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0521619394 - The Practice of Performance: Studies in Musical Interpretation

Edited by John Rink

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The twelve essays in this volume reflect the most important trends in the study of musical performance. Three areas are investigated: the psychology of performance, the semantics of performance, and the relation between performance and analysis. The first section broaches fundamental issues such as text, expression, musical motion and the role of practice in the acquisition of expertise. The next four chapters address the shaping of structure and the projection of meaning in performance, while the last four consider performance as analytical paradigm, as dramatic narrative, as act of criticism, as temporal process. By combining speculative enquiry with detailed case-studies and by approaching from disparate perspectives an activity of central importance to all musicians, the volume has a wide appeal, and it achieves this without sacrificing scholarly rigour or artistic viability. Among the distinguished international authorship are many accomplished performers whose practical experience ensures that the book contains unusually vital and stimulating insights into musical interpretation.

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Preface

The past few decades have witnessed a virtual explosion in scholarly writing about musical performance. A vast literature on historical performance practice,¹ the psychology of performance,² the relation between analysis and performance,³ and ‘interpretation’⁴ broadly defined has emerged during that time, but until now, no attempt has been made to distil the principal trends of performance scholarship into a single volume more accessible in style and content than the highly specialised – and often obscure – publications of its various subdisciplines. This book provides such a forum, and it does so by means of the ‘studies’ format widely used in music publishing. Whereas most collections of ‘studies’ focus on a single composer, however, this volume targets a musical *activity* of importance to all musicians – professional and amateur, academic and nonacademic. As a result, the book has a wide appeal lacking in much specialist writing, at the same time achieving a remarkable depth of insight into musical interpretation. Furthermore, it reflects the growing recognition of performance studies as a discipline in its own right.⁵ Among the international authorship are distinguished scholars in a range of subject areas; many are also accomplished performers whose

¹ For bibliographic information see H. M. Brown and S. Sadie, eds., *Performance Practice: Music before 1600 and Performance Practice: Music after 1600* (London: Macmillan, 1989), and R. Jackson, *Performance Practice, Medieval to Contemporary: A Bibliographic Guide* (New York: Garland, 1987). See also N. Kenyon, ed., *Authenticity and Early Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

² Details of past research can be found in J. A. Sloboda, *The Musical Mind: The Cognitive Psychology of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) and ‘Psychological structures in music: core research 1980–1990’, in J. Paynter et al., eds., *Companion to Contemporary Musical Thought*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1992), vol. II, pp. 803–39. See also J. A. Sloboda, ed., *Generative Processes in Music* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), and J. Sundberg, ed., *Studies of Music Performance* (Stockholm: Royal Swedish Academy of Music, 1983).

³ Bibliographic information is given in J. Rink, Review of W. Berry, *Musical Structure and Performance*, in *Music Analysis* 9/3 (1990): 319–39, and T. Howell, ‘Analysis and performance: the search for a middleground’, in J. Paynter et al., eds., *Companion to Contemporary Musical Thought*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1992), vol. II, pp. 692–714.

⁴ Examples include A. Brendel, *Musical Thoughts and Afterthoughts* (London: Robson, 1976) and J. Dunsby, *Performing Music: Shared Concerns* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

⁵ The increasing number of ‘performance studies’ courses at British universities and conservatories offers proof of this. See also ‘Musical performance studies as a “discipline”’, in Dunsby, *Performing Music*, pp. 17–28.

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considerable practical experience shapes their writing and lends the book particular vitality and cogency.

Despite the broad spectrum of topics, resonances between chapters are abundant. Indeed, the division into three sections – fundamentals, structure and meaning in performance, and performance as process – is neither rigid nor intended to sever the threads running through the volume, which include such diverse themes as performance ‘architecture’; the relation between musical moment and narrative process; shape as diachronic counterpart to structure; the role of intuition in performance; the relation between composer, performer and listener; the ‘text(s)’ of performance; and the inevitable partiality of interpretation and the need for choice among more or less plausible alternatives. That these recurrent themes have ‘naturally’ arisen attests to their general significance and topicality. It is hoped that the book will serve as a research tool for the further scholarly study of musical performance; to that end several authors offer useful overviews of past work in their respective subdisciplines and set agendas for future investigations.

