Richard Taruskin

Tradition and authority

Although I have written about Mozart and about Mozart performances, I am not a card-carrying Mozartean. Why, then, was I asked to address the Lincoln Center conference? It must have been because of my role in our ongoing War of the Buffoons, our dialogue of ancient and modern performance practitioners and theorists. In the spirit of buffoonery, then, let me change the subject. Let's take a break from Mozart and talk about Brahms. And then let's talk about Schubert, Prokofiev and the Maoris of New Zealand. And all the while we will be talking about Mozart just the same; because 'Mozart', as we all know perfectly well, is not just Mozart. If Mozart were just Mozart, would we have spent 1991 having fits over him?

Modern? Historical?

My position in the War of the Buffoons can be simply stated. I have suggested that the ancients and moderns ought to exchange labels. What is usually called 'modern performance' is in fact an ancient style, and what is usually called 'historically authentic performance' is in fact a modern style. I have set this position out in a number of essays and reviews that have appeared over the last decade.[1] I can give their gist by briefly analysing the latest salvo from the pamphlet wars: a piece by John Eliot Gardiner promoting his new recording of the Brahms Requiem.[2]

It observes all the usual conventions, beginning with the opening confession: 'I used to find Brahms' Requiem a maudlin, rather depressing work.' Tchaikovsky's dismal assessment of Brahms is thrown in as corroboration. The culprit, of course, is 'misconception, anachronism and stylistic accretions, all conspiring towards dating [the work] and removing it from currency.' But then comes revelation. With the right instruments, the right tempo and the right players ('whose daily fare [Brahms] isn't') the Requiem stands revealed as 'radiant, full-blooded, and optimistic'. Gardiner manages to praise his own lean-cuisine recipe by identifying it as the composer's: 'For all its harmonic richness there is not one gram of excess fat or indulgence in Brahms' [sic] handling of his [sic] orchestra, and with the chorus in full cry he [sic] creates an awesome dynamic curve.' Even the conductor's interpretive freedom is licensed by the composer's authority: tempo rubato in this performance, for instance, is founded not on the style of earlier performers—the baleful 'crypto-Wagnerian approach' that had sapped the work's vitality—but on certain 'wiggly lines pencilled into the conducting score' Brahms used at the first performance, representing 'his sense of rubato', not yours or mine (or Gardiner's).

It is easier than usual to decode the message here. Far from a restoration, Gardiner and his players have accomplished a radical defamiliarization, achieved by means of a determined literalism, and governed by an ideal of fleet coolness and light that is wholly born of ironized 20th-century taste. The involuntary giveaway is the calling of Brahms' contemporary, Tchaikovsky, as witness to the impoverishing effects of 'misconception, anachronism and stylistic accretion'. It is more obvious than ever that a performance so promoted is not a historically correct performance but a politically correct performance.

By now many readers will be feeling a familiar impatience with me. Why do I persist in debunking the hype rather than criticizing the performance itself? Why do I seem to dismiss (or as one of my exasperated critics has put it, 'compulsively deride')[3] a movement that has so many beautiful achievements to its credit? Why am I so concerned with motives rather than with results?

But I have never derided the movement or the performances—or even the players. The most quoted line I have ever penned is the one in which I welcomed Roger Norrington as 'the next great Beethoven conductor'.[4] And though I have seemed at times thereafter to take Norrington rather severely to task,[5] he has not worn out his welcome with me. While never accepting their claims to historicity, I have had no less enthusiastic things to say about the work of Nicholas McGegan in Handel, Nikolaus Harnoncourt in Bach and, in Mozart, Frans Brüggen, Malcolm Bilson and John Eliot Gardiner, among many others.[6]

Regarding the movement itself I have always held that, as a symptomatically modern phenomenon, it is not historical but *is* authentic. It is a message I have had great difficulty in getting across to musicians, because so many have invested so heavily in the false belief that authenticity can derive only from historical correctness. To deny the latter necessarily implies to them a denial of the former. They simply do not hear me when I say that

what 'historical' performers have actually accomplished is far more important and valuable than what they claim to have done. My reputation is now that of a hostile debunker, and it is as a debunker that I now find myself angrily debunked.

All I have ever debunked, however, has been the hype; and I persist in this disreputable waste of time, as many have called it, precisely because I want to rescue the notion of authenticity from that of historicity. I feel it is an urgent business for three reasons: first, because some of my musicologist colleagues have been throwing their weight—and that of our discipline generally—on the side of what amounts in my opinion to a dishonest claim of privilege; second, because the selective reading of historical evidence in support of an approved modern style has actually led to the repression of certain aspects of historical practice that might be very healthy to revive; third, because a more authentic understanding of what authenticity entails might make classical music more relevant to human needs and thus prolong its life in our culture.

I put my thesis most concisely, and most explicitly, in a short essay I published in the summer of 1990 in the Arts and Leisure section of the Sunday *New York Times*.[7] Intending the piece for the music page, I gave it a title that I hoped would make the main point inescapable: 'It's Not Historical—It's Much Better Than That'. When the Arts and Leisure staff decided to run it on the front page, the title had to be revised to include the word 'music', so my editor substituted 'The Modern Sound of Early Music'. But when they decided to promote it from second to top lead, the task of putting a head to it passed out of the hands of Arts and Leisure to the higher editorial echelons. Scanning the essay, the Assistant Managing Editor of the paper found a phrase he couldn't resist, and emblazoned it on top, even though it distorted the meaning of the piece in just the way I had hoped to avoid. The title that saw print—'The Spin Doctors of Early Music'—looked like a slander, and so I was not surprised to find intelligent musicians again misreading my message and accusing me, in the words of one irate letter-writer, of attempting 'to discredit the Early Music movement and the performance esthetic it has engendered'.[8]

Who speaks for the Maori?

Along with the brickbats, however, came a communication from one who did not misunderstand: an anthropologist at the University of Kansas, who wrote with the welcome news that my article 'resonates beautifully with some recent developments in anthropology and in history'. His letter, accompanied by a reference to one of his own recent publications, went on:

> I was particularly pleased [that] you avoided the trap of debunking 'historical' performances as inauthentic. Your analysis of how these represent contemporary values is convincing, and the point that a claim of reviving the past is actually a way of being original in today's world of music is a nice turn of the screw. One further turn is to recognize that essays like yours and mine are themselves reflections of our present orientations—specifically, the decenteredness and play of postmodern culture.[9]

Needless to say, I was elated to read this, and lost no time in looking up my correspondent's work, proceeding from there more deeply into anthropological and ethnomusicological terrain. It has been an education for me, and has led my considerations of the cultural meaning of musical performance practice to a new conceptual plane, and to a new evaluation of its socio-political significance. This article is offered as a preliminary account of the new direction I have been exploring, and the new questions it has raised for me.

