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The Early Music Debate: Ancients, Moderns, Postmoderns

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The Early Music Debate: Ancients, Moderns, Postmoderns

This was the title of a symposium chaired by Joseph Kerman at the first Berkeley Festival and Exhibition: Music in History, presented in June 1990 by CAL Performances, the arts organization of the University of California, Berkeley, in collaboration with the Music Department and local musical organizations. The event took place in Zellerbach Playhouse on the Berkeley campus and was attended by about two hundred people; it consisted of statements from the panelists, Laurence Dreyfus, Joshua Kosman, John Rockwell, Ellen Rossand, Richard Taruskin, and Nicholas McGegan; a discussion among them, and questions from the floor.

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Printed below is the prospectus that was circulated to all ahead of time, followed by the panelists' opening statements. The last two of these were not written out but delivered impromptu, and have been lightly edited from the recorded transcript. Highlights of the Festival were a *Carmina burana* program (Thomas Binkley), Monteverdi's Mass and Vespers of 1610 (Philip Brett), Jommelli's *La schiava liberata* (Alan Curtis), and Handel's *La resurrezione* (Nicholas McGegan—with Laurence Dreyfus playing the gamba part); some of these are referred to in the panelists' remarks.

JOSEPH KERMAN (*University of California, Berkeley*)

"Early Music" has always flourished in an atmosphere of multiple controversy, ranging from a philosophical argument about music and history to a professional dispute over turf. Contention escalated during the 1980s. As Early Music grew more expert and more successful, broader claims were made for its historical authority, or "authenticity," considered a value in itself as well as a promotional bonanza.

Yet influential Early Music performers—Nicholas Harnoncourt, Michael Morrow, Richard Taruskin, among others—reject such claims publicly and sometimes sharply. Never mind massive displays of musicological research and organological expertise; characteristic Early Music performances are said to be less "historical" than reflective of some twentieth-century mind-set. What attracts so many

listeners to Early Music is something contemporary, a performance style developed in response to certain aesthetic ideals and in reaction to certain others.

Building on earlier symposia of the 1980s (*Early Music*, 1984; *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon, 1988), the Berkeley Festival and Exhibition Symposium will carry debate forward into the 1990s (just). Though discussion will doubtless range over a wide spectrum of issues, our starting point will be the historical locus of Early Music ideology:

—will some participants (“Ancients”) reaffirm the traditional view that Early Music is a reasoned and appropriate approach to historical music making?

—will others (“Moderns”) see Early Music as a typical product of our own century, responsive to the cult of objectivity and other tenets of modernism expounded by Ortega, Eliot, and Stravinsky?

—will still others develop a position for today—for our fragilely named Postmodern Era? “Postmoderns” may suggest how recent changes in the techniques, scope, distribution, and social aura of Early Music demarcate a special phase or phenomenon that must be thought about in new ways in the 1990s.

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LAURENCE DREYFUS (*Stanford University*)

Early-Music and the Repression of the Sublime

In the classic polemics between the Ancients and the Moderns that dominate the early modern period, critics debated whether modern knowledge was superior or inferior to the wisdom of the ancients. This historical debate—alluded to in the subtitle to this morning's Symposium—provides a clever allegory for the contemporary musical scene, since it aptly suggests how historicist performers see a gradual decay in musical knowledge—requiring a revival of the old learning—while modern traditionalists performing *the very same music* see a historical advance in both the tools of their trade and in their collective approach to musical expression.

This dichotomy—and its ironic Hegelian synthesis suggested by the term Postmodernism—may nonetheless obscure a little noticed development of the last decade—the consolidation and reification of a homogeneous Early Music style that is neither “ancient” in its appeal to historicity nor “modern” in representing the late twentieth century. In my view, the style is a kind of regression in the consciousness of Early Music, one that needs some unpacking if Early Music is to maintain its vigor. As you might guess, I strongly dissent from the smug air of self-congratulation that seems to crowd current-day criticism on Early Music performance.

