Music 314 Literature Review: Early Music Performance Practice Discussions From 1980 to 2000

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1 Introduction

Of the easily accessible articles on the subject, there are two primary discussions that can be analyzed: first, the debate between whether or not early 15th-century chansons were written with instrumental accompaniment; second, two major definitions of the word *authenticity* as it relates to early music performance. I would imagine that once one digs deeper into the literature there are debates about the specific performance practices of different genres, regions, and instruments. As such, this paper will primarily focus on the definitions of authenticity forwarded by individuals such as Richard Taruskin and John Butt in the 1980s through the 2000s only. This is a massive area of research. I have attempted here to highlight these most pertinent sources available to me.

This literature review ended up relying heavily on Michael Troy Murphy's dissertation from 2008 on the recordings of J.S. Bach's *Passio Secundum Johannem*.[1] Murphy traces the interest the performance of historical music from Mozart arranging Bach and Handel, to Dannreuther Dolmetsch in the early twentieth century, to the founding in 1933 of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in Switzerland, to contemporary scholarship on performing historical music.[2]

2 Issues of Authenticity: Taruskin vs. Butt

In 1982, Taruskin wrote that we "tend to assume that if we can recreate all the external conditions that obtained in the original performance of a piece we will thus recreate the composer's inner experience of the piece and thus allow him to speak for himself."[3] Taruskin states that authenticity in "performance practice is a chimaera, most of us are nevertheless no more deterred by this realization from seeking it than was Bellerophon himself."[4] The essence of Taruskin's thought on the subject in 1982 seems to be: "it's find to assemble the shards of a lost performance tradition, but how much better to reinvent it."[5] In speaking of the most authoritative performances he asserts that they "have always been those that have proceeded from a vividly imagined—that is

1. Michael Troy Murphy, "Performance Practice of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Passio Secundum Johannem* — A Study of 25 Years of Recorded History (1982-2007) as Influenced by Events Surrounding the Historically Informed Performance Movement" (Ph.D. Disssertation, Florida State University, 2008).

2. Ibid., 9–16.

3. Richard Taruskin, "On Letting the Music Speak for Itself: Some Reflections on Musicology and Performance," *The Journal of Musicology* 1, no. 3 (July 1982): 341.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 343.

frankly to say imaginary—but coherent performance style. They provide themselves with Tradition …and bestow authenticity upon themselves."[6] These performances are not truly reconstructions of past performances, "they are quintessentially modern performances, modernist performances in fact, the product of an esthetic wholly of our own era, no less time-bound than the performance styles they would supplant."[7] At the end of this article, Taruskin quotes an analogy for the musicologist from Nikolai Malko in which the musicologist is like a cook who only talks about the making of eggs instead of actually making them. After this Taruskin states that in reference to those eggs, "we're eating them now, and even cook up a few on occasion, as when we do a little discreet composing to make a fragmentary piece performance. Now, if we could only sell them…"[8] This is an extremely interesting statement. It references a form of authenticity that Kivy mentions later in 1995, the 'sensible authenticity' in which the audience decides their own form of authenticity.[9]

Laurence Dreyfus, in his 1983 article, "Early Music Defended Against its Devotees", discusses Theodor Adorno's thoughts on early music performance and the developing aesthetic relationship between the emerging avant garde and early music. Dreyfus's article also attempts to examine many of the emerging connections within early music. One distinct way that he does this is through what he calls a Brechtian table in which he defines the different roles of Early Music against the Musical Mainstream.[10] This table has been printed below.

6. Taruskin, "On Letting the Music Speak for Itself: Some Reflections on Musicology and Performance," 343.

7. Ibid., 344.

8. Ibid., 349.

9. Peter Kivy, *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

10. Laurence Dreyfus, "Early Music Defended against Its Devotees: A Theory of Historical Performance in the Twentieth Century," *The Musical Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 317–318.

Early Music	Musical Mainstream
1. The conductor is banished.	1. The conductor is the symbol of authority, stature, and social difference.
2. All members of the ensemble are equal.	2. The orchestra is organized in a hierarchy.
3. Ensemble members play a number of instruments, sometimes sing, and commonly exchange roles.	3. The "division of labor" is strictly defined, with one player per part.
4. Symptomatic grouping: the consort—like-minded members of a harmonious family.	4. Symptomatic grouping: the concerto—opposing forces struggling for control; later, the one against the many.
5. Virtuosity is not a set goal and is implicitly discouraged.	5. Virtuosity defines the professional.
6. Technical level of professionals is commonly mediocre.	6. Technical standards are high and competitive.
7. The audience (often amateurs) may play the same repertory at home.	7. The audience marvels at the technical demands of the repertory.
8. The audience identifies with the performers.	8. The audience idealizes the performers.
9. Programs are packed with homogeneous works and are often dull.	9. Programs contain contrasting items and are designed around a climax.
10. Critics report on the instruments, the composers, pieces and that "a good time was had by all."	10. Critics comment on the performer and his interpretation.

