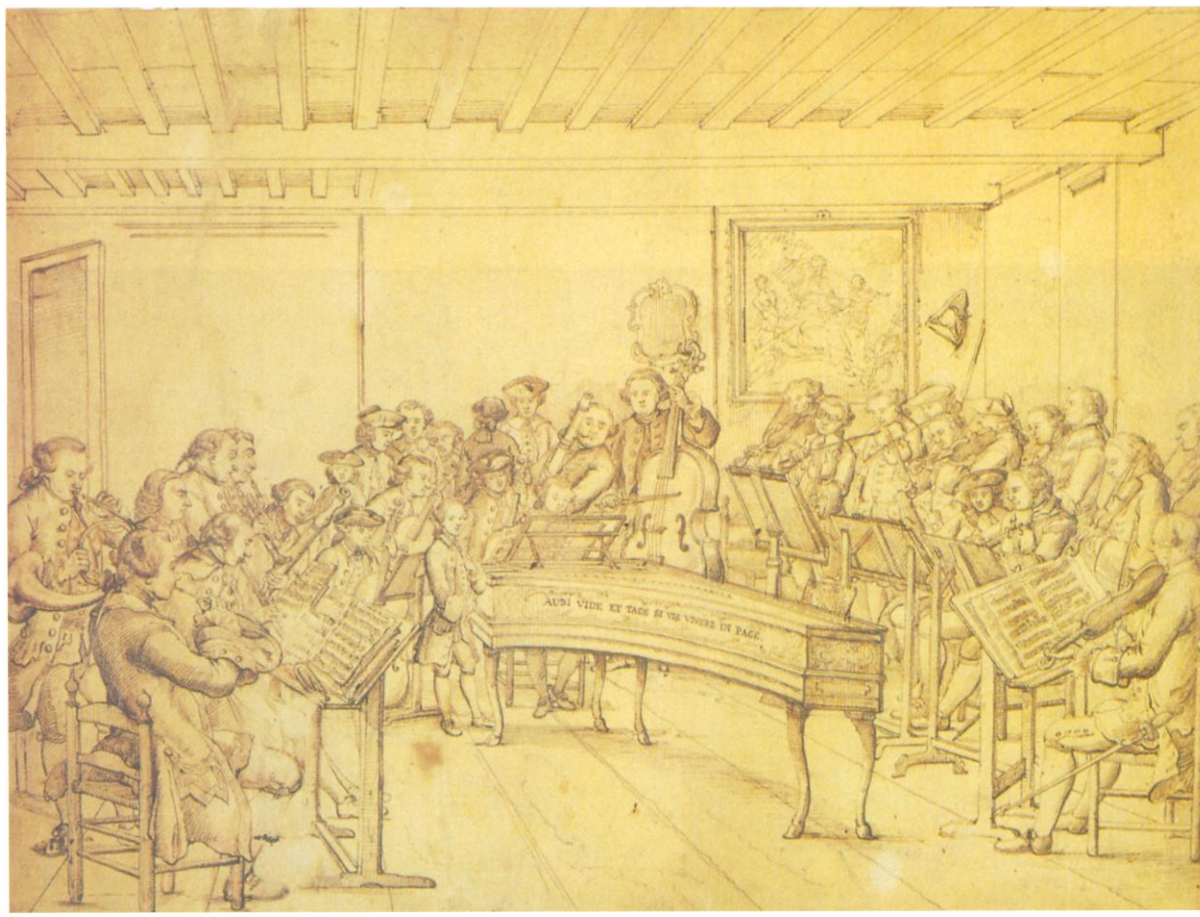
Lewis Lockwood

Performance and 'authenticity'



1 A Mozart performance? Drawing attributed to Johann Joseph Zoffany (private collection), from the exhibition *Mozart: Bilder und Klänge,* Schloss Klessheim, Salzburg 1991

