Shai Burstyn

Authenticity in interpretation

Between 28 May and 1 June 1995 the Jerusalem Music Centre played host on its magnificent campus to the international symposium *Authenticity in interpretation*. As conceived by Professor Jehoash Hirshberg and Hed Sella, rather than being simply another scholarly musicological conference or another performing workshop, the symposium attempted instead to create a dialogue among musicologists, performers and philosophers in those areas in which their respective interests intersect. In the words of the introductory remarks in the handsome brochure, participants were invited to address the current doubts 'as to the very possibility, legitimacy and desirability of authentic performance and the use of period instruments' within the wider context relevant to all performing arts, namely the status and meaning of the artistic text and the problems arising from its reading in performance.

In addition to their conference papers, the participating artists—Evelyn Tubb and Anthony Rooley (soprano and lute), Malcolm Bilson and Zvi Meniker (early pianos), Laurence Dreyfus (viola da gamba), Viola De Hoog (Baroque cello), Marten Root (Baroque flute) and, last but certainly not least, ensemble Project Ars Nova—also performed in concerts taking place the same week at the Israel Festival. Their performances provided a unique frame of reference for the symposium by becoming a sort of laboratory in which the problems and arguments raised during the day received a concrete testing ground in the evening, and vice versa. Thus, in happy contrast to other musicological conferences, these concerts, in addition to providing embellishment and entertaiment, more importantly established a secure and relevant grounding for the discussion of authenticity in performance in performance itself.

Although individual topics of presentation varied greatly, it was fascinating to observe how certain issues and even common attitudes surfaced time and again, each time from a different angle. Viewed together, they may be considered to have formed the real agenda of the symposium as it actually evolved rather than as it had been planned. It is these broad issues which I have chosen to address rather than make a report on all the individual papers read.

The changing winds in the early music movement became subject to a symptomatic concretization as participants repeatedly shunned, indeed disavowed, the term 'authenticity'. 'Authenticity', if indeed it is of any value at all, is now seen as performance-related, having to do with the conviction of artistic delivery—any artistic delivery—here and now rather than as a battle cry representing a well defined approach towards the early repertory of western music. A consensus seemed to have evolved that early music performance is first and foremost a performance; that is, there is no inherent difference between it and the performance of any other, 'non-early' music. This may be taken as an indication that the early music movement has come of age, especially if one keeps in mind that for performers under 40 who were born into it, it is the mainstream norm rather than a rebellious alternative to one. This may also be partly because, as it has now reached the Romantic repertory, early music seems to have swallowed up and incorporated most of the musical heritage of western culture, thus obliterating the uniqueness of a segment of that heritage, defined by a special performance code, as conceived and practiced by the movement's founders.

This performance-oriented trend loomed even larger in discussions concerning the composer's intentions. Viewed from a philosophical stance, Menachem Brinker distinguished between determinate and indeterminate aspects of the work of art, stressing that any act of artistic interpretation must fill the gaps found in the script. While the determinate aspects of the work should be followed according to its author's intentions, indeterminate aspects must be given concretization by the performer, albeit in concordance with the determinate ones. However, remaining faithful to authorial intentions does not necessarily enhance the work's aesthetic potential for all audiences at all times; sometimes 'performing the work in ways unpredicted by its author may enhance a greater aesthetic effectiveness.' Despite professing musical ignorance, Professor Brinker, an aesthetician, touched here upon a central issue in early music. For, depending on what it is we seek to give authenticity, we may adhere as closely as possible to the work but still produce a totally non-authentic aesthetic experience in our audience; conversely and paradoxically, in order to recreate an aesthetic experience akin to that of the composer's own audience we must purposely resort to non-authentic means. (For a fuller exposition of this idea see S. Burstyn, 'Authentic listening?', *Orbis musicae*, ix (1986), pp.141–9.)

Within the context of authenticity, this claim sharpens a point which came up time and again: how far can we differentiate the musical work as seen in the context of historical explanation from its interpretation in performance? Philosopher Asa Kasher argued that 'authenticity is neither necessary nor superfluous. It is a different genre, so to speak, that could produce novelty and understanding, could be better than its alternatives, could be worse. Most of the time it is just something else.'