The style I'm referring to can best be grasped as an orchestral musician's watered-down version of the Baroque revolution from twenty years ago. It is a degraded rendition of what was an essentially soloistic approach pioneered by the Leonhardts, the Kuijkens, Brüggem and Bylsma, whose phrasing and articulation sounded strikingly speech-like by mimicking ever shifting patterns of thought. Today this dynamic process has degenerated into formula. What I hear far too often is an appallingly predictable approach to phrasing and articulation—perfectly adapted to the digital technology of the recording studio—in which the uniform lengths and conventionalized weights assigned to various note values render a cold and mechanical effect. Adjacent slurs summon forth *Luftpausen* of identical character, upbeats are clipped short with one conventional length, vibrato is placed on predictable “good notes,” and tone color remains monochrome for an entire movement. I could go on. It is as if players imagine Early Music style as an algorithm guaranteed to produce uniform results. I'm talking especially about renditions of Bach, Mozart and Beethoven although the influence of this degraded style extends backward into seventeenth-century performance as well as forward into the most recent essays in Romantic music.

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This ironic replication of the discipline imposed on the modern symphony orchestra has happened, of course, as Early Music has become most marketable and lucrative in “big band” settings—the proliferation of Early-Music orchestras in Europe and in this country. Along with the articulative rigidity goes a kind of Allegro-inflation in which absurdly fast tempos and a superficial representation of musical character substitute for the absence of excitement on the level of the individual phrase. The new style, though a comfortable crutch for itinerant Early-Musicians dashing across the globe, has also trickled down to solo and small-ensemble playing. It is as if Early Music no longer wages a struggle against the stultifying effects of conservatory training but substitutes its own recipes for suspending creative thought. What I fear, in short, is that the sewing-machine style of the 1950s is back: we have merely acquired a “hi-tech” upgrade. Thus, despite all the hoopla in the press hailing the latest recordings of Classical symphonies and concertos, I wonder why it is that Early Music has thus far failed to produce one compelling reading of a Mozart string quartet or a Beethoven Archduke Trio, comparable to the renditions of Bach's keyboard works or Rameau's chamber music twenty years ago. Must one continue to turn to the remastered recordings from sixty years ago in order to experience the passionate rapture that accompanies a musician engaged wholly with the artwork?

The fault for the degraded Early Music style is partly institutional: large institutions tend by their nature to be conservative, so it comes as no surprise that a standard *modus operandi* in Early Music orchestras has developed. But the fault also lies with musicologists, for we have fostered an idea of performance practice that is, more often than not, narrow and petty. Our 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.

The underlying problem is that Early Music has imposed a period style on composers who were utterly atypical of their period. Let's be honest. No one is sitting around hotly debating performances of Telemann, Hasse or Hummel. The Early Music debate, such as it is, is about Great Music composed by Great Men, especially men whom the German idealist tradition enshrined in a pantheon detached from history. I am personally quite happy with this pantheon, but wish to point out that until we sort out the paradox of researching bagatelles in works of genius, we will continue to fool ourselves into thinking that an imagined return to a daily musical reality of, say, the 1780s, will furnish us with the keys to higher understanding. I am well aware how the revival of historical conventions can inspire new and exciting performances. But the recovery of conventions is simply not enough.

My suggestion is that historically-minded performers look beyond the confines of the usual performance manuals and start investigating the critical thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that tried to make sense of the most profound art of its age. This is the kind of ancient knowledge which, appropriated by someone in our own day, might better serve a musician in search of a conversation with Bach or Mozart.

