1 Historical performance in context

The seeds of growth

Historical performance in theory and practice has truly established itself as part of everyday musical life. Period instruments are routinely encountered in the concert hall and are virtually obligatory in substantial areas of the repertory. Throughout the world there has developed an immense interest in discovering the original expectations of composers in terms of sound and musical style and in acquiring appropriate instrumental techniques for their faithful realisation. This has involved not only finding and experimenting with relevant instruments and equipment, but also exploring earlier styles of performance through the examination of a wide range of primary source materials; for, as Roger Norrington has observed: 'a relationship with the past needs to be founded on truth as well as sympathy, concern as well as exploitation, information as well as guesswork'.[1]

This notion that works of the past should be stylishly interpreted with the musical means its composer had at his disposal has a fascinating history.[2] But it was not until the late nineteenth century that musicians began purposefully to contemplate using instruments and performing styles that were contemporary with and appropriate to Baroque or Classical music. The violinist Joseph Joachim directed a Bach festival at Eisenach in 1884, where Bach's B minor Mass was performed with some care taken towards the recreation of the composer's original instruments. Joachim and his associate, Andreas Moser, also signalled a conscious change in performing attitudes with some far-sighted advice in their *Violinschule* of 1905:

> 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.[3]

Such observations appear to have inspired the likes of Arnold Dolmetsch to set out his philosophy of historical performance in *The Interpretation of the Music of the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (London, 1915) and put it into practice at his centre in Haslemere for the study and recreation of the traditions of performance of early music.[4]

Dolmetsch's crusade was continued by, among others, the German scholars Robert Haas and Joachim-pupil Arnold Schering[5] and his own pupil Robert Donington. Donington's *The Interpretation of Early Music* and various complementary publications based on theoretical sources have become indispensable reference works, particularly for players of stringed instruments.[6] Much of Donington's most significant work involved the decoding and clarification of notational conventions and ambiguities within established musical, idiomatic and historical contexts. These conventions will always remain for us a foreign language, but such source studies have furnished us with the necessary grammar, vocabulary and knowledge to communicate freely and expressively within it as musicians.

Thurston Dart, Denis Stevens and others also gave early music a renewed impetus in Britain through their inspirational teaching, performances and scholarship, firing the likes of David Munrow and especially Christopher Hogwood to put theory into practice and challenge string players and other musicians to take up the cause of historical performance. Similar currents elsewhere in Europe encouraged a growing corpus of string players to experiment with period instruments: the Swiss cellist and gamba player August Wenzinger in Basle; members of the Leonhardt family, whose Leonhardt Consort (est. 1955) has been enormously influential, especially in the Netherlands; Nikolaus Harnoncourt and his Concentus Musicus (est. 1953) in Vienna; or violinist Franzjosef Maier's The Collegium Aureum (est. 1964), which pioneered the recording of the early Classical repertory on original instruments, some years before major British ensembles such as Hogwood's The Academy of Ancient Music or Norrington's London Classical Players.

Indeed, the espousal of period performance by record companies has provided the major commercial impetus to the early music movement from as

long ago as the 1930s; but the explosion in the recording industry in the 1960s and 1970s, together with its inviting financial rewards, attracted an ever-increasing number of converts to historical performance. Decca's (L'oiseau-lyre) complete cycle of Mozart's symphonies by Hogwood, Jaap Schröder and the Academy of Ancient Music and prepared under the scholarly eye of Neal Zaslaw in the late 1970s and early 1980s proved a significant turning-point, after which performers and scholars began to work in harness on various performance projects. Both factions recognised the irrationality of Bach being played as if it were Beethoven, and Mozart as if it were Wagner, and the 'performance practice' movement began truly to blossom.

