1 Music as history

Introduction

'In order to do justice to the piece which he is about to perform, the player must first acquaint himself with the conditions under which it originated. For a work by Bach or Tartini demands a different style of delivery from one by Mendelssohn or Spohr. The space of a century that divides the two first mentioned from the last two means in the historical development of our art not only a great difference in regard to form, but even a greater with respect to musical expression.'[1]

This far-sighted advice appeared at the very beginning of the twentieth century in Joseph Joachim's *Violinschule*, written in collaboration with his pupil Andreas Moser. Inevitably, Joachim's historical approach to Bach or Tartini must have been very different from today's and certainly did not involve a change of violin or bow. But one of the remarkable achievements of the following 100 years has been the probing investigation of musical styles of various eras, with stimulating and often surprising results. Tradition and intuition have been increasingly complemented by an unprecedented realisation of the practical value of primary sources.

The perceptive musical mind has indeed emerged as a necessary adjunct to mere technique and artistry. According to one of his pupils, the great pioneer Arnold Dolmetsch once characteristically remarked that he wanted his students to learn principles rather than pieces, so that they could do their own thinking.[2] A similar approach resurfaces in Gustav Leonhardt's recent observation: 'When one is a student one does things consciously, but when one is more experienced one does not play intellectually any more. One doesn't *think*; one *has thought* . . . things are done automatically, depending on what you intend to say.'[3] Other commentators have pointed to the importance of a certain attitude of mind rather than adherence to a set of techniques applied to an arbitrarily delimited body of early music. The real issue is a comprehensive theory of performance covering music from the earliest times we care about up to the present.[4]

In today's musical climate historical performance in theory and practice has truly come to form part of mainstream musical life. Period instruments are routinely encountered in the concert hall and are virtually obligatory in substantial areas of the repertory, notably in music before 1750. Throughout the world there has developed a huge interest in acquiring instrumental techniques of the past. Naturally, this involves not merely searching out relevant equipment, but also investigating earlier styles of performance. Meanwhile, the entire thrust of such endeavours has been subject to stimulating discussion and argument. But it cannot be denied that artistic life today makes demands which are decidedly unhistorical; for example, the microphone introduces a set of parameters which would have been unthinkable in previous generations. Furthermore, air travel has brought such changes that we do not have the option to turn back the clock.

The original expectations of composers in terms of sound and musical style ('performance practice') have become a lively subject for debate, widely reflected within a range of musical journals. In this area scholars and performers are mutually dependent, drawing upon archival, literary, iconographical, analytical and purely philological studies. The score itself is an imprecise mechanism, which by its very nature offers even the most dutiful performer a rich variety of possibilities.[5] There has always been much detail which a composer did not trouble to write in his scores; he simply knew that certain conventions would be observed. Some of these are no longer current, whereas others have undergone significant changes of meaning. Those elements of style which a composer found it unnecessary to notate will always remain for us a foreign language, but eventually we may be able to converse freely within it as musicians, and so bring a greater range of expression to our interpretations, rather than merely pursuing some kind of unattainable 'authenticity'.

Using the resources for which a particular repertory was intended may well make the music sound more expressive and can make more sense of what the composer actually wrote, re-creating something of its initial impact on the listener. But even if we could witness performances of large-scale works by Bach, Beethoven or Brahms, we should not necessarily want to adopt all their features, since to some extent our own taste would almost certainly continue to influence our interpretation. There will always be circumstances in musical history which we may well not want to emulate; on

the other hand, the different approaches to articulation and phrasing which obtained in earlier periods are in themselves a reminder that performing styles have changed out of all recognition.

The roots of the historical performance movement were already well in place at the very beginning of the twentieth century.[6] A valuable survey of changing musical attitudes is Harry Haskell's *The Early Music Revival* (London, 1988), an account of the multifarious activities of musicologists, editors, publishers, makers, collectors, curators, dealers, librarians, performers, teachers and record producers. Significantly, even after historical awareness in Baroque and earlier repertories had become an established principle, it continued to be widely believed that there was no benefit in performing Classical or Romantic music on period instruments. In 1955 H. C. Robbins Landon could routinely remark in his otherwise far-sighted book on Haydn's symphonies that 'no-one will want to perform Haydn's music with natural trumpets and ancient woodwind when our modern counterparts are in most cases superior in every way', a viewpoint which held sway for some considerable time.[7] Even in 1980 the article 'performing practice' in *The New Grove* claimed that in contrast to music written before 1750 'there has been no severance of contact with post-Baroque music as a whole, nor with the instruments used in performing it'. Subsequent musical revelations have proved this argument untenable, as period interpretations of Mozart and Beethoven have been followed by a traversal through the nineteenth century and even beyond. In the event, performance practice from Brahms's time has proved to be fraught with ambiguities, which are in some ways as challenging as those relating to earlier periods. These very problems seem to nourish historical enquiry, as witnessed by recording and concert schedules worldwide and the increasing opportunities at conservatoires for principal study of period instruments.