A key concept here would be surely be "the sublime" (*le sublime*, or *das Erhabene*), which, from the time of Boileau's celebrated translation of (pseudo-)Longinus through Kant of the *Observations* (published in 1764) and the *Third Critique*, inspired critics to dwell on the sense of awe and mystery that attends humankind's highest artistic achievements. Is not "the sublime" the very component repressed by Early Music, "this extraordinary and marvelous quality," in the words of Boileau, "which ensures that a work elevates, ravishes and transports"? The superficial renditions of Bach Passions that ignore his blood-and-guts Christianity, the trivialized reductions of late Mozart piano concertos to Georgian respectability, the crass pots-and-pans approach to Beethoven's symphonies—these and other offenses on the part of our movement miss the aura of enchantment that was the

glory of the charismatic pre-war conductors. What has been lost is the insight that the giants in our pantheon are great to the extent that they learn, for example, to represent the depths of melancholy, and melancholy, as Kant recognized, was a kind of secret key to the sublime. Whereas modern art of the early twentieth century prospered from the denial of the sublime—dwelling instead on shock and madness—Early Music needs to reinvent the sublime by rejecting the self-evidence of its style and by learning how to represent the gestures of pathos and joy, of suffering and jubilation, that coexist in these rich musical worlds. “Beauty charms,” as Kant observed, “the sublime touches” (*das Erhabene rührt*).

Some critics (such as Richard Taruskin) ask us to consider Early Music as a kind of mirror of contemporary values, thereby taking a stand against the naive objectivism that posits historical meaning as readily accessible to twentieth-century ears. While this stance is persuasive, it is also uncomfortably close to a radical skepticism that questions the very possibility of historical knowledge, a skepticism which can always assert that imagining the past amounts to narcissistic fantasy. But if this is the case, why is the professional critic or historian any more exempt from the charge of self-indulgence than the practicing musician? Or to put it positively, why should a practicing musician be any less capable of achieving historical understanding than a university-trained scholar? (You will perhaps note that I stress “historical understanding” and have avoided the term “authenticity.”)

The classic hermeneutic circle—with its suspicion of pure objectivity and its constant give-and-take between reader and text—is still the best way, in my view, to resolve the dilemma of ancients versus moderns, since it cautions against praising Early Music for its moral virtue in reviving the past while it hints that we gain more from historical performance than merely contemplating our navels. For where is it written that we cannot try to puzzle out the meaning of our most treasured musical texts at the same time that we make sense of what they mean *for us*? The trick is to see that these two seemingly disparate positions are complementary, and in fact constitute a model by which human understanding makes significant progress.

JOSHUA KOSMAN (*San Francisco Chronicle*)

In January of this year, Kyle Gann, who writes about new music for the *Village Voice*, published an interesting article tracing some of the paths new music had taken in the decade that just ended, and discussing a number of important issues that had arisen in that time. Halfway through the article, he paused to ask rhetorically, “And where were the critics in all of this?” Classical music critics, he

said, "were trying to look busy." "They spent ten years arguing the fascinating question of whether Handel's music sounds better when played on 200-year-old woodwinds. Answers to that provocative inquiry spanned the entire range from 'I think so' to 'I'm pretty sure.'"

Any debate could probably be written off in equally reductive and pitiless terms. But as a critic who has spent some time considering the questions surrounding historical performance, I felt a bit chastened by Gann's remarks. It does seem that there's something evasive about the thoroughness with which the practical and philosophical issues attendant on early music performance have been debated in recent years. I don't mean within the academy so much as in public arenas such as this one, where, as Richard Taruskin pointed out in a 1982 essay, unprecedented attention and respect are now being paid to what scholars have to say. Many voices have been raised, and much ink spilled, on a topic whose fundamental intellectual issues are fairly thorny, but on which the practical range of disagreement, as Gann rightly points out, is really not that broad. So the question I'd like to raise is one that shrinks like to ask: *Why is this so important to you?*

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I don't mean to suggest that the issues surrounding early music are not provocative ones. But even legitimate questions can become prominent for reasons having to do with other issues entirely. Among the attractions of early music, it seems to me, is that it serves to reconcile two conflicting desires on the part of the musical public. One is the desire for novelty, a desire which has been a constant feature of musical life for several centuries, and which is only slightly less strong today. The other is an urge to flee from the music of living composers (there are interesting reasons for that urge, which we can't get into here). Now, how can you satisfy a desire for novelty while still avoiding contemporary music?

