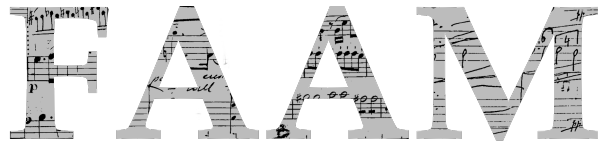


Exploring plurality of interpretation through annotations in the *long 19th century*: musician's perspectives and the FAAM project.



**Flemish Archive
for Annotated Music**

Introduction

In his seminal work *The Past is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal advocates a theory of history where past and future are dynamical entities continuously shaped by our subjectivity and aesthetics ^[1]. The early music movement has provided a solid framework for the performance of old music, and its temporal scopes have increased significantly, reaching out to music of the 20th century. As Harry Huskell suggested in his iconic *The Early Music Revival: A History*, the early music movement *has no natural chronological boundary, since it connotes not a fixed body of music but a philosophy of making music* ^[2]. The philosophy described by Huskell is the so called *historically informed practice*, advocating that the performer-scholar should derive their interpretation based on historical sources, like treatises and musical scores from the period.

Unfortunately, gathering all possible artifacts and knowledge from the past will not guarantee faithful and exact replication, as argued by Richard Taruskin during the “authenticity quarel” of the second half of the 20th century ^[3]. The performance of a musical work is a complex ecosystem, where performance practice, academic research, audience and musical aesthetics interact together. Furthermore, the progress in our historical knowledge of the past has paradoxically narrowed the imagination and artistic freedom of modern performers, reducing the musician's agency in name of historical accuracy and fidelity.

The quest of reconciling scholarship and interpretative freedom has always been present in the early music movement discourse, since its 19th century foundations. Confronted with a plurality of performance practices, the performer of Early Music is forced to make interpretative choices, based on musicological research of the sources and their personal taste. As Early Music movement pioneer Wanda Landowska (1879-1959) wrote in her essay ‘Authenticity in the Interpretation of Music of the Past’ *we represent an accumulation of traditions and interpretations of a ever-changing past. According to Landowska all interpretations must be studied and thought out*, allowing the historically informed musician to resonate in accordance with their own, personal artistic narrative ^[4].

Plurality and musical annotations



The critical analysis of the sources related to a musical work is often a time-consuming and cumbersome task, usually provided by critical editions made by musicologists. Such editions primarily focus on the composer's agency, neglecting the contribution of a complex network of professions, ranging from editors, conductors, amateur and professional performers and collectors. Looking at a work of art in all its manifestations and facets, like its evolution and reception through culture, has reached the attention of recent musicological and artistic research. The malleability of a musical work can be experienced through the 19th century practice of arrangements and variations, as revived in recent projects such as the [Online Chopin Variorum Edition](#), the [Beethoven in the House](#) and the research of Nancy November on domestic music-making in Vienna at the turn of the 19th century [5].

The [FAAM](#), Flemish Archive for Annotated Music, is an interdisciplinary project at the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp that wishes to explore the possibilities of annotation analysis on music scores for historically informed musicians.

Annotations are a valuable source of information to recollect the decision-making process of musicians of the past. Especially when original musical recordings are not available, the marks provided by these performers of the past are the most intimate and informative connections between modern and ancient musicians.

An annotation, such a metronome mark indication, can be quite objective while others, like an expressive mark or a written comment, leave room for speculation and creative resonance.

The project wishes to create a digital platform for artistic researchers, providing exploratory tools for understanding the plurality of interpretation of musicians from the *long 19th century*.

We are working together with several performers to explore the possibilities provided by musician's annotations in the imaginary dialectic between Ancients and Moderns and how this embedded knowledge is challenging their prior beliefs and historical understanding.

Contrary to a purely scholarly historically informed practice approach, based on the controversial concept of authenticity [6], we wish to allow the modern performers to reconcile their practice with the one of their predecessors in a process of *dialectic emulation*, where artistic process is improved through the past but does not stagnate in it [1:1]. We wish to consider a musical text as *opportunity for the exercise of imagination*, freeing the interpreter-performer from the *false promise of positivism* of carved in stone "objective truth" [3:1].

Project pipeline

During the course of the last academic year, the FAAM corpus has grown significantly thanks to a systematic digitization workflow at the conservatoire libraries of Antwerp, Ghent and other fellow institutions, such as the Fondo Fausto Torrefranca (1883-1955) at the conservatoire Benedetto Marcello of Venice [7], the [Collection of Historical Annotated String Editions](#) (CHASE) at the University of Huddersfield [8] and the [Resounding Libraries](#) project at Orpheus Institute [9].

Currently, the corpus includes more than 30.000 digitized images from more than 500 musical works, ranging from orchestral music, chamber music arrangements, early music editions of keyboard and polyphonic repertoire, Belgian compositions and personal collections, such as the one of pianist Marinus De Jong (1891-1984), singer Valentine Degive-Ledelier (1846-1912) and violinist Pierre Sechiari (1877-1932).

A first beta-version of an exploratory digital platform should be launched during the first trimester of 2024,

combining Computer Vision models, Digital Humanities and Music Information Retrieval standards.

We are working to provide at least four case studies before the end of 2024:

- A critical comparison of annotated editions of 18th century keyboard music published during the *long 19th century*, in collaboration with fellow artistic researcher [Liselotte Sels](#).
- Exploration of 16th century sacred polyphony editions connected to the Cecilian Movement^[10] with conductor Inge Bollaert ([Chamber choir El Grillo](#))
- A documentary portraying the imaginary conversation between pianist Anna Alvizou and the annotated piano music of Marinus de Jong (1891-1984).

References

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