The nature and development of historical awareness

Performances of 'early music' have been a feature of western culture at various times and places and at least one writer has remarked that we have all surely exaggerated the extent to which musicians before the late nineteenth century performed and studied only the music of their own time.[8] Certainly, musical histories often tend to discuss only that repertory

contemporary to a particular time, presented as though one is tracing an imaginary journey through a one-way street which might ultimately be found to link compositions of the distant past with those of the present. But in Renaissance England, for example, sacred vocal music often stayed in the repertories of church and cathedral choirs for more than a hundred years. Then in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, groups such as the Academy of Ancient Music and the Concert of Antient Music in London regularly performed early English church music as well as works by Purcell, Handel and Corelli. England was the first country where old musical works were performed regularly and reverentially, and where the idea of musical classics first arose. In their different ways historians John Hawkins and Charles Burney found newer (especially instrumental) works offensive to their ears and in questioning aspects of contemporary music, legitimised a canon of old works as the source of authority over musical taste.[9] A recent account of this phenomenon investigates the political and social reasons for such developments.[10] The Handel Commemoration of 1784 was the culmination, creating an extraordinary spectacle, massive in scale and splendour.

The crucial realisation gradually developed during the nineteenth century that contemporary performance styles did not necessarily suit music from earlier times. Prominent among advocates of such a viewpoint was François-Joseph Fétis, whose 'historical concerts' began at the Paris Conservatoire as early as 1832. It was this stylistic awareness which sowed the seeds of what was later to be known as authenticity, attempting to view older music in terms of its original period rather than transplanting it to the present. The widespread acceptance of so-called faithfulness to the original is much more recent and has been widely seen as symptomatic of the loss of a truly living contemporary music. At least one commentator believes that we have lost the unselfconsciousness necessary to use the present as the ultimate standard; the composer's intention has become for us the highest authority.[11]

Influential reworkings of Bach and Handel

The updating of earlier music as a matter of course, reflecting mainstream musical culture until a generation ago, owes a great deal to Mozart's arrangements of the music of Bach and Handel. His preoccupation

with the Baroque, stimulated in the 1780s by Baron Gottfried van Swieten, subsequently had an enormous impact on later composers. Van Swieten also came into contact with Haydn and Beethoven and made them aware of their Baroque heritage.[12] One of the tangible results was Mozart's six Preludes and Fugues K404a for string trio, where four of the introductory slow movements were of his own composition and the fugues (by J. S. Bach, except for one by W. F. Bach) were subject not merely to re-instrumentation, but to interventionist treatment in terms of embellishment, melodic line, harmony and even tonality. Van Swieten's private oratorio concerts (from 1787) were initially directed by Mozart and subsequently included the premieres of Haydn's *The Creation* and *The Seasons*. A highlight was Mozart's adaptation of Handel's *Messiah* in 1789, which reflected the circumstances of his time.[13] Mozart held Handel in high regard but in accordance with the spirit of his age felt the need for more orchestral colour, so that it was natural for him to bring the music up to date. Solo numbers were interchanged, transposed, inserted or shortened, while there were far-reaching alterations to the instrumentation. Mozart's orchestral tone-painting resembles contexts within his own operas such as *Don Giovanni* and *Die Zauberflöte*, and the additional wind parts in the tutti choruses make Handel's organ continuo redundant. In the arias Mozart added expression and dynamic markings. The art of high trumpet (clarino) playing had died out in the half-century since the date of composition; Mozart's pragmatic solution was to assign much of the obbligato in 'The trumpet shall sound' to the horn.

The importance of Mozart's approach through the nineteenth century is nicely captured in an article of 1879 by Ebenezer Prout, who introduces the topic thus: 'In the published scores of the older masters, especially Bach and Handel, much is to be met with which if performed exactly as printed will fail altogether to realise the intentions of the composer. This arises partly from the difference in the composition of our modern orchestras as compared with those employed a century and a half ago; partly also from the fact that it was formerly the custom to write out in many cases little more than a skeleton of the music, leaving the details to be filled in at performance from the figured bass.'[14] Prout remarks that passages are regularly encountered in Bach whose effect on the modern orchestra will be altogether different from that designed by the composer; in Handel, our ears are so accustomed to a rich and sonorous instrumentation, that this music if played only with

strings and oboes, or sometimes with strings alone, would sound so thin as to be distasteful. Reflecting the taste of his own times, he concludes that additional accompaniments must be judged on their own merits, though the question is not whether but how they should be written. Not foreseeing the climate of authenticity a century later, Prout suggests that modernisations of this kind will probably be written until the end of time.