My correspondent, Professor Allan Hanson, is a specialist in Maori culture. His article, which has been a newsmaker in his field,[10] is called 'The Making of the Maori: Culture Invention and Its Logic'.[11] What he has discovered is that aspects of Maori cultural tradition, including aspects as central as their mythology and their account of their origins as a people, were invented by the European anthropologists who studied them in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and who—like the pioneers of 'historical performance' as I have described them—supplemented isolated bits of observed or collected lore with connective tissue that was heavily coloured by their own theories and prejudices.

This realization gave rise, on the one hand, not only to post-colonialist guilt,[12] but also to severe epistemological jitters among conservative anthropologists who felt—like some of my colleagues engaged in performance-practice research—that the legitimacy of their activity was under threat, and who tended therefore to resist or denounce a line of inquiry and reasoning that raised sceptical 'questions about the nature of cultural reality and whether the information that anthropologists [or music historians] produce can possibly qualify as knowledge about that reality.'[13] On the other hand, the new findings were resisted by the Maori themselves, who—like today's 'historical' performers—had embraced the invented traditions as their authentic heritage, and drew from them their sense of cultural identity.

So as to avoid offending Maori sensibilities, Hanson relates, New Zealand scholars of white European ('Pakeha') stock have had to moderate or repress their critique.[14] This parallels the way I have been accused of wishing to harm or kill the historical performance movement by denying its *raison d'être.*

Hanson argues that these findings should in themselves lead neither to rejection of the ethnographic enterprise nor to the delegitimation of Maori traditions, whatever their origins. 'The fact that culture is an invention, and anthropology one of the inventing agents, should not engender suspicion or despair', he writes. In a like manner, I would contend, the fact that historical performance practice is an invention, and musicology one of the inventing agents, does not in itself call the authenticity of its products into question. Citing a wide variety of recent ethnographic studies involving peoples as diverse as the modern Greeks, the Quebecois, and the Hawaiian islanders, Hanson concludes that 'when people invent their own tradition it is usually to legitimate or sanctify some current reality or aspiration'. Among the newer generations of anthropologists, he writes, tradition is now generally 'understood quite literally to be an invention designed to serve contemporary purposes', and he quotes a colleague who defines tradition as 'an attempt to read the present in terms of the past by writing the past in terms of the present.'[15] That I believe this formulation to be wholly applicable to the current performance scene should be obvious. I have been saying it for years, almost in the same words. Not that I was by any means the first to do so: in his early essay, 'On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life', Nietzsche wrote, 'we try to give ourselves a new past from which we should have liked to descend instead of the past from which we actually descended.'[16]

But who needs Nietzsche? Each of us can confirm the truth of the observation introspectively. We all value our personal pasts and heritages selectively and create from them a personal mythology on which our sense of personal identity (read: authenticity) largely depends. Any historian or biographer who deals professionally with memoirs as source material has had to face the issue of constructed identity. (Having devoted long years to investigating Stravinsky I know this as well as anyone: I soon found, moreover, that it was not enough merely to catalogue the composer's forgetfulnesses, mendacities and (self-)deceptions; they turned out to be the very stuff of the Stravinsky character, as manifested not only in the memoirs but in the music.) Writ larger, the same point applies to whole cultures and civilizations; what Hanson says about the Maoris is no different from what many cultural critics have been saying about us Pakehas. (Martin Bernal, for example, has devoted a major study to demonstrating that we trace Western civilization back to an 'ancient Greece' that never existed until it was invented in the 18th century by the same theorists of classicism whose descendants invented the 'Classical Period' to canonize the fine art of music in the West.)[17]

From all of this, Hanson suggests, 'it follows that the analytical task is not to strip away the invented portions of culture as inauthentic, but to understand the process by which they acquire authenticity.'[18] Just so. It is the process we want to investigate, so as to demystify it and perhaps free our imaginations to respond to a wider variety of stimuli, including stimuli from history, than our current historical performance orthodoxy allows. In previous studies I have concentrated on identifying that orthodoxy with modernism, our 'tradition of the new', and on tracing its rise. Having said something about why it happened, I want to broach the question of how.

The engine of change

The assimilation of performance style to the tradition of the new was accompanied by a heavy assault on another kind of tradition, what from here on I shall call the 'oral tradition'. By 'oral tradition' I do not mean necessarily a mouth-to-mouth tradition, but any tradition that is founded on listening and emulating. It is the ordinary handing-down from performer to performer that keeps musical repertories alive. Though we tend to think of the Western musical tradition as a literate one, permanently preserved in written artefacts, the written artefacts have always been mediated by oral traditions of the kind I am describing, as the more reflective historical musicologists—and particularly medievalists—are well aware.[19]

Ethnomusicologists go further: Charles Seeger asserted that 'writing cannot be read—either in song or upon an instrument—without recourse to . . . oral tradition',[20] though he recognized that, unless specially instructed,

> musicians can hardly be expected to regard the term seriously in speaking of a Beethoven symphony. They would recognize the role of oral transmission in the fine art of music if it were explained to them. But they would know it as plain 'tradition'—the tradition of Joachim, Caruso, or De Reszke, or of Palestrina or Bach. In the former cases [Joachim, Caruso, De Reszke], they would be referring to very concrete musical realities ['performance practice'], transmitted largely by word of mouth. In the latter [Palestrina, Bach], they would be referring to substantial stylistic generalizations ['counterpoint'] conventionally dealt with in written words.[22]

Until very recently these 'concrete musical realities' were taken very seriously indeed; conformity with oral tradition used to be what conferred authenticity on interpretation. As recently as the 1960s Josef Krips was proud to tell a San Francisco critic that he had his Mozart direct from . . . Zemlinsky.[22] Some decades earlier Arthur Friedheim, a pupil of Rubinstein and Liszt, found it altogether natural to edit the works of Chopin to reflect his teachers' performances, since their interpretations were integral to what he conceived as the authentic Chopin tradition. Sergey Rakhmaninov, as record collectors may recall, also welcomed Rubinstein's mediation of the Chopin tradition, taking the reprise of the funeral march in Chopin's Second Sonata at Rubinstein's famous *fortissimo* instead of the composer's *piano.* Whereas in the 1930s objection to such contamination was generally written off as mere 'purism' or pedantry, by the 1980s even a musicologist known for her scepticism of scholarly orthodoxy declared herself to be 'astonished' that such things were once tolerated.[23]

Modern musicology has an altogether different concept of authenticity, and hence an altogether different concept of tradition. A great deal of recent historical-performance theorizing has had for its purpose the express denial or debunking of Seeger's 'concrete musical realities'. There is by now a sizeable polemical literature devoted to proving that what Seeger called 'the oral tradition of writing' in Western art music does not exist.