More specifically, Laurence Dreyfus, noting that 'all musical performance ... depends on establishing a context of authority which vouches for the correctness of its interpretative "readings"', sharpened the paradoxical dichotomy between the Romantic claims for both intuitive interpretation and fidelity to the composer's intentions. He perceives early music's insistence on historical authenticity not as a new authority for musical performance, for it too considers the composer's intentions supreme, but rather as 'a remarkably clever re-definition of a leading traditional metaphor'. Criticizing Robert Donnington's contradictory recommendation for both scholarly study and intuition, Dreyfus charges that 'crucial differences in attitudes and practices between scholars and performers are too often passed over' and argues for a separation of historical study and performance, for the former can never provide a successful basis for the latter. Dreyfus believes that 'musicianly intentions about a piece of music ought to override considerations of historical period style'. Strong words from the scholar who only the night before had rendered a beautiful performance of the Bach sonatas for viola da gamba as only one who is intimately knowledgeable about Baroque musical practices could.

A diametrically opposite view was taken by Neal Zaslaw. Typifying the artificial dichotomy between the intellectual and objective on the one hand, and the intuitive and technically brilliant on the other hand as 'absurd schizophrenia', Zaslaw examined three case studies in performance practice (the double dotting controversy; a 1780 Florentine engraving of a concert; orchestral recordings from the first half of the century), arguing that 'well informed performances and musically sensitive historical research are reciprocal activities, each shedding light on the other'.

Examining Bach's and Rameau's arrangements of their own music, Zvi Meniker introduced still another angle to the problematic notion of 'composer's intentions'. How can the incontrovertible evidence that these 'indefatigable arrangers', as well as numerous earlier ones, had changed as well as left open options for various instrumentations be reconciled with the claim that the original sound is a vital component of the music? How can we establish their compositional intentions? In view of the fact that composers seem to have constantly changed their intentions, could an arrangement, either by the composer or by someone else, be superior to the original?

Though neither analysed and defined, nor even mentioned as such, it seems clear that in the background of Meniker's, as well as of other conference references to the notions of 'composer's intentions' and 'correctness', lurks the implicit norm of Leo Treitler's 'paradigm of literacy'. (See L. Treitler, 'Oral, written and literate process in the transmission of medieval music', *Speculum*, lvi (1981), p.473.) The cumulative weight of the various discussions enhanced still further—at least in this reviewer's mind—the conviction of the inadequacy, and hence the disservice, of the deeply ingrained 'paradigm of literacy' for so much of western music.

Indeed, László Somfai's fascinating comparative analysis of Bartók's recorded performances of his own music raised the question of the adequacy of the 'paradigm of literacy' for any western music, well known claims and protestations to the contrary by some contemporary composers notwithstanding. The automatic acceptance of the 'original' or urtext as superior to later versions must be questioned in view of the recorded evidence that Bartók constantly changed tempos, dynamics, ornamentations and even pitch material when performing his own music. This led Somfai to the conclusion that 'a piece of music is a living and changing phenomenon. The final version, in spite of the composer's repeated efforts, is more or less a fiction.'

Thus, if one may generalize from Bartók's case, the nature of his creative process, combined with the evidence of his own performance, serve to underline the problematic nature of severing the work from its performance. Interestingly enough, this relativistic approach, supported by evidence culled from the practice of one of the greatest 20th-century composers, was countered by a positivistic claim regarding the music of the earlier composer considered—Guilluame de Machaut. Discussing the limits of the performer's decisions regarding musica ficta, Jehoash Hirshberg argued that since Machaut's manuscripts were supervised by him personally, they represent his compositional intentions. Hence, 'signed accidentals should be taken seriously as representing compositional decisions.'