Clearly, this article implies a quite different approach to the ideal of realising the composer's intentions than that of today. Prout notes that Bach in particular employed a number of instruments which had fallen into disuse, such as the viola d'amore, the viola da gamba, the oboe d'amore, the oboe da caccia and several others. He then proceeds to recommend substitution as far as possible with their modern equivalents. This was indeed Mendelssohn's procedure in his celebrated 1829 revival of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*. Mendelssohn claimed to have presented Bach's works exactly as they were written, but he was no purist, approaching Bach's music as a practical musician eager to bring it to life for his contemporaries.

Mendelssohn brought Bach's music into the public domain once and for all, inspiring performances in several German cities in the 1830s and 1840s and soon throughout Europe. He introduced cuts which reduced the work's performing time by a third; there were rescorings and reassignment of solo parts, together with tempo and dynamic markings that placed a premium on dramatic contrasts and the highly charged emotionalism characteristic of his own time.

Historical considerations

Mendelssohn was influenced in his own music by Baroque composers, as is evident from *Elijah* and from his keyboard preludes and fugues. For Brahms, earlier music offered an even more fruitful creative impetus. Michael Musgrave has noted that in his first choral appointment at Detmold (1857–9) Brahms performed two cantatas from the new *Bach-Gesellschaft* edition, as well as Handel's *Messiah*.[15] Later, he was to explore in performance the then obscure worlds of Schütz and Gabrieli. Brahms contributed to Chrysander's Couperin edition and wrote continuo realisations for the Italian duets and trios of Chrysander's Handel edition. Such an establishment of texts from preferred sources in an era of Collected Editions (includ-

ing Mozart) was soon to make possible the concepts of *Werktreue* (faithfulness to the text), performance practice and authenticity itself.[16] Meanwhile, Brahms made manuscript copies from rare printed editions of old music and gradually assembled for his own library some important treasures, such as the autograph of Mozart's late G minor Symphony.[17] The creative influence of old music is evident throughout Brahms's own work, which shows enormous historical awareness. His friend Joachim directed a Bach festival at Eisenach in 1884, where he performed the B minor Mass using a modern replica of an oboe d'amore and a so-called 'Bach trumpet', prompting the *Monthly Musical Record* to observe that 'the deficiencies in Bach's music, as we commonly hear it, are due, in fact, not to the author, but to the imperfection, in several remarkable respects, of our vaunted modern orchestra'.[18] This project illustrates a growing realisation that in earlier music the modern instruments commonly used for contemporary repertory would simply not do. But how did Joachim's Baroque performances actually sound? In his own words, 'we must certainly admit the view that the compositions of Tartini and of even older musicians will well bear a treatment in the matter of expression which, while in no way spoiling the uniformity of their style, will correspond more to the sentiment of the present day, than if performed with a timid anxiety to be literally correct. For the violin which we now play existed then as an already perfected instrument, on which all the later victories of technique could have been carried out, had anyone known how to do so.'[19] If Joachim appears here to be a touch patronising by today's standards, it is nevertheless important to remember that the degree of expression appropriate to 'early music' was to remain a matter for debate for years to come.

Discussion as to whether musical instruments had improved or merely changed was rife during the great technological developments of the nineteenth century. For example, Wagner was in no doubt that in Beethoven's symphonies valved trumpets and horns should be used rather than their natural precursors; he re-wrote their parts to remove any supposed limitations. On the other hand, Berlioz described the use of valves for stopped notes in Beethoven as a dangerous abuse; this is of special significance because he also enthuses about modern developments, such as Adolphe Sax's improvements to the clarinet and the newly devised Boehm flute.[20] At a similar period Gleich claimed that the use of valves in Weber and

Beethoven was a 'Vandalismus'.[21] *Grove 1* merely noted that both natural and valved instruments had their advantages. Amid all the argument, some felt that the new versatility of wind instruments was indispensable, whereas others believed that something of the individuality of tone-colour was lost as a result of mechanical developments. Regret continued to be expressed that the true qualities of older instruments had been lost. As William Stone observed, 'hardly any instrument, except the flute, has been so altered and modified . . . in its mechanism . . . as the oboe. . . . It has thus become by far the most elaborate and complicated of reed instruments, and it is a question whether a return to an older and simpler pattern, by lessening the weight of the machine, and the number of holes breaking the continuity of the bore, and by increasing the vibratory powers of the wooden tube, would not conduce to an improved quality of tone.'[22] He was even more vehement with regard to the bassoon: 'Various attempts have been made to give greater accuracy and completeness to its singularly capricious scale; but up to the present time all these seem to have diminished the flexibility of the instrument in florid passages, or to have impaired its peculiar but telling and characteristic tone.'[23] From this it seems probable that more than a century ago Stone would have approved of the return to period instruments for Baroque and Classical repertory.