Robert Winter, writing in *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments* in 1984, wrought some subtle and subversive changes (as Nicholas Kenyon admiringly called them)[24] in a text Howard Mayer Brown had written some ten years earlier for the article on 'Performing practice' in the original *New Grove Dictionary.* Accepting Seeger's 'concrete musical realities' for styles and genres that had never fallen out of active repertory, Brown had prefaced the discussion with the subhead 'Continuity of tradition', and stated that 'the study of performing practice in music since 1750 is fundamentally different from the study of earlier performing practice', since 'there is no "lost tradition" separating the modern performer from the music of Haydn, Mozart, and their successors comparable with that which separates him from Machaut, or even from Monteverdi.' Winter revised the subhead to read 'Apparent continuity of tradition', and modified Brown's statement to read as follows:

> Superficially, there is a fundamental difference between the study of performing practice before 1750 and the study of it after that date. Unlike the music of Machaut or Monteverdi, the repertory from Haydn to Elliott Carter has been performed continuously since its creation . . . But on closer examination neither the assumption of an unbroken performing history nor the corollary of an unbroken performance tradition stands up.[25]

Winter's 'apparent continuity of tradition' chimes with Roger Norrington's dismissive phrase, 'the perceived orchestral tradition', to denote what his performances have supplanted.[26] The reasons for calling such traditions illusory have to do in the first place, of course, with changes in hardware, but also (in Winter's case) with asserted disruptions in transmission: 'Haydn', he writes, 'left no accounts of Mozart's performing style', and 'the degree of contact between Mozart and the young Beethoven in 1787 has never been reliably established.' One can well imagine an ethnomusicologist like Seeger wondering that such considerations are deemed relevant to the transmission of performance style (or even composition style); he would doubtless have chalked it up to the historical musicologist's habit of fetishizing individuals and ignoring groups.

Both Winter and Neal Zaslaw, the latter writing in the recent New Grove handbook on *Performance Practice: Music after 1600,* heap scorn on the notion of precept and pedagogy as maintainers of continuous tradition. Krips' oral reception of Mozart from Zemlinsky or Friedheim's oral transmission of Chopin via Rubinstein and Liszt are for them only so much irresponsible complacency. Zaslaw, echoing a parallel statement by Winter, writes:

> Many 20th-century pianists could say that they had studied with someone who studied with Leschetizky who studied with Czerny who studied with Beethoven who studied with Haydn who knew Mozart. . . . But this patrimony, while it had indeed been continually handed down from generation to generation, had not remained unchanged. On the contrary, it is now clear beyond reasonable doubt that each generation modified what it received from its teachers' generation until the manner of playing music of the Classical period had been altered almost beyond recognition.[27]

Who ever doubted it? The idea that 'real' traditions are time capsules and only spurious ('apparent', 'perceived') traditions modify what they transmit is seriously entertained by no one. By such a definition there have been no real traditions; to imply as much is fine strategy for undermining confidence in existing ones. But traditions, according to any informed definition, modify what they transmit virtually by definition, if not necessarily by design, working their transformations not only through the active intervention of the critical faculty, but also by what we might call interference. Oral traditions,

especially in a musical culture as variegated as the Western fine art of music has become, are multiple, always contaminated and highly suggestible, receptive to outside influence.[28]

'Mainstream' performers and performer-editors have always tacitly (if not, like Friedheim, openly) recognized that tradition did not merely preserve but adapted and potentially enriched what it sustained, modifying both the 'objects' transmitted and the 'subjects' who did the transmitting. While the 'content' of the music—the part preserved in writing—could be thought of as fixed, its 'style'—the manner in which it was presented—could be supplemented or updated practically without limit, without any sense that the object had been violated. Mozart or Schoenberg or Beecham *vis-à-vis* Handel, Berlioz or Wagner *vis-à-vis* Gluck, Mahler or Walton or Webern *vis-à-vis* Bach—all were perpetuators of oral tradition, paradoxical though it seems to say so, seeing their work as part of the legitimate life-support system that kept contemporary art in contact with yesterday's—and vice versa.

Cultural anthropologists and ethnomusicologists, perhaps needless to say, accept these conditions as given. Their literature emphasizes over and over again that traditions as they have existed in the real world have never been anything other than engines of change—perpetual, gradual, regenerative, unstoppable change. Few, if any, 'persist . . . in opposing the notion "traditional music", like some ever-receding ethnographic horizon, to whatever it is that the folk are (alas!) actually performing, hearing, and dancing to now.'[29] Seeger boldly defined tradition as 'the handing on of acquired characteristics', observing that 'whether or not acquired characteristics can be inherited biologically, there can be no doubt that they are inherited socially.' Tradition, on this view, is the means by which 'the younger members of a group can begin where the older leave off.' And for all their guaranteed inconstancy, traditions are for Seeger 'the principal survival mechanisms [of] human culture communities.' As 'a function of culture' music tradition is inescapably 'a dynamic conception'. If its products (and, I am tempted to add, its practices) appear to accumulate, *that* is the illusion ('entirely subjective and a direct result of our individual existences in general space-time'). On the contrary, 'the repertoire as a whole and its relation to the culture . . . are in a constant state of flux.'[30] These 40-year-old formulations of Seeger graphically anticipate the recent theories of cultural invention promulgated by Hanson and company, and apply to 'the fine art of music' (as Seeger calls it) as well as they do to the folk musics that were his principal concern.

