration of ethnic, regional and cultural differences, the very public exchange and dissemination of these differences, all of which bring a new form of conformity, which, ironically, reflects the increasing standardisation of western culture.<sup>28</sup>

Taruskin's central arguments are supported by several other opinions: the 'seductive simplicities of determinism and utopianism have got to be resisted . . . and . . . the endlessly renegotiated social contract, dowdy patchwork though it be, is the only cause worth defending' (p. 192). This ties in with Taruskin's concern for the audience – an opinion that interestingly seems to grow in the later essays, as he becomes further removed from his own performing career – a move from a production oriented system to a 'proper' reassertion of consumer values (p. 47). This



development is also shadowed by Taruskin's growing distaste for the concept of *Werktreue*, something he sees as central to modernist performance (whether 'historical' or 'mainstream') and one that 'inflicts a truly stifling regimen by radically hardening and patrolling what had formerly been a fluid, easily crossed boundary between the performing and composing roles' (p. 10).

His reservations about the work-concept – the idea of individual, fully formed and authoritarian pieces of music – ties in with his distrust of the composer as an authoritarian figure. So much of historical performance, runs Taruskin's argument, is bogged down with questions of the composer's intentions, and, what is worse, those of a most mundane and provincial kind, when in fact we can never know intentions or even 'know we know them' if we happen to find them, and, furthermore, composers are often wrong or change their minds (p. 97). In his view, our need to gain the composer's approval 'bespeaks a failure of nerve, not to say an infantile dependency' (p. 98). This argument is bolstered with an impressive array of cases where composers change their minds, did not expect their intentions to be followed, or were simply working in an environment (especially opera) where adaptations and cuts were a matter of daily routine.

So if authority comes neither from the work nor exclusively from the composer, where are we to turn? To ourselves, would seem to be the short answer from the Socratic Taruskin: 'Authenticity . . . is knowing what you mean and whence comes that knowledge. And more than that, even, authenticity is knowing what you are, and acting in accordance with that knowledge' (p. 67). In fleshing out this concept, Taruskin tends to draw on two theories in modern thought: the history of *reception* as a major carrier of meaning and *tradition* as an alternative to authority. According to reception theory '[c]hange of context adds as much meaning as it may take away' (p. 267); the meaning, for us, of *Don Giovanni* has been 'mediated by all that has been thought and said about it since opening night, and is therefore incomparably richer than it was in 1787'. Reconstruction of original meaning (and here Taruskin clearly includes reconstruction of original performance practice) 'should add its valuable mite to the pile' but cannot substitute for the pile itself. Taruskin's conception of tradition also follows from this: tradition is 'cumulative, multiply authored, open, accommodating, above all *messy*, and therefore human' (p. 192). For the performer this means less fetishisation of documents and instrumental hardware, more listening to one another, reaction and competition. HIP is productive only when it spawns its own 'viable oral tradition' (p. 194).

Many, at this stage, might well be led to agree with the popular mythology that Taruskin is fundamentally opposed to the whole enterprise of historical performance. Furthermore, the temporal progression of the essays suggests that Taruskin has progressively distanced himself from it (only the earlier writings refer periodically to 'our movement'). But, as his introduction and postscripts to the essays often aver, he believes himself to be continually misrepresented as a crusty opponent to the movement when all he intends to show is its shortcomings. As Bernard Sherman reminds us, Taruskin has termed HIP 'the least moribund aspect of our classical music life' and recognised that it at least offers the opportunity to question 'knee-jerk habits' in performance.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps part of the problem is that his praise for the movement and his recommendations for its direction are argued far less strongly than his pointed criticisms, are often couched in ambivalent terms and are consequently less easy to summarise. Moreover, there are intimations that the movement has great critical and creative potential but, as a whole, has failed in some wider objective to revolutionise performance:

A movement that might, in the name of history, have shown the way back to a truly creative performance practice has only furthered the stifling of creativity in the name of normative controls. (p. 13)