If there is a red flag in musicology these days, it is the word 'authenticity'. Wars have raged over the term for ten years now, and show no sign of abating. On one side are many of those professionally engaged in the study and performance of early music in all its forms, striving to reconstruct as nearly as possible the soundscape of the past. Their names are legion, and need no introduction here. On the other side, armed with articles by Richard Taruskin and Laurence Dreyfus from the early 1980s and occupying a substantial part of the 1988 volume *Authenticity and Early Music*, a different consensus seems to have formed.[1] In the latter group, uniting scholars and commentators who can probably agree on very little else, this consensus stands for the belief that the quest for so-called 'authenticity' is about as likely to succeed as that of Jason for the Golden Fleece, or Diogenes with his lantern lit in broad daylight looking for an honest man.[2]

'Do we really want to talk about "authenticity" any more?' asks Taruskin in his most recent essay. He answers in no uncertain terms: the word has lost all meaning except that of 'commercial propaganda', possessing no other function nowadays than that of its

barely concealed 'moral and ethical overtones . . . being used to privilege one philosophy of performance over all others'.[3] Against the pretensions of those who claim to be seeking this unseekable end, Taruskin defends the poor performers of early music who are needlessly terrorized by the seeming authority of tough-minded positivistic scholars (the word is his) whose arsenal is ready to supply every possible element of historical and theoretical knowledge at our disposal. In Taruskin's portrait performers facing such strictures seemingly have no option than to bow or be quiet. Standing up for another and less stringent viewpoint, Taruskin offers solace to performers who seek to re-create music of the past not from knowledge of rules and treatises but from a sense of the capacity of well played old instruments 'in freeing minds and hands to experience old music newly'.[4]

In the light of all this, and much, much more, what can be left to say? The answer is, I hope, something quite different. So let me come out and claim forthrightly that I believe the discussion should be moved to another part of the forest; that a search for musical values within the purview of a revised understanding of the word 'authentic' is still valid and meaningful. I will argue that the word represents a goal that is, on the one hand, a historical improbability, but which is also, and equally a philosophical necessity. At the same time there are severe problems of usage and meaning attached to the word in the present context, and I have no intention of accepting the dullness of many performances that offer nothing more than supposedly 'authentic' instruments and thereby claim, more or less automatically, to represent the music 'as the composer intended it to sound'. Along with this I will also agree that the entire enterprise of 'early music performance' runs a permanent risk of being dead on arrival in the concert hall in the hands of performers who have thought about the music in no other terms than those they may have derived abstractly and literally from ornamentation treatises and the like without having deepened their grasp of the individuality of the work being presented—its structure, genre and artistic shape, the presumed intricacy and subtlety of its form and expression; in short, all the ramifications that modern musicians have learned to value in music of any period, not simply the remote past.

On the other hand, I am well aware that the best performers on any instruments, old or modern, do indeed place value on the kinds of issues that I am raising. And if, indeed, it turns out that the use of certain combinations of instruments enables that performer to render certain subtleties of shape and expression more effectively, then that alone justifies the use of these instruments; and when it turns out, if it does, that many shades of nuance and expression emerge more effectively when we try to replicate the sound-world in which the music was written—then, and only then, we are extending our musical perceptions effectively towards the elusive goal of 'authenticity'. But the question of which instruments are being used is secondary when compared with the performer's ability to translate for his listeners not merely the outer shell of sonority of a given work but its inner structure, its deeper qualities—in short, not only its text but the complexities of musical thought and expression that the composer built into it.

All of this does not disagree with the viewpoints expressed by Dreyfus and Taruskin, but it sets up the problem from a somewhat different viewpoint. Rather than hurl polemics at the performers who approach older music by mastering, if they can, the instruments and procedures native to the time, I would simply insist that these instruments and procedures themselves can never be sufficient, but must also be accompanied by deep insight into the aesthetic aims and purposes that gave rise to the compositions they endeavour to communicate.