So the difference between a Krips and a Winter or between a Friedheim and a Zaslaw in their attitude toward the oral tradition has nothing to do with their respective consciousness of change. All have been fully conscious of change. The difference lies in the value placed on change. It is wholly a matter of ideology. For the 'ancients', nurtured on the ideal of progress plus faith in the individual genius of performers as well as composers, change was adaptation, survival, even improvement; for the 'moderns', heirs to existential *Angst* plus a heavy dose of Germanic philology, change is loss, corruption, debasement, even vandalism.[31] (For us happy-go-lucky postmoderns, with our fluid, 'decentred' view, change is interesting.) Tradition as such cannot honestly be denied, only deplored. In deploring it, Winter and Zaslaw have plenty of distinguished company, going back at least as far as Mahler ('Tradition ist Schlamperei') and Strauss ('the last bad performance').

Cheating at Telephone

But if socially sanctioned custom is to be dethroned as arbiter of style, what can replace the empowering sense of direct possession and authoritative transmission such custom enables? Obviously one must draw one's energy from some other power source, some other authority. But which? Whose? The easy answer, of course, is the composer's, direct. Indeed, the idea of the composer as oracle, a vestigial residue of the Romantic cult of genius, has until quite recently been a foundation stone of modern performance ethics, invoked routinely by performers (especially conductors, and particularly when arguing with soloists), by musicologists and by critics.

In the case of outstanding composer-conductors like Mahler, it is easy enough to see the anti-traditional cult of the composer's authority for what it is, namely an assertion of personal authority. He debunked tradition in the heat of battle, in an effort to tame obstreperous performers. Among the *Schlampereien* he is said to have rooted out of his performances were the traditional appoggiaturas in Mozartean recitative, something the composer never imagined doing without. Mahler's alliance with the composer and his putative intentions was a way of pulling rank, and the composer was among those outranked. The same goes for Toscanini, who was known to claim alliance with an even higher authority. He once 'apologized' to a musician he had insulted during one of his famous tantrums by protesting, 'the trouble is, God tells me how He wants this music played, and you—you get in His way!'[32] Call it God or call it

Mozart, the *force majeure* does not vary, and it always comes from within.

I would insist, in fact, that all who claim to speak directly for the composer are in fact asserting their own authority, even if they do not claim divine inspiration. I call it cheating at Telephone (known in Britain, I'm told, as Chinese Whispers), the game in which A whispers a message to B, B to C, and so on, until the last player says it aloud to general hilarity. Not content to accept the whispered message from the one seated next to you, you get up from your seat and tiptoe round behind the other players to the first chair, which by now of course is empty; you ask the nearest person, 'Pardon me, is this place occupied?' and, being assured that it is vacant, you sit yourself down in it and proclaim yourself the winner.

That obviously defeats the purpose of the game. The ploy, increasingly transparent, has been getting rare. Its most recent prominent advocate was Edward T. Cone, in an essay published a decade ago under the title 'The Authority of Music Criticism', where that authority was located precisely in its congruence with the composer's conception, 'insofar as it can be ascertained' by research and analysis—even where it may turn out to have been 'subconscious'![33] One does not have to be a professed post-structuralist to see Cone's claim as circular and self-validating; but so is any claim to alliance with that vacant chair.

Le texte, c'est moi

It is more common today to invest final authority in the 'text', the artifact that, under Seeger's definition of 'the oral tradition of writing', represents the object negotiated by tradition. The text is rescued, as it were, from tradition (and, as we shall see, from the composer) and enshrined as autonomous, eternally fixed. There have been two distinct phases to this process.

The earlier one, which still has many adherents, was the 'Urtext' movement, in which the score as the composer left it was regarded as a complete and self-sufficient directive, the incontestable final arbiter. There remained a site of contention, however, namely the unresolvable question as to which manifestation of the text (fair copy? first edition? corrected *Handexemplar?*) was entitled to the privileged status. The difficulty of hunting down that chimerical beast known as the *Fassung letzter Hand,* embodying the idealized final intentions of the author, finally led to Phase 2, epitomized by James Webster's much-repeated maxim that the score contains the truth and nothing but the truth, but not the whole truth.

On this view, the concept of text was enlarged to include not only the composer's actual notation but written evidence of all kinds (sketches, treatises, payment records, seating plans). As the notion of text expanded, the authority of the composer was correspondingly diminished. If we now expand the notion yet further to encompass all concrete physical objects inherited directly from the past (such as authentic period instruments), we shall come very close to the idea of textual authority that currently reigns among modernist musicians, including the historical kind.

Here, too, it is easy enough to show that ultimate authority rests not in the texts but in the interpreters (for texts do not speak for themselves); that texts, no less than composers, are routinely outranked, if only by other texts or types of text; that when choice among texts is exercised, the choice is irreducibly arbitrary, however elaborately fiat be disguised as rule; hence (again) that all non-traditional or anti-traditional authority is discretionary authority; and, finally, that 'discretionary' is just a euphemism for personal and subjective.

The surliest attack on oral tradition I have ever seen was made by a committed textualist, Arthur Mendel (like Mahler and Toscanini a conductor, but one recently turned scholar), in an essay published under the title 'The Services of Musicology to the Practical Musician'. The diatribe, in which the word 'tradition' never appears without impugning scare-quotes, took the form of a huge gratuitous footnote to a discussion of the musicologist's primary task, as Mendel saw it—that of preparing editions of old music. It makes fascinating reading not only for its rhetorical excess, but for the paradoxical way it answers the inevitable question: If tradition is abolished, what remains?

> Sometimes a significant part of the work of ascertaining the original meaning of notation consists in clearing away a mass of 'tradition' attaching to the performance of a particular work or type of work.
>
> In the exercise of his interpretative imagination, a great performer, whose playing or singing carries particular conviction, introduces a hastening or slowing down of the tempo, a *sforzato* or a *piano subito,* a *Luftpause* or a *fermata,* that constitutes an integral part of his conception of the piece. Lesser men, then, in search of the secret of the compelling power of the greater artist's interpretation, grasp at the details in which it obviously differs from others—details which the great interpreter has not found explicit in the notation but which have been suggested to him by his own re-creative imagination. And the lesser men imagine that if they imitate these details they will achieve an effect similar to that of the performance in which the details occurred.