Taruskin's relation to HIP parallels, in many ways, Nietzsche's attitude to history in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Nietzsche, like Taruskin, has often been accused of trying to dispense with history altogether when, in fact, his purpose was to destroy the belief that history led to a single, indisputable truth (i.e. 'History' in the objectivist sense as understood by Lowenthal). Instead, history should reveal as many perspectives on the past as there are individuals studying it; it should open up new possibilities rather than close down our perspectives. In short, it should promote life and individual development in the present, thus, in Taruskin's terms, leading to newer and better forms of musical performance (i.e. as 'Heritage' in Lowenthal's formulation).<sup>30</sup>

So what constitutes good historical performance for Taruskin? One thing that seems clear is that many performances need to be 'more historical', particularly if the historical evidence implies creative departures from the text, something he demands particularly for the performance of Mozart piano concertos (p. 167). He seeks a return to a conception of classical music that began to die out two centuries ago, something that would bring the music closer to the values of pop music than 'classical' (p. 170). Another useful comparison, which unfortunately he uses only in one

chapter (essay 15), is that between ‘crooked’ and ‘straight’ performance. Straight performance is fine ‘if what you want out of music is something to sit back and relax to’ while the crooked performers are the ‘real artists’, such as *Musica Antiqua Cologne*, whose ‘responses are conditioned not by generic demands that can be easily classified . . . but by highly specific, unclassifiable, personal and intensely subjective imaginings’ (p. 317). In short, historically informed performance is all very well provided the ‘literalism’ (i.e. following of some documentary evidence) is ‘inspired’,<sup>31</sup> such as in the case of Roger Norrington’s strict adherence to Beethoven’s metronome markings. Taruskin also praises Christopher Page’s Stravinskyesque approach to fifteenth-century courtly songs, which ‘arose out of a fundamental rethinking of the repertory in its specific details, and on as close to its own aesthetic and historical terms as human nature and human epistemics allow, rather than from the acceptance of a standard of beauty or of audience appeal imported unreflectingly from past experience’ (p. 351). Gustav Leonhardt produces joyful results in Bach performance through ‘passionate and committed experiment with original instruments’ (p. 148), while Nikolaus Harnoncourt refuses to succumb to the customary efforts to prettify and sanitise Bach’s severe message in the sacred music (essay 14).<sup>32</sup>

Taruskin’s view of ‘good’ history in performance seems to come quite close to Nietzsche’s of 1874: history as a form of knowledge, ‘known clearly and completely’ has been neutralised and is in effect dead; but history that does not try to mimic science can be a service to life, something dynamic and opening up new possibilities.<sup>33</sup> Karol Berger suggests something similar by pairing art and history as forms of representation (i.e. of possible and past worlds) in contradistinction to philosophy and science (which have more to do with argument than with representation).<sup>34</sup> This wider sense of history, that Berger borrows from Aristotle, covers more than the academic discipline of history: ‘Its scope includes any portrayal of the real world, present as well as past, journalistic as well as historical . . . History and art can be mixed, though usually one will predominate, as when a historian imaginatively reconstructs the thoughts of a historical protagonist that, strictly speaking, cannot be documented’ (*A Theory of Art*, p. 61). Thus the point to which Taruskin may ultimately be most pointing is that performance should indeed be separated from history, insofar as the latter is a factual, scientific, discipline in Lowenthal’s formulation, but that history in the wider sense – that which is akin to an art in suggesting a world that is not immediately present (i.e. Lowenthal’s ‘Heritage’) – might be a useful way of

regenerating performance. Historical evidence might be worth following to the degree that it causes us to refashion ourselves and produce a performance that is fully committed.

I find two of Taruskin's points specifically problematic: his desire to 'democratise' performance by catering to the needs and wishes of the audience, and his tendency to promote postmodernism as the answer to all modernism's ills. He introduces the issue of audience satisfaction within his argument that all classical performance is under the grip of the work-concept, all joining 'the ranks of museum curators, with disastrous results – disastrous that is, for the people who pay to hear them' (p. 13). Does this imply that there is some standard by which we may test whether or not the audience has had its money's worth, whether or not it has been cheated of some profounder experience?