Public acceptance of period performance has not been won easily. Early standards of performance, particularly in the concert hall, were not beyond reproach and provided ready ammunition for the movement's detractors. Equally, the vast majority of twentieth-century listeners were not fully attuned to the aims and objectives of period performers and simply failed to understand the complexities of, for example, pitch, tuning, temperament and intonation. However, Hans Keller's assertion (1984) that 'most of the authentic boys just aren't good enough as players to make their way without musicological crutches'[7] has surely been disproved in the last decade, if not before, while market forces continue to negate violinist Pinchas Zukerman's well-publicised view that historical performance is 'asinine stuff . . . a complete and absolute farce . . . nobody wants to hear that stuff'.[8]

The violin and viola literature

The upper members of the modern violin family have been the subject of lively discussion in print for countless decades, whether in musical journals, dictionaries or individual books.[9] In addition to extravagantly illustrated 'coffee-table' volumes and museum catalogues on the work and products of various illustrious luthiers, there have been various attempts at placing the violin, its technique and its executants into some kind of historical perspective, notably by Dubourg (1836), Wasielewski (1869), Moser (1923), and Bonaventura (1925).[10] However, the major influential publications on period string performance have been penned in more recent times, by David Boyden, whose monumental *The History of*

Violin Playing from its Origins to 1761 (London, 1965) was the first book to deal with the history of violin playing against the vast panorama of the violin's evolution and repertory, and the present author, whose *Violin Technique and Performance Practice in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1985) takes Boyden's work as a starting-point for further investigation into the nineteenth century. As already noted, Robert Donington supplemented his invaluable research into early music interpretation with *String Playing in Baroque Music* (London, 1977), and Peter Holman has also weighed in with *Four and Twenty Fiddlers* (Oxford, 1993), an historical study of the violin at the English Court 1540–1690 which incorporates an updated account of the violin's origins.

Most significant books about the instrument since Boyden's study have devoted at least a chapter (or equivalent) to aspects of technique and historical performance, notably Sheila Nelson's *The Violin and Viola* (London, 1972), Walter Kolneder's *Das Buch der Violine* (Zurich, 1972),[11] *The Book of the Violin* (Oxford, 1984), *The Cambridge Companion to the Violin* (Cambridge, 1992) and *The Violin Book* (London and San Francisco, 1998). The viola has not fared quite so well, Maurice W. Riley's interesting, yet inconsistent *The History of the Viola* (2 vols., I, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 1980; II, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1991) being the only study of note to be devoted exclusively to the instrument, but Yehudi Menuhin's book *Violin and Viola* (London, 1976; with William Primrose and Denis Stevens) includes valuable historical and other information for the general reader. Biographical and critical perspectives on earlier performers are incorporated in many of the above volumes as well as in Boris Schwarz's *Great Masters of the Violin* (London, 1984), Margaret Campbell's *The Great Violinists* (London, 1980) and Henry Roth's *Violin Virtuosos from Paganini to the 21st Century* (Los Angeles, 1997).

Among books on performance issues there are a number of chapters devoted to string playing, notably those in *Performance Practice: Music after 1600*, edited by Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie (London, 1989), and in some of the volumes in the series entitled 'Cambridge Studies in Performance Practice'.[12] Meanwhile, Duncan Druce has contributed a stimulating essay on Classical violin playing and Robert Philip's detailed study of early recordings has important implications in our attempts to recreate the performing styles of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[13] Clive Brown's *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice* (Oxford, 1999) looks

further back in time, incorporating much material for string players to contemplate, especially in respect of accentuation, articulation, bowing generally, portamento and vibrato.

While *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, its numerous editions and its various off-shoots have been mainstays amongst musical dictionaries for entries on string performance, countless journals have provided vehicles for the dissemination of research data and other information, ranging from 'historical' ones such as the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* and *Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung* to more recent examples such as *Performance Practice Review*, the organologically slanted *Galpin Society Journal* and especially *Early Music*. The latter has continued to be an important forum for practical concerns of a wide readership – scholars, players, instrument-makers, CD collectors and concert-goers – since its first issue in 1973, with significant contributions on string playing from, among others, Clive Brown, David Boyden, Roger Hickman, Robert Philip, Robin Stowell and Peter Walls.[14]

Period violinists and violists

Thanks largely to the nature and function of the instrument, few period viola players have achieved particular prominence in the early music movement. Among the many violinists who have devoted their energies to historically aware performance is the Israeli violinist of Romanian birth Sergiu Luca, who benefited from collaboration with the American scholar and violin historian David Boyden. Sonya Monosoff has also carved a niche in the field, but not exclusively, and Austrian Eduard Melkus has gained a formidable reputation as a soloist and as founder of the Vienna Capella Academica (est. 1965), even if his style and technique occasionally espoused elements that are, strictly speaking, unauthentic. Alice Harnoncourt, Marie Leonhardt, Jaap Schröder, Reinhard Goebel and Sigiswald Kuijken have also advanced the cause of historical performance; Goebel's Musica Antiqua Köln and Kuijken's La Petite Bande have each amassed a wide-ranging repertory and discography, while a newer generation of violinists sparked by the recording and broadcasting opportunities of the 1970s and 1980s includes Catherine Mackintosh, Monica Huggett, Priscilla Palmer, John Holloway, Simon Standage, Micaela Comberti, Pavlo Beznosiuk, Elizabeth Wallfisch, Ingrid Seifert and Alison Bury.