In Taruskin's next article on the subject of authenticity, he notes that performers see musical performance as texts. He notes that "many, if not most, of use who concern ourselves with 'authentic' interpretation of music approach musical performance with the attitudes of textual critics, and fail to make the fundamental distinction between

music as tones-in-motion and music as notes-on-page."[11] This discussion of performer as textual critic is placed in opposition to the performer as moral philosopher. I must add this excellent quote which has bearing on finger-style guitar:

> So where does one begin? Surely with the music, with one's love for it, with endless study of it, and with the determination to challenge one's every assumption about it, especially the assumptions we do not know we are making because, to quote Whitehead, 'no other way of putting things has ever occurred' to us …One Musician whom I particularly admire, a lutenist, once told me that when he began to experiment with improvisation practices to accompany medieval song, he deliberately mistuned[*sic*] his instrument so that his fingers would not be able to run along familiar paths.[12]

It is curious to think of the early music performer as sharing characteristics with the 21st-century finger-style guitarist. In a segment which Kivy might deem a discussion on 'sonic authenticity,' Taruskin notes that using old instruments forces the performer into a space of unfamiliarity which forces her "into a more direct confrontation with the music."[13]

The next article, was written by Channan Willner in 1990. It focuses on the then rising trend in the recording of Beethoven symphonies of using what are thought of as period instruments. Of interest is the statement that in order for an effect performance of Beethoven on period instruments there would be a requirement of "the leadership of a historically informed conductor of the same high quality, one who possessed commensurate experience (especially the once-traditional long apprenticeship) and could draw the right kind of expressive response from a group of period players."[14] This is quite interesting once one thinks of Taruskin's discussions on how the performer of early music might also need to be a scholar of early music. Here, Willner seems to be stating that a conductor would need to be at the same level if not higher than the players in a period orchestra in order for the performance to be effective. It is also interesting to note that the performance of Beethoven symphonies seems to go against Dreyfus's assertion that there are no conductors in early music.

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11. Richard Taruskin, "The Authenticity Movement Can Become a Positivistic Purgatory, Literalistic and Dehumanizing'," *Early Music* 12, no. 1 (February 1984): 4.

12. Ibid., 10.

13. Ibid., 11.

14. Channan Willner, "Beethoven Symphonies on Period Instruments: A New Tradition?," *The Musical Times* 131, no. 1764 (February 1990): 89.

By all accounts it sounds as if the period instrument discussion was being had in all sorts of musical circles. In *The Musical Times* in 1991, Leo Black states that the "whole issue of 'authenticity', of 'period-instrument' performance, has got out of hand, though so much money is involved that it isn't going to go away."[15] It is interesting to note that Black goes on later in this brief article to espouse the music of Reinhard Goebel who, to my ear, seems to have taken the 'whole issue' to a place that someone might find difficult. Perhaps Dreyfus's comparisons of early music to the avant garde are useful here. Where a critics voice seems to say that 'the listener should listen to this obscure, period-instrument, performance by a German conductor of some very well-known music. You might not like it.'

A deeply difficult-to-read article was published in Noûs in 1991 by Stephen Davies.[16] If I had more time this semester I feel that this article would reveal itself as a very curious discussion of the performance of music from an ontological perspective. This article begins with a brief recap of the individuals who are writing about the performance practice debate and couches it within a perspective of the nature of the musical work.

From my perspective it does not seem to have taken a long time for the term 'authenticity' to be defined in the manner that Lewis Lockwood says that Taruskin defined it in 1988 in "The Pastness of the Present, and the Presence of the Past" as 'commercial propaganda.'[17] The idea that authenticity is a marketable term, especially within classical music, is certainly going to be a potentially strong theme in the discussions of authenticity. I am quite surprised that there wasn't more discussion about the possibility that the push for authenticity in the performance of early music is a push for capitalizing on an obscure component of classical music. It would be interesting to read any analyses of authenticity and Marxism or a reading of authenticity and capitalism.

Daniel Leech-Wilkinson's article in *Companion to Medieval & Renaissance Music* examines the different ways in which contemporaneous sources talked about the production of music and musical aesthetics as a way to engage with the trend of authenticity in early music.[18]

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15. Leo Black, "…'More than Authenticity'," *The Musical Times* 132, no. 1776 (February 1991): 64.

16. Stephen Davies, "The Ontology of Musical Works and the Authenticity of their Performances," *Noûs* 25, no. 1 (March 1991): 21–41.

17. Richard Taruskin, "The Pastness of the Present, and the Presence of the Past," in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 137; as quoted in: Lewis Lockwood, "Performance and 'Authenticity'," *Early Music* 19, no. 4 (November 1991): 501–508.

18. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, "The Good, the Bad, and the Boring," in *Companion to Medieval & Renaissance Music*, ed. Tess Knighton and David Fallows (Schirmer Books, 1992), 3–14.