Things become a little clearer with the next reference, for now Taruskin identifies himself as a member of the audience (this is the non-performer Taruskin of 1994): 'My first commitment is to the mortals – that is, the audience – and to their interests, since I am one of them' (p. 18). Using the force of the oppressed masses to justify one's own position is a common tactic among politicians. This impression is strengthened on p. 47 where he states that he is 'glad to see increasing impatience with an excessively production-oriented system of values in classical music and the proper reassertion of consumer values (yes, audience response) as a stylistic regulator', surely the language of a free marketer. But most of the evidence he cites for this shift in priority concerns changes at the production level rather than a revolution on the consumers' side: pluralism in the concert scene, the breaking down of the walls between the 'high' and the 'low' in the field of classical composition. In other words, the shift is in the direction of that which Taruskin believes the audience should want rather than unequivocal evidence of the people's will at work.

What would count as evidence in any case? If consumer values are the issue, surely the remarkable prosperity of Taruskin's *bête noir*, Christopher Hogwood, must be strong evidence; somebody must have bought all those records. Of course, the audience may have been stunningly uninspired in its choice of purchase, perhaps cruelly hoodwinked by the hype of authenticity. But if this is the case, how can Taruskin insist that the audience call the tune? If he wishes to persist in so harsh a view of Hogwood, he must, along with 'virtually all important artistic movements since Romanticism . . . have shared in [the] contempt for the public as arbiter of taste' (pp. 72–3). This is substantiated by his comment regarding Roger Norrington on p. 234: 'I don't know whether his work

will prove as marketable as Hogwood's. Probably not: You have to pay attention to it.' Here then there is a revulsion at the 'easy-listening' culture that seems to come with commodification, a revulsion similar to that which Adorno experienced several decades before. Moreover, Dreyfus had already suggested that there was considerable identification between performers and audience in precisely that form of HIP which was most objectivist and opposed to 'individualist' interpretation (Dreyfus, 'Early Music Defended', p. 317).

Taruskin distances himself from the dictatorship of the market with one of his 1994 postscripts: 'I have always considered it important for musicologists to put their expertise at the service of "average consumers" and alert them to the possibility that they are being hoodwinked, not only by commercial interests but by complaisant academics, biased critics, and pretentious performers' (p. 153). This is laudable enough, but it does imply that the audience is incapable of making up its own mind and needs the benevolent dictates of an inspired expert. But simply shifting the performer's responsibility from 'upwards', to the work, composer or whatever, to 'downwards', to the audience, does not solve any problems of responsibility, since the identical issues (and perhaps more) simply reappear in a new position. One is forced either to accept the judgement of the audience in commercial terms, or to dictate what the audience should enjoy (which is little different from dictating how, and in what style, the performer should play, in the name of historical fidelity, the composer spiritual intentions, or 'the artwork').

Taruskin might also be implying another sense of 'pleasing the audience', one with which I can wholeheartedly concur. This is the idea of the performer taking on something of the audience's role, constantly monitoring the performance from a listener's perspective, and reacting to what she hears. While this is obviously a golden rule for all performance, it might take on a special significance in 'historical' performance as a very practical antidote to a surfeit of factual data. It is precisely this reflexive attitude which is so often a sure sign of quality in visual and musical arts, in which the earliest possible stages of reception are folded back into the creative act (for a further exploration of this see chapter 3, below).

Taruskin must take credit for being one of the first musicologists to introduce the term 'postmodernism' (in essay 13, of 1987); by the time we get to the 1990s, the term is bandied around by virtually anyone who wants to appear 'relevant' and up-to-date. We even get macabre disputes between scholars trying to be 'postmoderner than thou'.<sup>35</sup> The fault of this approach is to see postmodernism as the answer to all the