The early music movement has stepped into the breach. It's happened in two ways, which Nicholas Kenyon outlines in his introduction to the symposium *Authenticity and Early Music*. One is by unearthing or rehabilitating unknown music of the past—rarely heard works by masters of the medieval and Renaissance periods, and works by lesser lights of more recent times. The other—and this is the strain that has been most visible in the concert halls and especially on the record charts—is by dressing up familiar masterpieces (Beethoven symphonies, Mozart piano concertos, Bach cantatas and passions) in fresh guises, so that they somehow present themselves as new and unfamiliar works.

These two strains show some interesting differences, but what they share is an ability to offer both novelty and familiarity at once. Handel's *Messiah* played on period instruments is still *Messiah*; and

ears trained on Mozart and Haydn will scarcely be daunted by the music of Nicolò Jommelli.

Of course, I don't mean to imply that the early music boom is simply an orgy of escapism; that's hardly true or fair. But it is the case that in the culture at large, older music has appropriated the functions that belong by rights to new music. I was struck, for example, by this sentence from Marita McClymonds' notes on the Jommelli opera *La schiava liberata*: "Jommelli's music," McClymonds writes, "has drawn our attention as the interest in early music has grown, and as our appetite for new operas has outgrown the supply." Now, notice that by "new operas" McClymonds means "old operas, but unknown ones." An appetite for genuinely new operas is characteristic of the musical public of the seventeenth, eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries; but not of the twentieth. In fact, we don't have much of an appetite for contemporary music at all. Instead, we have a musical culture in which the search for novelty is channeled into what Professor Taruskin has identified as a modernist version of antiquarianism, one which sees new music in rediscovered relics, and substitutes archaeology for new creation.

And this is why the authenticity debate has come to seem so pressing. If Nicholas Kenyon is correct, as he says in that same introduction, that the most stimulating thing today's musical culture has to offer is new ways of playing Bach, then we'd better be sure to get them right. But I believe—I hope—that he's wrong.

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JOHN ROCKWELL (*New York Times*)

Whatever scholars may contend about the nature of the Early Music movement, its presumptions to authenticity and its debts to the *Zeitgeist*, it is not they who communicate most directly with the mainstream classical-music public. That function belongs to the music critics of our daily newspapers. As a member of that tribe, I wish here to consider the role that has been played and might better be played by daily journalistic critics in the discussion, dissemination, distortion and commodification of the Early Music movement.

The suspicion, not to say outright hostility, with which critics are regarded by composers and performers is the stuff of popular anthologies. Scarcely less fierce, however, is the disdain accorded critics by musicologists, and the mixture of supplication and scorn with which critics respond to the musicologists. Musicologists dismiss critics as under- or uneducated lightweights, dashing from prose snippet to prose snippet without ever taking time for a reasoned consideration of the premises underlying their craft and precluded by the limitations of a general-interest publication from digging deep enough into

any subject to matter (particularly in terms of the constraints placed on their use of technical language). Critics, conversely, may yearn for the authority of musicological specialists, the positivist illusion of neo-scientific certainty. They may cite or steal from scholars whenever they can. But they are equally likely to dismiss musical scholars privately or even publicly as pedants—pedants with teeth, to be sure, if the musicologist in question has a taste for polemics.

This mutual suspicion lingers despite significant indications that the gap between the two professions may be narrowing. Periodically, delegations of critics make pilgrimages to musicological conventions to plead the case for more amiable relations. Prominent musicologists from Paul Henry Lang onwards have practiced daily criticism. And many critics (Andrew Porter, Will Crutchfield), even if they lack formal musicological training, have brought scholarly values and attitudes to journalism. We live in a time in which the criticism of classical music, unlike film or television or art or dance or even theater, is directed mostly backward, however much individual critics may champion some contemporary composers. So it is only natural that music critics gradually take on the historicized methodology of musicologists.

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Musicologists might be said to have a professional bias toward the Early Music movement, mainstream musicians to have a professional bias against it, and journalistic critics to be divided. Musicologists favor the movement, sometimes without fully questioning its presuppositions and self-congratulatory assertions, because it represents a triumphant incursion of their discipline into the traditional territory of performing musicians (not my subject here, but an equally fecund one, is the residual tension between musical scholars and musicians). Musicians oppose early music (except, of course, for those who now make their livings from it) because it threatens their training and traditions, not to speak of their livelihoods.