Ensemble Project Ars Nova, in addition to giving two superb concerts of 14th-century music, also provided an illuminating as well as sobering glimpse into the

performer's workshop. Together with the other performers they enriched the discussion with expressions I have rarely, if ever, encountered at musicological conferences: 'It feels so and so'; 'to live with a piece'; 'to tell a story'. These expressions drove home the performer's need 'to throw away the score' in order to interiorize the music, to make it his own in order to be able to perform it with conviction, i.e. authentically.

The perennial issue of 'which instrument for which repertory' received a fresh airing in Malcolm Bilson's richly demonstrated exposition on 'what role, if any, do instruments have in realizing musical texts'. Bilson, for whom 'the instrument is not simply a tool, but a guide', became gradually aware of the limitations of the modern piano for performing Mozart and Schubert, among others. Exemplifying his point by constantly moving between the 'modern' Steinway grand (actually designed in the 1870s) and his own early Graf, Bilson convincingly demonstrated how technological advancement does not necessarily enhance, but may even obstruct the composer's stylistic intentions. More than any other important technical improvement (such as thicker felt hammers and heavier strings) it was the Steinway-introduced innovation of overstringing which revolutionized piano construction by affording a hitherto unknown equalization and smoothness of the entire range. It is precisely this new quality which, Bilson claims, makes the modern grand inadequate for Mozart, for in order to let the right hand sing, the player must suppress the left hand, whereas on early pianos the desired balance is achieved naturally. This led Bilson to the seemingly sacrilegious but actually stylistically sound conclusion, which I take to be symptomatic of the self-contradictory attitudes and practices of many a performing pianist, namely that since the modern piano cannot do what Mozart composed, following the *instruktive Ausgabe* may be preferable to following the urtext.

Like the two philosophers participating in the symposium, Cyril Ehrlich, whose contribution to various important social and economic aspects of musical life in the recent past needs no intruduction to the readers of this journal, also provided a welcome, albeit pessimistic perspective and cultural context for other, more detailed discussions. The relativistic, 'anything goes' cultural approach which replaced the disintegrating 'idea of progress' bred, Ehrlich claims, 'an anarchy of taste'. Typifying the great cultural divide of the early 1960s by both the rise of pop and rock music and that of the early music movement, Ehrlich suggested that their concurrent appearance was not coincidental. Severely criticizing the 'priests of authenticity' whose 'devotion to niceties of text and timbre may be remote from soundbite audiences and practical performance outside ... the recording studio', he nevertheless, as if by default, believes they fulfil an important stop-gap cultural role for they, at least, discriminate and select, and by so doing 'give us a chance that music as a living art may survive'.

Limitation of space precludes reporting on papers given by Don Harran, Shai Burstyn, Eitan Ornoy, Anthony Rooley, Viola De Hoog and Marten Root, all of whom addressed various aspects of the uneasy, indeed problematical relationships between so-called historical performance practice and its application in live performance for late 20th-century audiences.

Considered together, the symposium papers and discussions point to a noticeable move away from notoriously positivistic views towards more relaxed, even relativistic approaches to the central issues of early music—above all, to the very notion of 'authenticity'. In so far as the Jerusalem symposium may have successfully manifested some of the typical current trends in the early music movement, its deliberations may be indicative, albeit partially, of the state of the art in the mid-1990s.

Lucy Robinson

The 'ffantazia manner'

Between 7 and 9 July 1995 members of the Viola da Gamba Society of Great Britain gathered at York University (alongside a colourful array of bishops at synod) for a conference on 'The fantasia in England from Alfonso Ferrabosco II to Henry Purcell'. This event—deftly organized by Lynn Hulse and Caroline Wood—was the society's tribute to the last composer of fantazias, marking the tercentenary of his death. It attracted delegates from the Lute Society and the Viola da Gamba Society of America.

Bruce Bellingham and Christopher Field opened the proceedings at the beginning of the 17th century with papers on Ferrabosco II. Bellingham focused on forms of artistic emulation apparent in Ferrabosco's work, and brought his points splendidly to life by playing his own illustrations with assistance from the Rose Consort. Field proposed that the fantazia as a form invites revision—*vide* Byrd, Dowland, Lawes and Locke—and shared with us his discoveries concerning Ferrabosco's refinements,