In the first essay, Roy Howat claims that it is not music but ‘notation’ (the score, analytical diagrams, theoretical treatises, composers’ own performances, etc.) that we interpret. Works by Mozart, Schubert, Debussy, Ravel, Bartók and Gershwin are discussed along with such topics as ornamentation, rubato, tempo and pedalling. Howat concludes that performers must often ‘re-edit’ notation in order to express the music as felt by the composer, rather than merely follow the dictates of received tradition.

Eric Clarke explores the paradox that musical performance can have immense rhetorical force even though the expressive principles underlying it are quite simple. He surveys three existing models of expression before proposing a more inclusive semiotic framework which recognises and indeed celebrates the multiplicity of function of expressive features. Adducing data from a range of performances of Chopin and Beethoven, Clarke proposes that certain expressive details act as clues for varying conceptions of the music, rather than as empirical determinants.

One area identified by Clarke as warranting further investigation concerns the relationship between musical motion and performance, which is the very topic addressed in Patrick Shove and Bruno Repp’s chapter. Noting that composers, performers and listeners alike experience movement in music, they locate its source not within the music itself but in human motion, specifically, that of the performer, whose articulatory movements are shown to be sound-structuring movements. Shove and Repp draw upon the theories of James Gibson and the empirical research of three German ‘pioneers’ as well as more recent investigators to demonstrate that performed music has the potential to represent forms of natural motion and to elicit corresponding movements in a human listener, and they go on to suggest that this potential must be maximised to achieve ‘aesthetically satisfying performance’. According to them, expert performers have a profound understanding of principles of natural movement which they exploit in interpreting music.

Expertise in performance is also considered by Ralf Krampe and Anders Ericsson, who define a model of ‘elite’ (encompassing both ‘expert’, or professional, and

'eminent', or innovative) performance based not on the prevailing notion of talent but on the amount of 'deliberate practice' engaged in by musicians. Their developmental framework, empirical evaluations and provocative conclusions pose a fundamental challenge to the generally accepted view of the grounding of musical excellence.

Nicholas Cook's reappraisal of a particular 'historical performance practice' – that of Wilhelm Furtwängler – offers a similar challenge. After closely examining two of Furtwängler's recordings of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Cook claims that these interpretations represent a correlate in sound of a Schenkerian structural hierarchy, realised by means of carefully calculated 'tempo gradients' analogous to spans in a voice-leading graph. In short, Furtwängler's 'long-range conducting' creates nothing less than 'analyses in sound'.

Focusing on a structurally critical passage in Schumann's Fourth Symphony, David Epstein justifies his 'emotional' response when conducting the music, a response which at first seemed to contradict the composer's dynamic marking in the score. He adduces recent research on affect, analyses the music's form and thematic construction, and scrutinises manuscript evidence to make sense of his interpretation. Epstein's conclusion – that the passage in question belongs to a *Steigerung*, an intensity gradient not unlike those defined by Cook – reveals a sensitivity to the 'total language of the music', the ambiguity of which requires interpretative choices to be made sometimes at odds with the apparent wishes of the composer.

Janet Levy homes in on ambiguity and the implications of choice in interpretation, investigating the central question faced by performing musicians: what to project in performance and with what consequences – not only for the performance itself, but for those listening to it. She defines several types of musical ambiguity (often involving tiny details invested with 'immense communicative power' – a point also made by Eric Clarke), whether between immediately successive events, events separated in time or simultaneous ones. By treating ambiguity as an 'empowering' tool, Levy broadens the range of meaning that the performer can effectively convey.

Musical meaning is also explored in Ronald Woodley's chapter – specifically, ironic layers of meaning intrinsic to Prokofiev's Violin Sonata Op. 80. Woodley traces the 'ironising process' manifested throughout the work, which employs such agents as tonality, rhythm, metre and timbre in a fundamental struggle towards an ultimately unattainable, 'pure' spiritual realm free from irony. His conclusions of how performers 'can/should locate themselves' in transmitting that struggle point to the 'multivocality of artistic utterance' alluded to by several authors in this book.