Andrew Manze, Lucy van Dael, Fabio Biondi, Maya Homburger, Rachel Podger and Benjamin Hudson have come to prominence in more recent times, and many more violinists who have benefited from specialist study of historical performance at various progressive conservatoires and universities world-wide are waiting eagerly in the wings. Even established soloists on the 'modern' violin such as Christian Tetzlaff and Thomas Zehetmair have been attracted by the challenges of Baroque violin playing and, into the new millennium, the Siberian virtuoso Maxim Vengerov has succumbed to his 'fascination with the past' and 'the lure of gut', demonstrating a far more liberal and intellectual attitude to performance than many of his predecessors. He confesses, 'the Baroque violin has changed me, not only my technique. It changed my mind about how to play Mozart, and Beethoven, and everything!'[15] Thus, an understanding of historical performance issues can be extremely influential in practice, whether or not the player opts to play on a period instrument.

Interpreting the evidence

Much of the philosophy and most of the aims of historical performance have already been aired in this handbook's parent volume as well as in a wide variety of books and journals on music and aesthetics.[16] Meanwhile, period performers have continued their attempts to fulfil their goal of investigating, discovering and experimenting with the (sometimes unwritten) conventions, styles and techniques of the past, gleaned from a variety of instruction books and other primary sources, and applying them as appropriate in performance on original instruments (or faithful reproductions) relevant to the historical context in which the music was conceived. In the course of such a performing regime they will be required to make decisions. Some may be based on musicological revelations gleaned from others and some founded on informed conjecture, taste and musicianship about the imprecisions of the score; but all should be made to fall naturally within the technical and stylistic parameters established by their historical investigations.

Many general issues addressed in the parent volume have relevance to performance on the early violin and viola to a greater or lesser degree. Details about primary sources, including instruments and treatises specific to the

violin and viola, will be elaborated upon in the following chapters; however, period performers should also consult treatises for other instruments such as the flute or keyboards in order to develop a general historical perspective, taking in national idioms and the various different approaches to matters such as rhythm, specific ornamentation, extempore embellishment and improvisation. Other areas for serious study include articulation, melodic inflection, accentuation, tempo, expression and various aspects generally unidentified in musical notation, notably issues of pitch and temperament, the constitution and placement of ensembles and matters of direction. Such study is vital to the process of forging well-grounded historical performances, but period performers should be warned that historical evidence is often ambiguous and may raise more questions rather than provide answers.

Standards of verity

As the 'early music movement' has developed from a radical fringe activity into a major part of international musical life, its original pioneering spirit has all too easily been eclipsed by requirements that are decidedly unhistorical, such as the high standards of technical proficiency demanded by the microphone. The search to rediscover the sounds and styles of nineteenth-century music can too easily conflict with the exigencies of the recording studio and the need to produce a neat and tidy, easily assimilable product. No one will dispute the importance of mastering an instrument, but that mastery must always be combined with a continuing stylistic awareness. However, increasingly burdensome commercial pressures have often resulted in retrograde steps in terms of compromise with instruments, technique and even taste, and some players have regrettably taken as their primary sources the well-read musical directors with whom they collaborate rather than Leopold Mozart, Spohr or Baillot. Such second- or third-hand interpretations may grossly misrepresent the music, at the same time putting at risk the standards of verity practised by succeeding generations of musicians.

Such standards are also pertinent to organological considerations. As the period before 1800 witnessed arguably the most significant developments in the history of both the violin and the viola (save perhaps for the development of the Tertis model viola in the twentieth century), there are inevitably

limits to the accuracy of our knowledge of the types of instruments, bows and accessories used in certain parts of the globe at any given time. Our efforts to seek the truth may therefore only be approximate, and there are bound to be compromises, some inevitably involving improvements on the past (for example, in the modern methods of making gut strings).