Dreyfus's article takes offense at the authenticity trend in early music's approaches to the performance of Mozart.[19] In the same issue of *Early Music*, Taruskin describes the authenticity debate as "our ongoing War of the Buffoons."[20] Taruskin also sums up his position by stating

> 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.[21]

Taruskin's main point in 1992 seems to be that 'historical' performances are in fact representative of modern values. The performance is modern because of its defamiliarization and its distance from the oral traditions which pervade the performances of Beethoven, Brahms and the like.[22]

At a symposium in Berkeley, Dreyfus places a hefty amount of blame on the musicologists for creating the fragmentation that could be heard in the performance of early music in the early 1990s. He states that the

> famous debates and sometimes gratifyingly raucous polemics about overdotting, vibrato, and the performance of trills have shaped a generation of musicians who imagine the historicist enterprise as a sum of accrued details, useful for shaming colleagues into observing yet another prohibitive taboo.[23]

The idea seems to be that through detailed research and healthy debate on performative aspects of early music, the scholars have affected the performance of its music in a deleterious manner. Dreyfus goes on to recommend that the antidote to this is for the performer to read the philosophers and critics of the era in which the performer is performing in order to attempt to understand the context of the music a little better. He goes on to recommend explicitly that the performer examine the concept of 'the sublime.'[24] The article from which these quotes are taken would be an interesting read in the future on how the voices of the scholar and the music critic coalesce and diverge

19. Laurence Dreyfus, "Mozart as Early Music: A Romantic Antidote," *Early Music* 20, no. 2 (May 1992): 297–309.

20. Richard Taruskin, "Tradition and Authority," *Early Music* 20, no. 2 (May 1992): 311.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., 314.

23. Joseph Kerman et al., "The Early Music Debate: Ancients, Moderns, Postmoderns," *The Journal of Musicology* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 116.

24. Ibid.

when discussing early music performance practices from a historical sense and from a 20th-century context.

In a different, more organized, world, I would have read most of *Text and Act* by Richard Taruskin. This book contains such wonderfully pithy statements which help situate Taruskin's views on the subject. For instance, "what we call historical performance is the sound of now, not then. It derives its authenticity not from its historical verisimilitude, but from its being for better or worse a true mirror of late-twentieth-century taste."[25] This seems to be the kernel of Taruskin's argument in the debate about authenticity. The authenticity of the performance of early music is based upon its authenticity in the present moment not in the past moment. Taruskin seems to believe that this type of authenticity is better than the other type of authenticity. It is a question of taste not a question of authenticity for Taruskin.

Shai Burstyn gave an account of a symposium at the Jerusalem Music Centre called *Authenticity in interpretation*.[26] This report gives a good description of how players interact with the scholarship on the subject. This is important because these individuals seem to differ in opinion from Taruskin and Dreyfus.

The next major publication in the field is a review of Taruskin's *Text and Act* by John Butt.[27] The article starts with statement that this is a field that "Taruskin has not only dominated, but largely defined over the last 15 years."[28] Butt provides the opinion that Taruskin is actually on the side of historically informed performance by saying that Taruskin only wanted to show the shortcomings of the movement.[29] Butt attempts to show how Taruskin's arguments are some times contrary to each other. Butt posits that Taruskin's "desire to 'democratize' performance by catering to the needs and wishes of the audience…and his tendency to promote postmodernism as the answer to all modernism's ills" is a difficult position to defend. The idea that the audience decides what is good and what is bad is difficult to quantify. There is not some rubric that the scholar is able to use to determine if the audience likes something. Butt takes offense to the idea that postmodernism is able to answer any of the questions that are posed by this or any other debate. Butt see this as an attempt at utopianism which Taruskin attempts to remove from his assessment of the postmodern turn of

25. Richard Taruskin, *Text and act: essays on music and performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 166.

26. Shai Burstyn, "Authenticity in Interpretation," *Early Music* 23, no. 4 (November 1995): 721–723.

27. John Butt, "Acting Up a Text: The Scholarship of Performance and the Performance of Scholarship," *Early Music* 24, no. 2 (May 1996): 323–332.

28. Ibid., 323.

29. Ibid., 325.

early music performance.

Kivy "proposes there are four" authenticities.[30] As discussed in Murphy, there is the 'composer authenticity,' the 'sonic authenticity,' the 'personal authenticity,' and the 'sensible authenticity.'[31] The first deals with composer intent, the second, sonic, is concerned with "reconstructing the physical materials" surrounding a given composition's inception, the third, personal, deals with the performer sense of authenticity, the fourth, sensible, deals with how the audience interacts with authenticity.

3 Conclusions

Like most of the work that I have done this semester, I find myself biting off more than I can chew, as it were. This project demanded more time than I was able to give. It is a worthwhile subject. In a different world, I would have worked more with recent dissertations on the performance of early music. It also would have been beneficial for me to work more exclusively with dialogues in the 2000s as it seems that this is when a plurality of voices were able to engage with the debate started in the early 1980s by Taruskin and others. I also would have been interested in focusing on thoughts on early music performance surrounding plucked-string instruments, such as lutes and historical guitars. It appears that these discussions have been written about in journals such as *Performance Practice Review* and *Early Music*.

30. Kivy, *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance*.

31. Murphy, "Performance Practice of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Passio Secundum Johannem* — A Study of 25 Years of Recorded History (1982-2007) as Influenced by Events Surrounding the Historically Informed Performance Movement," 26.

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