Looked at with as much dispassion as possible, it can be said that some critics, generally older ones or ones with real or imagined links to the world of mainstream performance, resist the movement as a trendy fad and a haven for executorial incompetence. Others, often younger or more excitable, champion it with fervor. An amorphous middle ground takes things on a case-by-case basis, either because they adhere to a grand Anglo-American tradition of non-ideological, fair-minded pragmatism or because they are too indecisive or lazy to decide.

It is with the champions that I wish to concern myself here, partly because—however much I may flatter myself for my evenhandedness—I am one myself. Hence I have a vested interest in advocating a critical role in the dissemination of enlightened information about

the movement and its underlying assumptions, and also a certain defensiveness about real or imagined charges of critical superficiality and irresponsibility.

Another reason to concern ourselves with critical advocates of the Early Music movement is that advocacy allied with an already-extant trend of some force is clearly more likely to effect changes in our musical culture than passive reportage or grumpy resistance. Such complaints as might be legitimately levelled against over-enthusiastic acceptance of the Early Music movement's more grandiose claims can only be directed toward critical proponents, enthusiastic but, perhaps, uninformed or temperamentally uninterested in the deeper issues involved.

Complaints against critics' blundering involvement in the Early Music debate are many. A common one is that the nature of a critic's daily rounds makes them prematurely jaded. Assaulted by the businesslike mediocrity of the classical-music industry, they are perhaps too ready to welcome novelty as an escape from the ordinary. Unconcerned on an analytical or contemplative level with a score's structural meaning, they respond like terriers to the slightest surface sensation in its performance. Confronted with the headlong tempos and fierce percussion and braying brass and deliciously wispy strings of a Roger Norrington Beethoven symphony performance, for instance, they salivate with enthusiasm just because that performance provides blessed relief from a tiresome onslaught of big, heavy, unthinking, uncaring modern Beethoven run-throughs.

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Similarly, critics dote on trends, hoping to be perceived as their instigators or leaders. Deprived of the satisfaction of actual composition or performance or serious analysis, they attempt to accrue prestige by proximity: if Norrington is prized and if the critic was the first to heap hosannas on him in his community, then he may be blessed with some spill-over Norrington prestige, like being sprinkled with fairy dust.

Journalistic involvement with the Early Music debate may well also help push the movement precipitously into the nineteenth century. Most critics are not specialists in, or even aware of, much music before Bach. Alerted to the issues involved in early-music performance, they naturally take a greater interest in the movement's incursion into the standard repertory. Thus critics may contribute to the slighting of the early musician's traditional repertory.

The natural tendency of journalism to personify the abstract encourages a concentration of attention on a few, marketable stars. An editor's natural inclination, if he sees a favorable review, is to commission a feature on the subject of that review, and a feature, even in the more "serious" newspapers, concentrates on chatty opinions and

personal details. Hence the Norrington phenomenon: no matter how good he is, and no matter how genuine and intelligent some of his first champions, critical and musicological, he has now been sucked into the star-making machinery and inflated into the musical equivalent of a Macy's Thanksgiving Parade float, swollen beyond all human scale. Whatever his merits, he is now a victim of "hype," and anyone who writes about him or has written about him, intelligently or stupidly, even those who profess to decry the hype, are contributing to it.

Thus ultimately, journalistic attention to the sober and serious issues of the Early Music movement leads to the movement's commodification, to drag in a term beloved of Marxist cultural commentators. The spiritual devolves into the material; originality is pressed into lowest-common-denominator mass production.

As a working critic, I can attest to the validity of every one of the above complaints, at least in part. But I can also muster up a defense against each of them.

If critics are jaded, they are also generalists, and help encourage a broadening of a debate too often prone to narrow, parochial concerns. Critics do hear a lot of music, too much of it, but they are forced thereby into offering judgments that reflect a wider scope of music as it is actually made and heard today than a more cloistered observer, who only hears what he wants to hear. And, one might add, the very confrontation with music of all kinds keeps the ears open and the imagination fresh.