However, while reviving the past and aiming for historical fidelity, performers should be cautious about making improvements that might run counter to their objectives. In this regard, the relation of reproductions to original instruments and bows remains a contentious issue. Some modern makers have certainly been guilty of beefing up their reproduction instruments to make their sound more acceptable to twentieth-century ears, while weights of bows and some of their playing characteristics are regrettably also known to have been attuned to the tastes of players in modern symphony orchestras who dabble in period performance. Nevertheless, the role of stringed instruments has been crucial to the development of the historical performance movement, since such instruments constitute the life-blood of much Baroque and Classical chamber, orchestral and choral music; and the work of scholars and luthiers has provided the impetus, sources, information and essential tools for string players to experiment with and refine.

The value of historical performance

The pros and cons of historical performance have been well rehearsed and argued.[17] There have been many objections to an openly historicist view of performing; but the value of historical performance lies in the effort to reconstitute the sound of the particular period, just as the value of history lies in trying to understand the events of a particular time. Even if an informed approximation of historical performance practice is the result, this must surely always be better than reducing music from all periods to a standard style and instrumentation, as was happening from about the 1960s. In the early 1980s, Hans Keller believed that the very art of performance was being endangered by standardisation of technique, and he warned: 'What has been an art is turning into a craft.'[18] Modern players sporting a continuous vibrato consistently ignore the small and diverse articulations so important in the performance of Baroque and Classical music; as Joseph Szigeti admitted in 1964: '[we produce] a big and somewhat undifferentiated tone;

we neglect many bowing subtleties . . . we articulate with less character than even a few decades ago'.[19]

Much work needs to be done on the interface between scholarship and practice in the field to sustain the development of historical performance. With the intervention of commercial pressures, performers have failed fully to realise in sound the radical implications of recent research into texts and early recordings, even though many appreciate the conflict between their knowledge and understanding of historical performance issues and their practical realisation of them. Recorded performances from the earlier twentieth century give a vivid sense of being projected spontaneously as if to an audience, the precision and clarity of each note less important than the shape and progress of the music as a whole. Nowadays the balance has shifted significantly, so that powerful, accurate and clear performance of the music has become the first priority and the characterisation is assumed to take care of itself. If pre-war recordings resemble live performance, many of today's concerts show a palpable influence of the recording session, with clarity and control an overriding priority.[20]

Presentation of a convincing historical performance requires of its performers all manner of historical discernment (whether technical or musicological), imagination and artistry if they are to realise anything of the music's charm and power, such as they can sense them to have been at the time of composition. The study of notation, treatises, documents and history is important, but ultimately one can rarely be certain how the music sounded. Feeling, interpretation, personality and individual taste in performance play a vital role in bringing the music to life and are essential adjuncts to the use of early instruments; however, as Peter Williams has remarked, 'the *studies* part of performance practice studies are their highest purpose'.[21]

2 The repertory and principal sources

Introduction

The adoption of a core period (*c.*1700–*c.*1900) for this series of handbooks is intended both to offer optimum accessibility for its prospective readership and to cultivate some consistency of approach and expectation in the specialist case studies that form an integral part of each volume. Such temporal parameters could cause us to undervalue the achievements of numerous seventeenth-century composer-violinists, who did much to develop the violin idiom in a variety of genres, hence the sharper focus on their repertory below. Furthermore, although the six case studies appear to neglect this significant period of the instrument's emancipation and development, the first opus to be featured, Corelli's Op. 5, was probably composed some years earlier than its publication date (1 January 1700). As noted in Chapter 6, this set of sonatas belongs to the genre of accompanied duo with alternative keyboard continuo which became popular in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, and it effectively summarises and codifies the musical, idiomatic and technical achievements of violinist-composers of the period. It 'laid the foundation for his [Corelli's] fame as *the* violin master of the seventeenth century – a fame he does not deserve exclusively but must at least share with such masters as Fontana, Neri, Legrenzi, G. M. Bononcini, Stradella, P. Degli Antonii and Torelli'.[1]

The emancipation of the violin

At the beginning of the seventeenth century the violin was rapidly transformed from a provider of popular dance music into a vehicle for the most sophisticated artistic ends. This transformation was effected initially in Italy and coincided with the development of vocal monody, articulated, for example, in Caccini's *Le nuove musiche* (Florence, 1601/2), and an important tradition of virtuoso solo instrumental writing.[2] Solo parts for the