evils of modernism, as the way for the future, even as a happy utopia in which all differences will live side-by-side in a pluralistic flux. Taruskin, in his first reference to the term (p. 16), tries to erase the utopian element since he directly associates utopia with 'authoritarian fulfilment'. Postmodernism, then, seems to have something to do with the subversion of authority (which was, incidentally, fundamental to modernism at the outset of the twentieth century). Next he implies that postmodernism in fact has much to do with 'premodernism', since it revokes the triple nexus (which solidified only around 1800) of 'serious-classical-work'.<sup>36</sup> This is already an odd situation, for however much a postmodernist approach to music (i.e. subversive of musical works) may share with the concepts of music before 1800, the cultural context in which music is conceived, produced and used is radically different. Indeed, this point was elegantly made by Adorno: the culture of early music pretends to substitute the pre-individual state for the real, post-individual state of its 'own collectivisation'.<sup>37</sup> The pre-modern era was essentially feudal and it was, ironically, bourgeois 'freedom' that led to the work concept in the first place. So unless Taruskin is prepared to talk about music and its performance in the abstract (absolute music?), divorced from its cultural environment (and I'm sure he's not), the pre/postmodernist association is considerably impoverished.

Later he approvingly quotes a definition of the postmodern stance proffered by two legal scholars, which entails 'rejection either of applause or of dejection, which are themselves . . . the products of specific cultural moments, in favor of a somewhat more detached acceptance of the inevitability of change and our inability to place such changes as occur within any master narrative' (p. 36). This seems to me a 'genuine' definition of postmodernism,<sup>38</sup> but one that hardly accords with Taruskin's approach elsewhere: rejection of judgement? a neutral stand, above culture and ideology? a detached acceptance? This sounds like classic, objectivist HIP as outlined by Dreyfus. Furthermore, many of Taruskin's most trenchant criticisms of historical performance seem to target an archetypal postmodern stance: 'The art works of the past, even as they are purportedly restored to their pristine sonic condition, are concomitantly devalued, decanonized, not quite taken seriously, reduced to sensuous play' (p. 138). Perhaps, then, postmodernism is precisely what is wrong with 'authenticist' performance. Taruskin's preference for strong, authoritative performances which creatively and virtuosically deviate from the letter of the score seem not of a piece with postmodernism insofar as the latter encapsulates decentredness and play (p. 176). It is, rather, the cult

of the composer as the ultimate authority in music that he beats with the stick of postmodernism, not the concept of authority in general. In this way he does a great service in rendering performance *per se* much more crucial in contemporary culture. Rather than seeing it as the lapdog of the composer or of objective, factual evidence from the past, it is elevated as a mode of cultural production in its own right. Performance becomes the primary mode of musical being as indeed it so often was before the advent of the work concept.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, by considering the entire issue of the history of performance and the various roles it has played in the very concept of music it may be possible to regenerate western music. HIP can, and does, obviously play a part in this, but it has to be conceived in a sense that is both far broader and more critical than the old objectivist form decreed.

Perhaps Taruskin should have been more sceptical of postmodernism as a stance or ideal (although it is certainly acceptable – indeed indispensable – as a description of the condition we happen to be in; this will be explored below in chapter 5). In its earliest forms, of the late 1960s and 1970s, postmodernism has been taken to task for its irresponsible, amoral stance. Terry Eagleton, for instance, sees postmodernism as ‘simply co-extensive with the commodification of all life in consumer capitalism . . . an aesthetic reflection of already aestheticised images’,<sup>40</sup> and Christopher Norris quite rightly condemns Jean-François Lyotard’s denial of any meaning or truth-value ‘aside from the manifold language-games that make up an ongoing cultural conversation’, since this allows Lyotard to affirm that there is no certain way of denouncing Faurisson for his assertion that the Nazi Holocaust never really happened – according to Lyotard, ‘there is *no common* ground between Faurisson and those who reject his views’.<sup>41</sup> Jürgen Habermas, who sees modernity as an unfinished project, relates postmodernism to the neoconservatives, those who attempt to diffuse ‘the explosive content of cultural modernity’, a group that ‘asserts the pure immanence of art, disputes that it has a utopian content, and points to its illusory character in order to limit the aesthetic experience to privacy.’<sup>42</sup>

Much of what Taruskin has to say, seems to me close to the spirit of Habermas’s call for the completion of the Enlightenment:

What I am after, in a word, is liberation: only when we know something about the sources of our contemporary practices and beliefs, when we know something about the reasons why we do as we do and think as we think, and when we are aware of alternatives, can we in any sense claim to be free in our choice of action and creed, and responsible for it. (p. 19; see, too, the quotation from p. 67, above)