As for leaping on trends, concentrating on the nineteenth century, stressing feature articles and hastening commodification, one can only argue that critics are more pawns than puppet masters, more symptoms of larger forces than their instigators. Commodification is encouraged above all by impresarios and record-company executives, not critics. Early musicians become trendy in the absence of wildly popular new composers, or when those exciting new composers have been shunted off into a vernacular musical arena too *déclassé* for "serious" attention. Perceived with ironic judiciousness, trends are merely symptoms of things that actually excite and interest people, and should not be scorned on that account alone.

Furthermore, those who question the Early Music movement's claims to authenticity on the grounds that it is more reflection of the *Zeitgeist* must in turn recognize the potency of that *Zeitgeist*, and absolve critics of the responsibility of creating it. They, too, like the Early Music musicians and the musicologists, are mere silver surfers on the Hegelian wave of historical destiny.

From my own perspective, it seems odd to regard claims for (at least relative) authenticity and demands for the recognition of the

impact of contemporary values on historical research as antithetical. Common sense tells us that a sophisticated (historically sophisticated, not just musically sophisticated) effort to play music as it was played in the past will yield fascinating results, and probably come closer to the past than blind guess-work or an inchoate adherence to oral tradition.

Equally obvious, however, what will bring any performance to life will be the creativity of the performers and, more mystically, their responsiveness to the *Zeitgeist*. They can't help but be affected by their times; if they aren't, they're mere antiquarians.

Critics, who perhaps more than most musicologists still do pay attention to the present, thus find themselves in a good position to make those comparisons, to measure how shifts in contemporary music and its performance relate to changes in Early Music practice. An example is the recent penchant of many of our livelier young early musicians towards greater flexibility, ornamentation and spirited play in their performances, compared with the "objective," rigorous, briskly metronomic performances of the 1950s, 60s and 70s. There is a clear parallel here to post-modernist composition, in composers' greater interest now in fancy, wit, rhetorical drama and engaging an audience. The synchronicity of interest between old and new musicians, from the 1920s through the 1950s to the 1990s, lives on, and colors our approaches to the past in ways that a journalistic critic can help chronicle.

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Musicologists and critics should stop pecking at each other and start recognizing their common interests. To be sure, there are egregious failings on both sides, from arrogant or lazy obscurantism to blithe or lazy superficiality. Critics would do well, if not to pursue their own musicological researches, then at least to keep abreast of scholarly debates. And musicologists should struggle to avoid the perhaps natural tendency toward arcane specialization, cutting themselves off not just from their students but from the broader public—even the lay musical public that might be eager to hear what they had to say.

For American musicologists to emulate their British betters and write more frequently for general-interest publications—if not actually to become daily newspaper critics—is of course not fully their decision to make. It would require a greater seriousness of intent on the part of newspaper publishers and editors, a recognition of the needs and rights of a specialized readership. That, in turn, would mean a general rise in the country's cultural literacy.

In the meantime, both sides could profitably try to meet the other half way. Critics could take care to consider issues as analytically as

time and temperament allow, refusing to accept giddy claims by musicians or businessmen or even scholars without careful analysis. Humanistically inclined musical scholars could speak out more to the public, as free from the distortions they decry in others as they can muster. Such efforts can only serve to clarify and illuminate issues in which we have a common interest.