Out of these imitations, and imitations of these imitations, are born performance 'traditions', which by the time they have earned that impressive name have usually become meaningless distortions guarded with opinionated obstinacy and a sort of guild or secret-society pedantry by those who have no conception of how they arose or what purpose they originally served. Probably few of them have any connection with the composer. Whatever their origin, the musicologist must help the practical musician to free himself from any supposed obligations imposed by them, and thus to make his own direct contact with the notation in which the composer has symbolized his intention and arrive at his own independent understanding of its meaning.[34]

Like so many others, Mendel represents 'tradition' as a sort of Nibelheim, populated exclusively by the stupid and the complacent, measured against some Valhalla (here the abode of the intuitive elect).[35] The really glaring contradiction in his argument involves the relationship between the performer, whether 'greater' or 'lesser', the composer, and the notation. 'Traditions' are rejected, 'whatever their origin' (!), because they have no *demonstrable* connection with the composer. To the extent that they are not inherent in the notation, even the composer's intentions are thus thrown out of court. Anything unwritten is therefore unknowable and irrelevant to the performer's 'obligation'. (Also apparently unknowable is what distinguishes interpretive licence born of a great artist's 'integral conception' from 'imitations of imitations'; the distinction is groundlessly invidious.) But who decides what is knowable from the writing and therefore binding?

Since it is presumably the 'lesser' performer whom the musicologist addresses—the 'greater' being exempted by virtue of his greatness—and since the lesser artist is so defined precisely by his incapacity for 'independent understanding', it is not clear what sort of freedom such a musician enjoys by virtue of 'direct contact with the notation in which the composer has symbolized his [unknowable] intention.' In fact, by making the edition, the musicologist has undertaken to mediate between the 'lesser' performer and the notation. Contact is not direct after all. What imposes an authentic 'obligation', then, is the covertly paternalistic edition. Ultimate authority, on Mendel's view, rests not with the composer, not with the notation, but with Papa Doc, the musicologist.

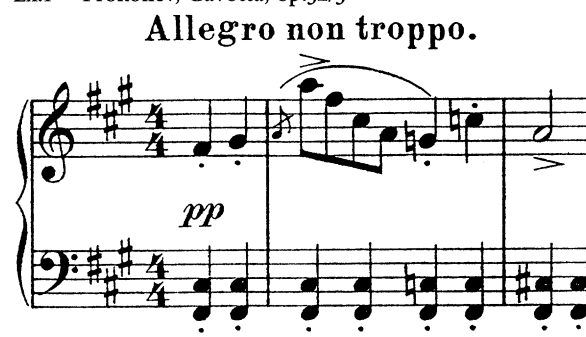
The price we pay

Text-fetishism, the exaltation of scores over those who read or write them, has seriously distorted contemporary performance practice—notoriously so in the case of Mozart's concertos, where there has been an effort on the part of some musicologists to minimize the spontaneous aspects of their performance and, by forcing evidence, to place arbitrary quasi-Mendelian limits on the freedom of performers. Anachronistic notions of textual fidelity ('*Werktreue*'), of form (e.g. the 'double exposition', first described as such by Ebenezer Prout in 1895), and of 'classical' concert decorum are projected back onto a repertory that actually embodied an aesthetic closer to that of today's pop culture.[36] It is evident that Mozart's actual performance practices are of far less interest to today's performers and those who instruct them than his texts. As a performer, Mozart is just part of the ignorable 'tradition'.[37]

But then so is Prokofiev, whom I cite not only because he too had an anniversary celebration in 1991, but because we have evidence of his performance practice such as we shall never have for Mozart. His own recordings of his piano music are available. But they have had virtually no impact on later performers, many of whom must surely have listened to them.

Consider the *Gavotta*, op.32/3, composed in 1918 and recorded in 1932. The composer plays the opening pair of staccato crotchets with a hesitation that leaves no doubt that they are an upbeat (meanwhile identifying the genre: 18th-century gavottes begin with an upbeat of a minim duration). The slurred quaver arpeggio that follows on the downbeat is rushed in compensation, seemingly in accordance with the old rule of tempo rubato, which Prokofiev may well have learned from his piano teacher, Anna Yesipova, not only the pupil but the former wife of Leschetizky ('who studied with Czerny who studied with Beethoven' etc.), or picked up from the performances of any number of virtuosos active in Russia in the first decade of this century. Later on it appears that slightly rushing the tempo was part and parcel of Prokofiev's way of executing fast slurs (and this is corroborated by other recordings of his, notably that of the Third Piano Concerto).

Ex.1 Prokofiev, Gavotta, op.32/3



These features are completely absent in other recordings, for example the recent one by Boris Berman, an established Prokofiev specialist who has recorded the composer's complete works for piano for Chandos. To hear it is to be finally convinced that, since texts outrank performers even when the performer is the composer, texts outrank composers, too. Of the oral traditions in which the composer participated so conspicuously, the younger pianist is oblivious. (One can even imagine him setting the composer straight on the matter of tempo: 'It says here Allegro *non troppo*, Seryozha, *non troppo*!') For him dots and slurs are just dots and slurs, not tempo indications; he plays 'just what's written', assuming the adequacy of what's written to the definition of the music as played even in the face of audible evidence to the contrary. He has accepted the notion, a veritable oral tradition in itself (though put in writing by Mendel), that to imitate the composer's rendition would be a 'meaningless distortion'. So my own piano teacher told me when I brought the piece in to my lesson. 'But that's how Prokofiev plays it', I protested. 'I don't care', he parried, 'it's wrong.'

Sometimes one hears it said that deviant authorial performances like Prokofiev's of Prokofiev or Debussy's of Debussy are valuable because they establish or clarify the limits of acceptability. But that is no help. I still wonder why we are so obsessed with setting those limits. What makes the whole matter doubly ironic is that study of Prokofiev's performance in conjunction with the score shows his apparent licences to be perfectly consistent—that is, rule-bound—readings of the notation. There are even treatises that put such things in writing, though of course they do not mention Prokofiev. Of course I do not mean that we are to accept Prokofiev's performance of his own piece because it is corroborated by Türk, only that blind modernist prejudice against the unwritten is also deaf.[38]

As a thought-experiment, let's imagine for a moment that Prokofiev's version was played by Berman, and Berman's by Prokofiev. Would not 'Berman' now be dismissed out of hand as 'mannered'? But more to the point—would not 'Prokofiev's' literalistic rendition now assume *immense* authority, because it could now be used to bolster notions of *Werktreue*? It would now simplify rather than complicate our idea of what, exactly, defines or constitutes 'the piece'. A similar thought occurred to me at the Lincoln Center conference as I listened to Jacob Lateiner's loving description of the manuscript containing Mozart's Rondo in A minor, K511. I was fascinated by his account of a small alteration in the slurring at the end of the first phrase, and convinced when he characterized it as a stroke of genius. And yet, I had to wonder, would its sound, its effect, its meaning, or its genius be any different if, instead of occurring to Mozart in the act of writing the piece down, the change had occurred to Mr Lateiner in the course of practising or performing it? The answer must obviously be no, so far as the listener is concerned, and yet it is part and parcel of the *Werktreue* philosophy, as Mr Lateiner himself outlined it, that any such spontaneous tampering is forbidden. It is plainly tautological (though, like all tautologies, irrefutable) to argue that a genuine stroke of genius can occur only to the composer; yet that tautology is the very root of the Urtext ideology (even in its expanded form), and it is among the factors that have so stifled the creativity of classical musicians since Mozart's time.