The pioneers: individuals and institutions

Unsurprisingly, the beginnings of the historical performance movement were modest indeed, though from a European perspective it is significant that in 1915 (the year of publication of Dolmetsch's book) Saint-Saëns surveyed the principal issues of style, technique and equipment in a lecture in San Francisco.[24] A huge number of fledgeling institutions developed throughout Europe, such as the Schola Cantorum of Paris, the Chanteurs de St Gervais of Charles Bordes, two Sociétés d'Instruments Anciens, the Deutsche Vereinigung für alte Musik and Safford Cape's Pro Musica Antiqua of Brussels. There had already been a long tradition of early music at Basle when the gambist August Wenzinger co-founded the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in 1933. Established as a teaching and research institute for early music from the Middle Ages to Mozart, it gave a new prominence to instrumental music, though retaining a sacred and secular vocal

syllabus. Its avowed intention was that early music should become an integral part of everyday life, whilst aspiring to professional standards, rather than those of the dilettante.

Dolmetsch's special status in the history of period performance is justified by the wisdom of his book rather than the eccentricities of his career. His restoration of early instruments from the late 1880s had been motivated by his discovery and subsequent performance of the English repertory of fantasies for viols.[25] His great gift was indeed that he had both the imagination and the musicianship to take a work which had become a museum piece and make it speak to the people of his own time. His comments on period instruments are full of insight, arguing for example that the one-keyed flute *can* be played in tune, but that this 'requires constant watchfulness of the ear, which thus becomes more and more sensitive to faults of intonation'.[26] But Dolmetsch's own reconstructions apparently wanted not only to revive the past, but to improve upon it. In 1932 Donington remarked that 'the old harpsichord has certain limitations [and produces] a jangle, slight in the treble but audible in the bass. Use of the damper-raising pedal is rendered impracticable, precluding a number of effects of great musical value . . . The new instruments, which remedy these historical oversights, have proved both purer and more sustained than any previous harpsichord.'[27] Donington's view of these 'improvements' as sound common sense is at least as interesting as Dolmetsch's 'fidelity' to history. The relationship of copies to originals remains a contentious issue to this day. The erratic quality of Dolmetsch's performances was nicely summarised by his pupil Ralph Kirkpatrick, who observed, 'Study is problematical with a man who prides himself on never practising.'[28] Dolmetsch treated recordings and concerts as work in progress rather than as the finished article. In a sense, he was fortunate in having had the opportunity to implement his pioneering work at a time before the pressures of the recording industry were to place such a high premium on technical accuracy at all costs.

The role of musical expression

An important issue debated throughout the twentieth century has been the degree of expression which is appropriate in the context of 'early music'. Dolmetsch had spoken abstractedly about feeling and expression,

rejecting the idea 'that expression in music is a modern thing, and that the old music requires nothing beyond mechanical precision'.[29] The harpsichordist Wanda Landowska, the first early music 'personality', regarded the idea of objectivity as utopian, since no interpreter should be restricted to remaining in the shadow of the author. At the same time she was able to assert that she aspired only to serve her composers. Modern scholars have desired to lay down specific rules about interpretation. But the art of music is of course much more difficult to quantify than the craft. This point is well illustrated in Türk's *Clavierschule* of 1789, which lays out various stylistic precepts, but finally admits that some aspects of musicianship cannot be taught and that all one can do is simply to listen to the best singers.[30]

The widespread aversion to 'interpretation' has been widely linked with Stravinskian neo-classicism, as performers shied away, not just from virtuosity and exhibitionism, but from interventionism of any kind. This philosophy occurs in its purest form in a programme note written by Erwin Bodky for the Cambridge Society for Early Music in the 1950s: 'Early Music was a highly aristocratic art and restraint governed even the display of emotion as well as the exhibition of technical virtuosity. This deprives concerts of Early Music of the atmosphere of electricity which, when present, is one of the finest experiences of the modern concert hall. Who seeks but this may stay away from our concert series. We want to take this opportunity, however, to thank our artists for the voluntary restraint in the display of their artistic capabilities which they exercise when recreating with us the atmosphere of equanimity, tranquillity and noble entertainment which is the characteristic feature of Early Music.'[31] Inevitably, this kind of thinking gave authenticity a bad name, making the term 'scholarly' when applied to performance synonymous with dull and unimaginative. Meanwhile, the critic Theodor Adorno wrote of 'impotent nostalgia' during the course of one of his celebrated articles.[32]

Adorno was especially critical of Hindemith, who in fact showed himself well aware of the inevitable subjectivity of interpretation. What he wrote in 1952 in *A Composer's World* eloquently defines the value of an historical approach, in broad agreement with Dolmetsch: 'All the traits that made the music of the past lovable to its contemporary perfomers and listeners were inextricably associated with the kind of sound then known and appreciated. If we replace this sound by the sounds typical of our modern instruments