The four chapters in the final section concentrate in different ways on the relation between analysis and performance, attending in particular to the temporal basis of performance. Joel Lester advocates the use of performance as an analytical paradigm, arguing that analysts would do well not only to refer directly to specific renditions of a work but also to introduce the terms of performance into the analytical premise. Like Roy Howat, he regards the score as merely a 'recipe'; each interpretation thereof reflects one and only one option. This, he says, is as true of analysis as of performance, and he encourages analysts to weigh up multiple strategies (as the performer must) and to avoid musically limiting black-and-white judgements.

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Further discussion of how and when to project analytical findings in performance follows in the essay by William Rothstein, who argues (as I do in my chapter) that merely 'bringing out' the results of an analysis can all too easily distort the music. Instead, he favours 'synthesis' as a goal – i.e. an all-encompassing musical statement, a coherent 'dramatic' act. Rothstein supports his argument by studying thematic and motivic elements, metre, phrase structure and voice-leading in pieces by Bach, Beethoven and Chopin. In Chopin's Waltz Op. 42, for instance, he encourages the pianist to celebrate ambiguity by keeping more than one hypermetrical option alive.

Whereas Joel Lester casts performance in the role of analytical paradigm, Edward Cone's chapter defines it as a critical statement. Cone claims that the choice of a work and the building of a programme are both acts of criticism, as are basic decisions concerning relative and absolute tempo. Convincing performance, he says, results from the adoption of particular interpretative strategies to which the musician feels a deep personal commitment. Tempo decisions are especially crucial, and he discusses works by Schubert and Chopin to show the relation between tempo, expressive content and formal structure.

Many of the foregoing points are echoed in my own chapter, which uses Brahms's *Fantasien* Op. 116 to investigate the projection of large-scale temporal unity in performance, the shaping of smaller-scale gestures within that temporal background, and the style-historical basis of the 'intuitive' interpretation evaluated throughout the essay. My central aim is to show how analytical and historical awareness can together shape an interpretation without dominating it to the point of distortion; in short, 'synthesis' as defined by Rothstein is the goal of this reading of the work, which also demonstrates a novel kind of 'historical performance practice'.

As this overview suggests, the twelve chapters unite speculative enquiry with empirical case-studies, many of which refer to master recordings or to authors' own performances. The focus on music from the mid eighteenth to early twentieth centuries inspires discussion of a wide range of relevant topics, and this breadth is balanced by a concentration on piano music, orchestral repertoire and violin/piano works. By raising issues of concern to soloists, conductors and chamber players alike, the volume has the potential to speak to anyone actively engaged in making music, as well as to musicologists and music-lovers. Indeed, it is hoped that for all readers new light will be shed on the act of interpretation, the practice of performance, the very life of music.

A few prefatory guidelines will facilitate use of the book. An author–date citation system has been employed throughout: that is, an author's surname, date of publication and, where relevant, page number(s) of a given quotation are provided in the text rather than the footnotes, in the form 'Smith 1990: 24–5', etc. Subsequent references in immediate succession to a full citation are abbreviated ': 26', etc. rather than with 'ibid.' Dates in square brackets within a citation (e.g. 'Wagner [1869] 1966: 290') refer to the year of original publication, with the following date that of the later source from which the quotation was taken. In all cases, complete bibliographic (or, in some cases, discographic) details are given in the reference lists at the end of each chapter.

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In both the text and the examples, upper- and lower-case Roman numerals depict major and minor harmonies respectively. Careted numerals designate either scale degrees or structural pitches in Schenkerian contexts. Pitch classes are represented by capital letters; the Helmholtz system is used to denote specific pitches where necessary.

As a last preliminary, a few words of acknowledgement are in order. I should like to thank in particular Lucy Passmore of the University of Surrey for her generous assistance, especially in preparing the index; John Sloboda, Eric Clarke and Alf Gabrielsson for helpful advice; the Department of Music, University of Surrey for financial support; and Penny Souster at Cambridge University Press for her warm encouragement and practical guidance.

John Rink