Sometimes I wish we could somehow abolish scores without abolishing pieces—that is, return music to a fully oral tradition, but with our cherished repertory intact. At the very least, I think, we would pay more attention, as listeners, to the kinds of things that make individual performances treasurable, and, as performers, we would be more receptive to their charisma. Consider another case of 'mannerism', one that resonates curiously with Prokofiev's way of doing his gavotte. Artur Schnabel's recorded performance of the little Schubert *Moment musical* in F minor[39] used to be controversial. The slurred pairs of semiquavers (often slurred onto the following quaver) are given a familiar little push by the venerable Viennese pianist, who studied, like Prokofiev's teacher, with Leschetizky. (I remember being exhorted as an adolescent by another of my own teachers, 'If Schubert had wanted that, he would have written that'; to which I now would answer, 'How?') Also unexpected and unnotated (and related) are the little *Luftpausen* that come before the cadences on A♭. On the other hand, Schnabel doesn't make much of the notated dynamics.

The notated dynamics are more faithfully observed (and lots of unnotated ones added) by another, younger Viennese, Paul Badura-Skoda, whose performance[40] otherwise resembles Schnabel's a great deal. He, too, indulges in that unwritten lilt on the semiquaver pairs. Is he merely imitating the great man's invention? Was Schnabel imitating Leschetizky's? Does that mean, as Mendel would say, that they had 'no conception of how [it] arose or what purpose [it] originally served'? Or are we dealing, in effect, with two artists who know how to say *Zwirnknäuler*l?[41] It's a Viennese thing; Sviatoslav

Richter or Emil Gilels wouldn't understand, as we may hear in their recordings.[42]

But what, precisely, is its status? Does it go back to Schubert? Or does it represent the beginnings of 'alteration almost beyond recognition'? Is it just a 'perceived' or 'apparent' tradition? Is it sanctioned by authority? Whose? Does it possess authority? For whom? Does it have validity? What validates it? Should editors take note of it? Should they undertake to free performers from 'obligation' to it? Should critics endorse it? Should they condemn it? Should we draw the magic circle round 'the piece' wide enough to include all rhythmic variants? If not, where will we place the limits? What will fall outside? When you start considering such questions, Robert Donington's 'simple and categorical' retort to sceptics of performance-practice fundamentalism—'*Authenticity is congruity between music and performance*'—could hardly seem more complicated and indeterminate. '"Do it now as it was originally done" is no bad start for getting round to that', he further specifies.[43] But since it transpires that 'doing it as it was originally done' is exactly his definition of 'congruity', and his only one, the clarification only compounds ambiguity with another impregnable tautology.

Tradition redux?

A humanist has been defined as one who rejects authority but respects tradition.[44] Our liberal educations were founded on that precept. The history of our century should have convinced us all by now that the aesthetically seductive simplicities of determinism and utopianism have got to be resisted wherever they may surface, and that the endlessly renegotiated social contract, dowdy patchwork though it be, is the only cause worth defending. That is why I find it so dispiriting, and ultimately sinister, that so much of the rhetoric in our ongoing War of the Buffoons has taken the opposite tack, respecting authority and rejecting tradition.

That is the authentic rhetoric of modernism, all right, as epitomized in the latest blast from Generalissimo Boulez, who 'sing[s] the praises of amnesia' in a recent issue of *Early Music*.[45] Despite all the usual savagery of expression and violent imagery, his harangue is limp and quaint, for he naively mistook his audience. Far from the tribe of easily intimidated traditionalists he may have remembered from early music's age of antiquarian innocence, he was now addressing a readership of authoritarian amnesiacs every bit as intransigent as he. To shout 'there is no such thing as tradition'[46] won't cow this crowd; they have been shouting it for years. Boulez never voiced any more militant hostility toward tradition than Clive Brown, who elsewhere in the same issue debunks a whole slew of Haydn recordings on period instruments because the players have not totally expunged the memory of their training.[47]

It may be time for some counter-militancy—against authority, against utopia, against purity—on behalf of tradition as hermeneuts conceive it: cumulative, multiply authored, open, accommodating, above all *messy*, and therefore human. By all means let the stream of authentistic experimentation continue. At its best it is the best thing now going, and its commercial success is all the evidence we need of its authenticity. It is an authenticity born of its unquestionable relevance to our sense of ourselves at this moment, and to the culture we have invented. We like what is authentic because authentic is what we like. To seek any higher or more objective criterion is to confuse the goals of performance with those of research; that there is a difference I continue to insist.[48] Authentistic performance, being the loyal child not of antiquity but of modernity, is in this sense quite traditional. It stands firmly in the receiving line of that grand game of Telephone we call culture. Yet the hype continues to proclaim the ugly opposite, and as long as the Emperor continues to parade I shall be standing in the crowd with the other little boys.

I do see hopeful signs of counter-insurgency in some recent scholarly, critical and even practical work. In a wide-ranging manual for conductors currently in progress, David Epstein is attempting to revive (or assert) the ideal of proportional tempo. His thesis is certainly not free of utopianism (nor am I much impressed by his frequent appeals to biological or historical necessity). But his empirical surveys of tempo relationships in actual recorded performances have revealed the way oral tradition has often imposed proportional tempo relationships on works (such as the Schumann symphonies) whose explicit metronome indications have not been co-ordinated proportionally. What I find so refreshing and liberating is that, instead of turning this observation into a new stick for beating a tired old drum on behalf of the infallible composer-creator, Epstein has the courage to assert that in such cases the composer was wrong and tradition is right.[49] The social mediation of the rhythmic structure, he implies, has helped keep the music alive. That is what tradition is and does, and why it is valuable. Though it contradicts the most hallowed dogma of modernism to say so, the customer is not always wrong.