What I am advocating, then, is a revised historicism, in which early instruments and reconstructed performing forces—if they are well attested by evidence—play as strong a role as they can in the pluralistic musical environment in which we live and in which future generations are bound to live as well. But what is needed as a corrective to the 'commercial' side of the early music movement is the constant engagement of performers not simply with singing and playing techniques and with historically appropriate theoretical sources, but at least an equal engagement with the creative background of the music that they are performing. By this we mean the ability to evaluate good performing texts; to know and study the authentic sources of the works (here there can certainly be no quarrel about the word 'authentic'); and to think of the music not only as an expressive entity to be interpreted, but as a complex structure to be articulated. All of this should be done not as if there can be only one right way to do it, but as a special realization of a particular set of relationships which the text of the composition permits us to infer, and which on this occasion we should like to hear and think about. The best possible statement of this quasi-improvisatory approach comes from a reasonably unimpeachable source and it reads as follows:

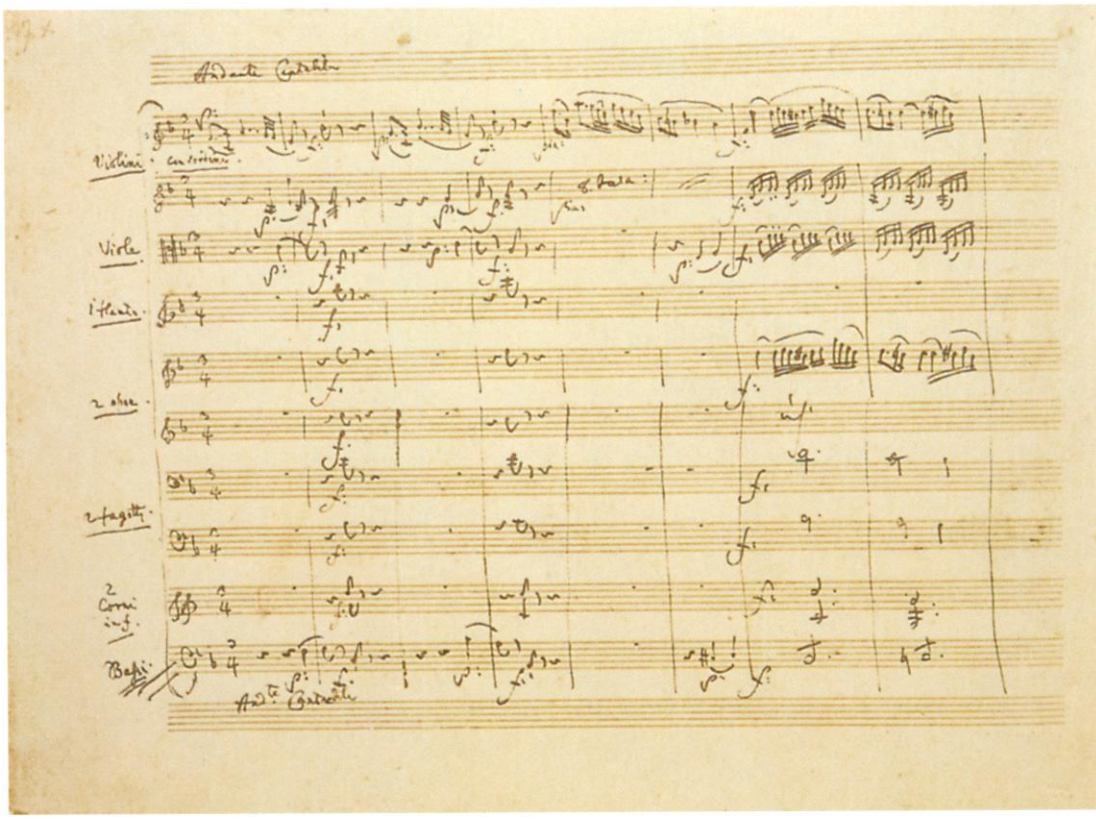
and in what consists the art of playing *prima vista*? In this: to

play the composition in the proper tempo; to give expression to every note and ornament, tastefully and as they are written—so that one may believe that the performer himself composed the piece.

The writer is of course Mozart himself, in a famous letter of 17 January 1778 to his father, in which he had just gone to great lengths to castigate Vogler for his miserable sight-reading of a Mozart sonata with tempi that were much too fast, including frequent use of a 'different bass than the one I had written' and occasional changes in the harmony and melody as well.[5] All who know the Mozart letters know that they are replete with references to the words 'taste', 'expression' and 'feeling' (*Ausdruck, Empfindung* and *Gefühl*); it is clear from all his positive statements and from negative remarks about others (for example Clementi) that Mozart's personal view on performance entails a strong belief in the conveyance of affect in performance.[6] His complaint about Clementi in a famous letter is precisely this: Clementi has a solid keyboard technique but 'otherwise he hasn't a *kreuzer* of feeling or taste—in one word, he is a completely mechanical player [*ein blosser Mechanicus*]'.[7]

Now there are strong trends in musicology these days that are playing down source studies. Some people are growing tired of watermarks and folio numbers, and are anxious to hunt for bigger game: for example, new approaches to analysis, especially via hermeneutics and gender studies; to study the role of music as discourse, whether semiotic or narrative; or music as symbolic expression within cultural frameworks. The viewpoints are many, but one at least is well expressed by Gary Tomlinson in his article in *Authenticity and Early Music*—the meaning of a work is not 'the meaning that its creators and first audiences invested in it' but rather 'the meaning that we, in the course of interpretive historical acts of various sorts, come to believe its creators and first audience invested in it'.[8] Tomlinson realizes, of course, that whether we are asserting our beliefs with confidence or diffidence, we still are attributing some role to the author of the work, therefore the 'text' is not yet for him a disembodied entity detached from history and floating in uncharted time and space—but certainly the strong pull of his line of thinking is towards the opening up of multivalent meanings for music, created by its auditors and recipients, out of the multiple cultural premises that they bring to the musical experience.