I think we are more open to this idea, even in the academy, than we used to be. I'd like to think that an audience of academic performance-practitioners might no longer react with so easy to laugh as the one I observed only a few years ago when a crusading scholar mocked a journalist for having called a traditional high note in Verdi a gift from the Italian people to the composer. But then reclaiming Verdi (and Donizetti, and Rossini) from the folk—which meant zealously textualizing them—was one of the ways in which Italian opera was redeemed for the canon in the 1960s and 70s. It is a measure of how far and how fast things have moved that a serious musician like David Epstein can now acknowledge and even approve the extent to which the German symphonic literature has become folk music.

That is obviously a postmodern attitude, but it is not new. It is far older, in fact, than the 'historical' ideology it is in process of supplanting. Not that historical performers will have no place in a decentred musical polity. Their special opportunity—once they get past the text-fetish and the bad conscience it breeds, and get truly historical—will be to point one possible way out of the desert of unspontaneous uncreativity in which classical music now languishes. They will only stand a chance of doing this, of course, if they aspire to say the next word, not have the last. They need to see themselves not as a substitute for the oral tradition, but as part of it.

And here, happily, I can end the sermon, because that is exactly what seems to be happening. Why has historical performance been improving so spectacularly over the last decade? Why do we hear so much less self-conscious downbeat bashing than we used to, so much less distracting *messa di voce*? It's not because the performers are reading better treatises (the treatises haven't changed), or because their hardware is improving (though of course it is). It's because they are not just chaining themselves to the documents. They are listening to and competing with one another, starting younger and with more experienced teachers, thinking of themselves increasingly as normal rather than as deviant or alienated members of musical society. In short, the movement has spawned a viable oral tradition. Around that authentic-modern product I admire so much a hardy social practice has been growing up that obeys its own dictates, has its own momentum, is becoming more and more eclectic, contaminated, suggestible. Is this just wishful thinking? Perhaps not; Alfred Brendel has sensed the same phenomenon: 'Principles, textbook rules and fixed ideas are [now] held in check by musicians for whom music is the sum of *all* its parts. Performances have become less dogmatic and more personal.'[50]

So the engine of change is chugging away. Acquired characteristics are being inherited socially. The younger members of the group are beginning where the older leave off. Soon everyone will be improvising cadenzas, embellishing arias, extemporizing over grounds in a gratifying spirit of play—or they will if we'll let them. So let's forget utopia. Cut the authoritarian propaganda; no more special pleading! Can we just stand back and let tradition have its way? I will if you will.

Richard Taruskin is Professor of Music at University of California, Berkeley. His edition of the Latin-texted works of Busnoys was published in 1990 by Broude Bros. He has contributed over 160 articles on Russian music to the New Grove Dictionary of Opera *and has written substantial books on Musorgsky and Stravinsky which are due for publication in 1992 and 1993 respectively.*

[1]For the most extended statement see 'The Pastness of the Present and the Presence of the Past', *Authenticity and Early Music,* ed. N. Kenyon (Oxford, 1988), pp.137–208.

[2]J. E. Gardiner, 'Brahms and the "Human" Requiem', *Gramophone,* lxvii (1991), pp.1809–10

[3]L. Treitler, Letter to the Editor, *New York Times,* Arts & Leisure, 23 September 1990, p.4

[4]R. Taruskin, 'Beethoven: The New Antiquity', *Opus,* iii, no.6 (October 1987), p.63, This time the protests came from the other side, e.g. Leo Black, ' . . . "More than Authenticity" ', *MT,* cxxxii (1991), p.65.

[5]R. Taruskin, 'Resisting the Ninth', *Nineteenth-Century Music,* xii (1988–9), pp.241–56

[6]R. Taruskin, 'Handel from Hungary', *Opus,* iv, no.1 (December 1987), pp.40–41; 'Facing Up, Finally, to Bach's Dark Vision', *New York Times,* Arts & Leisure, 27 January 1991, pp.25, 28; 'Mozart Symphonies: "Old" Tempos, "Early" Instruments', *Opus,* iv, no.1 (December 1987), pp.45–6; 'A Mozart Wholly Ours', *Musical America,* cx, no.3 (May 1990), pp.32–41

[7]R. Taruskin, 'The Spin Doctors of Early Music', *New York Times,* Arts & Leisure, 29 July 1990, pp.1, 21

[8]J. Richman, Letter to the Editor, *New York Times,* Arts & Leisure, 26 August 1990, p.3

[9]A. Hanson, personal communication, 29 July 1990

[10]See J. N. Wilford, 'Anthropology Seen as Father of Maori Lore', *New York Times,* 20 Feb 1990

[11]*American Anthropologist,* xci (1989), pp.890–902

[12]For examples of how colonial officials, and anthropologists studying colonial Africa, have authored and imposed 'traditions' on indigenous populations, see D. B. Coplan, 'Ethnomusicology and the Meaning of Tradition', *Ethnomusicology and Modern Music History,* ed. Stephen Blum *et al.* (Urbana and Chicago, 1990), pp.35–48.

[13]Hanson, 'The Making of the Maori', p.890

[14]Hanson, 'The Making of the Maori', p.895

[15]Hanson, 'The Making of the Maori', p.890. The quotation is from L. Lindstrom, 'Leftamap Kastom: The Political History of Tradition on Tanna, Vanuatu', *Mankind,* xiii (1982), pp.316–29; compare the formulation of E. B. Thompson, quoted in Coplan, 'Ethnomusicology', p.40: 'Tradition [is] dependent upon a symbolically constituted past whose horizons extend into the present.'

[16]F. Nietzsche, 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben', quoted in P. de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis,

2/1983), pp.149–50. Nietzsche continues: 'But this is also dangerous, because it is so difficult to trace the limit of one's denial of the past, and because the newly invented nature is likely to be weaker than the previous one.'