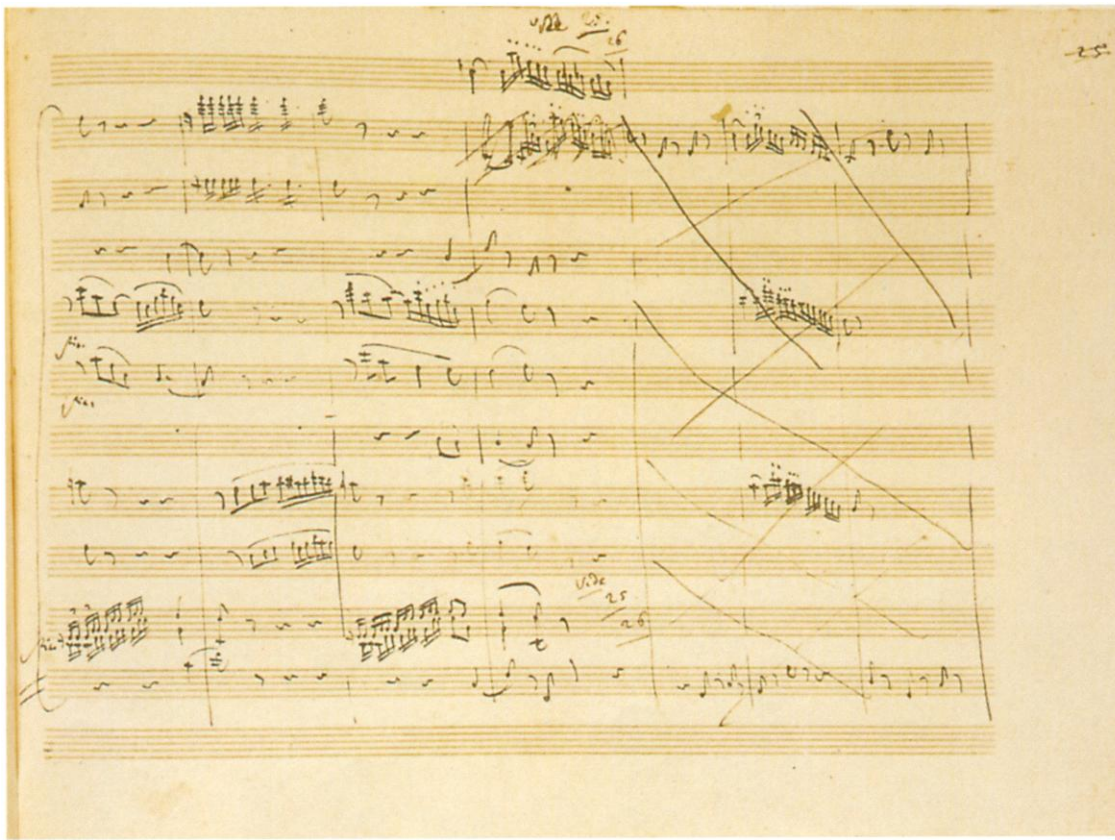
2 **Symphony in C, K551, ii, opening.**

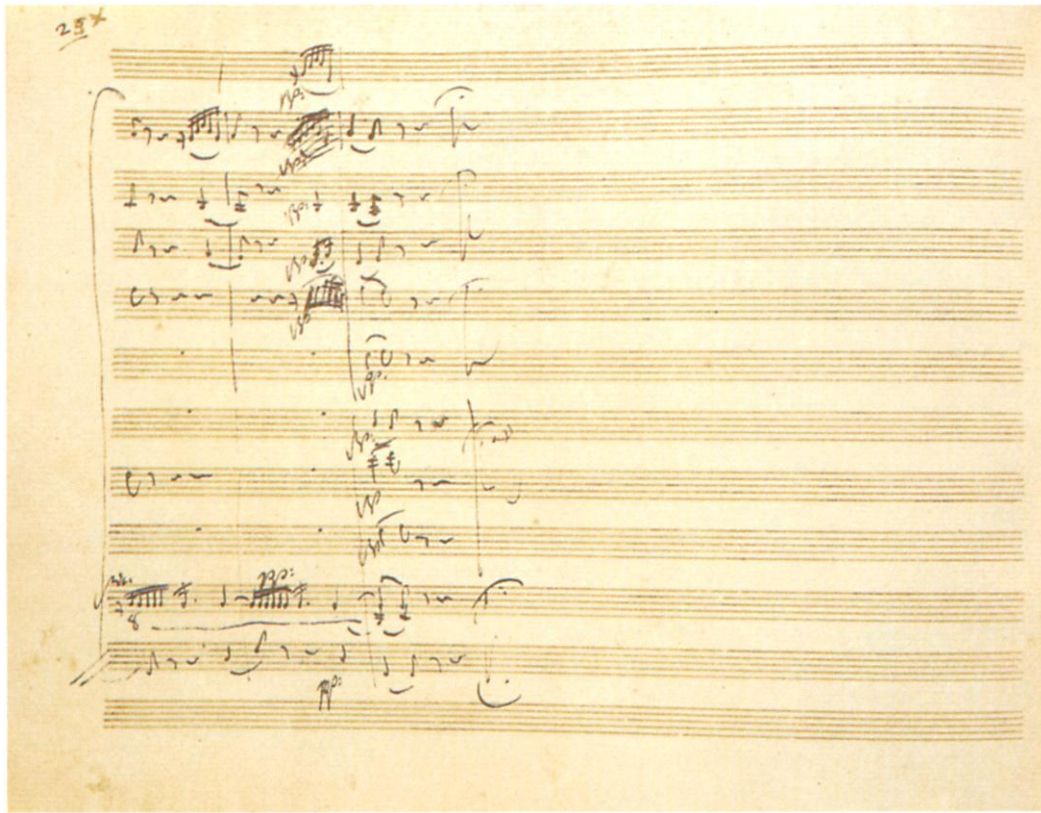


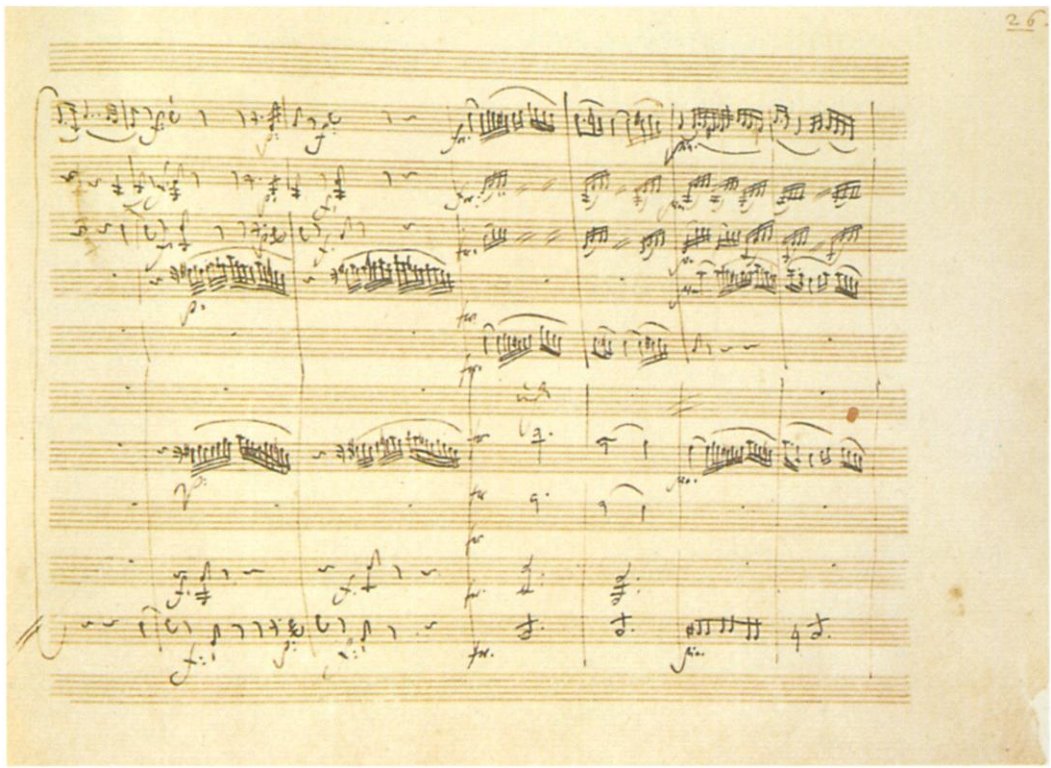
In the midst of this, what should the average listener understand about performance and interpretation? And along with the listener, what about the conscientious performer, looking for the right way to project such old-fashioned elements as structure and expression and to communicate these to audiences? My own view is that, long before the more abstract and entangled issues that may emerge from a vast widening of viewpoints about musical meaning, the performer has a basic obligation to remember that there *is* a body of material that seems to retain, for most of us, a sort of 'privileged status'. But its privileges stem from our realization that it authentically represents the composer's conception of his piece (at least, prior to the age of sound recording). I mean, of course, the autograph sources of a given work, along with whatever specific other evidence we may possess about its origins—sketches, corrected copies, supervised or otherwise reliable editions, relevant letters and so forth—the basic historical and textual source materials on which scholars and performers have always relied.

Not that these are 'definitive' in helping us to understand the celebrated and elusive 'intentions' of the composer; but they are a great deal better than impassioned guesswork on the part of performers who wish to know as little as possible about them. And they can certainly provide us with a secure basis for determining many vital aspects of a text—its note-text, articulation, dynamics, placement and grouping of ideas, and the like. All this is ancient wisdom, the long familiar viewpoint espoused by textual scholars from time immemorial and by musicologists since Schenker, who was the first to insist on the study of the sources as basis for the texts to be analysed.[9] Beyond all the familiar reasons why performers need to know sources, there is another: the sources, especially if they contain evidence of the compositional genesis of the work, force the performer to think of the composition not as fixed in amber but as a work that was once in progress, that was brought into being by an agency of intelligence and artistic vision—and was in fact *composed*, in the true meaning of the word. Knowing whatever we can know about its true origins is not a bad thing, and the autographs of Beethoven and other composers bear witness to what can be learned. For Mozart such transformations at the auto-

3 **Symphony in C, K551, ii, ending. f.26 is a new insertion between f.25*r* and f.25*v*.**







graph stage may or may not be as plentiful, but there are sufficient numbers of them already known to show what value they may have.

To close, let me briefly comment on one such change at the autograph stage, in one of Mozart's most famous works—the C major 'Jupiter' Symphony, in the second movement. Everyone knows that at the end of this marvellous Andante cantabile in 3/4 the first theme (illus.2) appears as the closing theme of the movement (illus.3), as it was at the beginning, in the first violins, intensified by running demisemiquaver phrases in the winds to fill out the rests that had marked the opening two bars; all this leading at the end to the wonderful cadential phrases that bring the movement to a close. But what can be learned only from the autograph is that the idea of bringing back the opening theme at the end was an afterthought. Mozart had originally written a short near-closing phrase of three bars with scalar triplets, perfectly satisfactory but lacking melodic profile and certainly lacking any reference to the opening of the movement. With the change, he brings about a whole series of revelations: first, that opening and closing thematic functions can be fulfilled by the same material, a feature that we associate with some of his most mature movements and especially first movements of later chamber music; second, that the thematic idea that had originally filled bars 1–4 could now lead to what had originally followed in bars 7–8 without the intervention of the original bars 5–6—therefore bringing a condensed and conflated linear flow that intensifies the reference back to the opening while it reinforces it; third, Mozart manages by this means to bring back the opening theme, for the last possible time, once again in the first violins, which had not had it with this continuation since the opening—thus pointing up in the strongest the way his avoidance of a literal thematic recapitulation for the movement as a whole. That this moment and its sudden emergence as a change in the autograph manuscript can have a strong impact on any first-rate musical mind is sufficiently shown by Mendelssohn's delighted response to it in 1845, when he described the change in minute detail in a letter to Ignaz Moscheles.[10]

In what way can the performer benefit from evidence like this? The answers are indirect with respect to the 'physics' of performance; most conductors will let the return of the theme at the end speak for itself, and perhaps only a modest special emphasis, shift in tempo, or nuance can be suggested here. But on a broader and more significant front, what is important is that performers have opportunities and obligations wider than those of simply putting the notes before the public; their role is too important to be construed as that of mechanical transcribers. The more a performer—in this case a conductor—sees and perceives the varied ways in which this return of the theme rounds out, fills out, and amplifies the inner relationships of the movement, the more focused his rendition of the movement will be; the more he will value the creativity that went into this long familiar but truly remarkable work. The more, in Mozart's words, he will give his audiences the sense that a stream of fresh thinking has gone into his preparation for performing the movement and the symphony altogether. In fact, if he can find a way, it might even create the illusion that he and the orchestra were composing it as they produce it. This may or may not be possible, but if it were, the spirit behind it would convey the sense that what is being accomplished is truly Mozart's—and therefore is truly authentic.

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Discussion

RICHARD TARUSKIN You started with the ritual genuflections towards the camp that supposedly includes me, but what you went on to say is something with which I have no problem whatever. I do need to clear up one misperception: I have never hurled polemics against the use of old instruments. At the time I wrote that article I was playing one. I've always upheld the use of old instruments, though not perhaps in the same terms as other people have upheld it. What I have taken potshots at is the idea of basing a career on playing *prima vista*, though not in the sense that Mozart used the term.

ROBERT LEVIN What you've just said about the 'Jupiter' Symphony is marvellous, and it points to an important aspect of Mozart's revisions which I'd like to take further; it's one which we encounter also in the Piano Concerto in B flat, K595, when he adds in seven bars at the end of the opening tutti in order to provide an antecedent for later appearances of the same material. In the second movement of the 'Jupiter' the material unfolds in a fascinating way: after the first violins have played the tune it appears in the cellos and basses, accompanied by

pulsating quaver chords in bassoons and horns, punctuated by a demisemiquaver response in the violins. It is this second, more elaborate version that appears at the recapitulation (bar 60), with a transfer of materials: the tune is in the first violins, as in bar 1, the quaver figure of bar 11 is given to the second violins and violas, and the demisemiquaver figure appears, at least initially, in the cellos and basses. Now if you look at illus.3 (f.26) of your paper, you will see from Mozart's manuscript that his first version of the revision quotes the opening bars in terms of the bass line, but the recapitulation does so in terms of the second violins and violas, which have the quaver chords. Mozart seems to have been after a synthesis of the textures of exposition and recapitulation (with a new twist—the demisemiquaver response is transferred from the strings to flute and bassoon). He then immediately deleted the quavers with a characteristic flick of his thumb over the still wet ink, showing here, as so often, his tendency to revise by simplifying, not elaborating.