[17]M. Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization,* i: *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1987)

[18]Hanson, 'The Making of the Maori', p.898

[19]See R. Crocker, 'Is There Really a "Written Tradition" in Music?', an unpublished paper quoted and discussed in J. Kerman, 'A Few Canonic Variations', *Canons,* ed. Robert von Hallberg (Chicago, 1984), pp.177–95. Kenneth Levy, David Hughes, Leo Treitler and Hendrik van der Werf have also written extensively on the matter of 'orality' and its implications, unquestionably the hottest issue in medieval musicology today. For a checklist of this literature, see the bibliography following Levy's article, 'On Gregorian Orality', *JAMS,* xliii (1990), pp.185–227.

[20]C. Seeger, 'Oral Tradition', *Funk and Wagnall's Dictionary of Folklore* (New York, 1950), p.828

[21]Seeger, 'Oral Tradition', pp.825–6 (glosses in brackets mine)

[22]R. Commanday, 'Alexander Zemlinsky's Chance for the Spotlight', *San Francisco Chronicle,* Datebook, 17 February 1991, p.31

[23]R. R. Subotnik, 'On Grounding Chopin', *Music and Society,* ed. R. Leppert and S. McClary (Cambridge, 1987), p.111

[24]N. Kenyon, 'Introduction', *Early Music and Authenticity,* p.11

[25]*New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments,* iii, p.53

[26]D. Henahan, 'St Luke's Orchestra with its New Director', *New York Times,* 7 December 1990

[27]*Performance Practice: Music after 1600,* ed. H. M. Brown and S. Sadie (New York, 1989), p.207

[28]For a general discussion see B. Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology* (Urbana, 1983), chap.13.

[29]Coplan, 'Ethnomusicology', p.47, For more trenchant criticism of ethnographic nostalgia, see J. Porter, 'Muddying the Crystal Spring', *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music,* ed. B. Nettl and P. V. Bohlman (Chicago, 1991), pp.113–30.

[30]All quotes from Seeger in this paragraph are from 'Oral Tradition', p.826.

[31]'Vandalism' was the preferred term at the Lincoln Center conference, applied especially to editors. As to corruption, compare D. K. Holoman, Introduction to 'The 19th Century', *Performance Practice,* ed. Brown and Sadie, p.323: 'The proximity of the 19th century ensures that the central task in the study of its performance practice is to separate, among all the ore we have inherited, the practices that have survived unsullied from the past from those that have been corrupted by the vagaries of changing taste and fashion.'

[32]H. Taubman, *Music on my Beat* (New York, 1943), p.42. In this connection it is worth recalling the nickname Toscanini went by during his reign at La Scala; he was known as *il Dio* ('the God'): H. Sachs, *Toscanini* (Philadelphia, 1978), p.138

[33]*JAMS,* xxxiv (1981), pp.1–18; esp. pp.12–14

[34]A. Mendel *et al., Some Aspects of Musicology* (Indianapolis, 1957), pp.8–9

[35]Compare Philip Brett, who links traditional hostility toward tradition ('assimilating works *unthinkingly* to our mode of performing and perceiving' [italics added]) with more recent notions of enlightened discourse ('a sense of *difference*' [italics original]). See his 'Text, Context, and the Early Music Editor', *Authenticity and Early Music,* p.114; or, for a more explicit statement, 'Homosexuality and Music: A Conversation with Philip Brett', in L. D. Mass, *Homosexuality as Behavior and Identity* (New York, 1990), p.53.

[36]For a detailed discussion of these points see Taruskin, 'A Mozart Wholly Ours'.

[37]The one Mozart performer who actually tries to emulate Mozart the performer, Robert Levin, for that very reason remains an isolated and somewhat controversial figure in today's music world. As to the 'pop' aesthetic of Mozart's day and the reluctance of today's musicologists to acknowledge it, compare Mozart's famous description of the behaviour of the Paris audience at the première of his Symphony no.31: 'The audience, as I expected, said "Shh!" at the soft beginning [of the finale], and then, as soon as they heard the forte that followed, immediately began to clap their hands' (letter to his father, 3 July 1778) with Neal Zaslaw's commentary: 'The 1778 audience required new music and expressed its appreciation and understanding not only after each movement but—exceptionally—during a movement' (*Mozart's Symphonies* (Oxford, 1989), p.311). The letter itself reveals that the audience's disconcertingly spontaneous behaviour was not exceptional; Mozart had predicted it.

[38]The literal truth of this statement is driven home by reviewers who have praised Berman's Prokofiev performances for realizing (to quote Peter G. Davis) 'important defining qualities one hears in the composer's own recordings': *New York,* xxiv, no. 9 (13 May 1991), p.98

[39]Angel COLH-308, originally recorded in 1937

[40]Westminster XWN 18161, *c.*1960

[41]See C. von Canon, 'Zwirnknäulerl: A Note on the Performance of Johann Strauss *et al.*', *Nineteenth-Century Music,* ii (1978–9), pp.82–4. While breezily written, this is one of the few musicological discussions of performance practice to take 'oral' traditions seriously, in this case quite literally oral; the article shows how characteristic Viennese dance rhythms reflect the rhythms of Viennese colloquial speech.

[42]Richter: Melodiya D-011755, released in the USA on Monitor MC 2057 (*c.*1960); Gilels: Melodiya S-40082, released in the USA on Musical Heritage Society MHS 4025 (1979). Here, too, there is a nice irony: the piece was first published in the almanac *Album musical* (Vienna: Sauer & Leidesdorf, 1823) under the title 'Air russe'.

[43]R. Donington, 'The Present Position of Authenticity', *Performance Practice Review,* ii (1989), p.117

[44]E. Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Chicago, 1955), p.3

[45]P. Boulez, 'The Vestal Virgin and the Fire-stealer: Memory, Creation and Authenticity', *EM,* xviii (1990), p.355

[46]Boulez, 'Vestal Virgin', p.358

[47]Record review, *EM,* xviii (1990), pp.483–6

[48]I go out of my way to make the point partly as a down-payment to Leo Treitler on the defence of this distinction he has challenged me to produce (see his review of Kerman, *Contemplating Music,* in *JAMS,* xlii (1989), p.399). For the latest attempt to reconfuse the issue, see D. Schulenberg, 'Expression and Authenticity in the Harpsichord Music of J. S. Bach', *Journal of Musicology,* viii (1990), pp.449–76, esp. pp.473ff.

[49]D. Epstein, *The Sounding Stream* (New York, forthcoming)

[50]A. Brendel, *Music Sounded Out* (New York, 1990), p.223