[FROM THE FLOOR] I'm a little confused by the implication of your remark that there are inner musical elements which have nothing to do with the choice of instruments. Surely it has a lot to do with that: I've just been singing Schubert songs with a fortepiano rather than a Steinway, and a lot of those inner musical elements were easier to communicate in those circumstances. I don't think you can disregard the tone and colour of instruments which have a direct relationship to musical content.

LEWIS LOCKWOOD I have absolutely no quarrel with that; perhaps I did not stress the point enough. First, I am advocating an acceptance of a much more pluralistic view of performance than the previous controversies seem to have been allowing for, and second, I'm perfectly prepared to accept that the nature of the instrument and its touch, feeling and sound-world can be enormously revealing. But that is not the only way in which the masterpieces of music can be revealed.

[1]R. Taruskin, 'On Letting the Music Speak for Itself: Some Reflections on Musicology and Performance', *Journal of Musicology*, i (1982), pp.338–49; also Taruskin, 'The Musicologist and Performer', *Musicology in the 1980's: Methods, Goals, Opportunities*, ed. D. Kern Holoman and C. V. Palisca (New York, 1982), pp.101–17; and L. Dreyfus, 'Early Music Defended Against its Devotees: A Theory of Historical Performance in the Twentieth Century', *MQ*, lxix (1983), pp.297–322

[2]A wonderful modern parallel would be Sullivan's organist looking for the 'lost chord', followed about 75 years later by Jimmy Durante's marvellous parody skit on it. Durante's number was recently brought sharply to the attention of the world of music and even musicology by Michael Ochs, editor of *Notes*, who published the entire Durante text in *Notes*, xlvii (1991), pp.986–7

[3]R. Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present, and the Presence of the Past', *Authenticity and Early Music* ed. N. Kenyon (Oxford, 1988), p.137. Among the other important articles in this volume I must particularly mention those by Howard Mayer Brown, Robert Morgan and Gary Tomlinson.

[4]Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present', pp.203–4

[5]Bauer-Deutsch, *Mozart Briefe*, no. 405 (Mannheim, 17 January 1778)

[6]For a recent survey of this aspect of Mozart's views on performance, and new interpretations of articulation markings in his autographs, see R. Riggs, *Articulation in Mozart's and Beethoven's Sonatas for Piano and Violin: Source-Critical and Analytical Studies* (PhD diss., Harvard U., 1987).

[7]Bauer-Deutsch, no. 657 (Vienna, 12 January 1782)

[8]G. Tomlinson, 'The Historian, the Performer, and Authentic meaning in Music', *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Kenyon, p.115

[9]On this aspect of Schenker's work see, among other writings, his monographs on the Beethoven Ninth and Fifth Symphonies; his *Erläuterungsausgaben* of the late Beethoven Piano Sonatas; and various essays on individual works in his periodical *Der Tonwille* and in the yearbook *Das Meisterwerk in der Musik*.

[10]See letter of 7 March 1845, published in *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn to Ignaz and Charlotte Moscheles*, trans. and ed. Felix Moscheles (Boston, 1888), p.247. Mendelssohn writes: 'André has just sent the original score of Mozart's C Major Symphony ("Jupiter") for my perusal. I must write out something from it for you that will amuse you. Eleven bars before the end, it formerly stood thus:—[Mendelssohn writes out the suppressed passage]. The whole repetition of the theme he has written on an inserted leaf: the above passage is struck out, and only comes in three bars before the end. Isn't it a happy alteration? The repetition of the seven bars is one of the passages in that Symphony I love best . . .'