ELLEN ROSAND (*Yale University*)

It occurred to me that a worthwhile focus for our attention, given the two performances of Jommelli's *La schiava liberata*, might be the relevance of the Early Music Debate to opera. It is fairly easy to translate the terms we've been discussing into attitudes to early opera that we can recognize (though what we mean by early, has likewise changed in the past decade). The Rudel-Sills production of Handel's *Giulio Cesare* was classic for its time: in our terms we might call it archaic. Aside from a few continuo instruments, the orchestra was big and modern; the plot was rewritten, huge portions of the music were cut and rearranged. And the castrato roles were transposed for standard male voices. (Surprisingly, it was until very recently [1992] the only recording of *Giulio Cesare* in the CD catalogue). Then Leppard came along, more stylish certainly, but not much more authentic. He began by "realizing" Monteverdi, and then turned his attention to Cavalli. In seeking to make seventeenth-century opera palatable to the masses—and to the Glyndebourne picnickers—he too cut and pasted, rearranged, transposed, and "modernized" the orchestral sound, beefing up the continuo with harps and other instruments, adding string accompaniments at random, and so on. His edition of *Ormindo*, which some of you may know from the recording, also rearranges the plot. Yes, Leppard too must be counted among the archaics.

The ancients (working at about the same time, in the 60s) might be represented by our own Alan Curtis, whose pathbreaking production of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* right here on the Berkeley campus in 1967 (and subsequently recorded) remains a monument to early ancient-ism. He used countertenors and/or women for the castrato roles (just as he does in *Schiava*), and restricted his orchestra to almost exactly those instruments called for by the documentary evidence. There were other kinds of ancients too. Harnoncourt was one. Perhaps the extreme of ancient-ness may be represented by the reconstructions of Mozart and other operas at Drottningholm, in which the theater itself was one of the "authentic" elements.

I'm not sure who the moderns actually are, but the most notorious examples of post-modernism are surely the Mozart productions of

Peter Sellars. In those, the “authenticity” of the musical aspects is taken for granted. But Sellars, too, (like Leppard?) wants to make the works relevant for our time, and so he overlays the text with a modern reading. Don Giovanni, in Spanish Harlem, is a junky; his conquests are drug addicts. I’m afraid that this approach may not be fundamentally different from Leppard’s: both seek to enhance the audience’s identification with the work by couching it in familiar terms. And both do a kind of violence to the original.

Where does *La schiava liberata* fall on the continuum? Musically, Curtis still figures as an ancient. The most important aspects of the score are preserved: castrato roles, orchestration. And quite beautifully played and sung, I might add. But what about the production? I think it’s post-modern. That is, it rereads the work in what seem to be anachronistic terms. The subtle mixture of comedy and seriousness in the original is obscured (undermined) by, among other things, the ridiculing of Don Garzia in his only aria—he should be a serious character. But actually, I’d like to focus briefly on the quirky supertitles used in this production, which seem to have attracted so much attention. I think they also contribute to the post-modern distortion.¹

To back up for a moment. Nothing could be more “authentic” in principle than the use of supertitles; for the one unassailable assumption for opera of all periods was the intelligibility of the text. No matter how the music was cut and changed, transposed or replaced for new singers, the clarity of the text was preserved. The various solutions to this problem for a foreign audience—singing translations, supertitles, facing translations in librettos to be read with the lights up in the theater—all have their limitations; but one of them is surely necessary if the audience is to understand what is going on on stage. Simultaneous translations via earphones may work in the UN, or even in some spoken plays, but hardly in opera!

But what do the translations say? In the case of the supertitles of *Schiava*, they sometimes say what’s not in the play. This is occasionally very effective—especially at comic moments when the actual content of the text may be less important. Most of us will remember the “SUPERTITLE FAILURE” message that flashed on during the opera’s French bits. But other times these titles project an ironic tone that undermines a serious moment. “Da capo we entreat you, pity our sadness,” and “I am royally spurned” are two places that come to mind.

I think we have to face the fact that all translation is fundamentally a rereading, an alternate text, a criticism of the work. After all

¹ The supertitles were the work of Joseph Kerman. [ED.]

the directorial rereadings and misreadings I have lived through, from Rudel to Leppard to Sellars, I'm not too happy contemplating a new era of supertitle criticism.

RICHARD TARUSKIN (*University of California, Berkeley*)

I'm not at all sure that this Festival is the right place to be having this Symposium. I'm not saying this in the sense that even at Vatican II you wouldn't want to have a symposium on the legitimacy of Jesus . . . it isn't that sort of a thing. But the debate, such as it's been, to which we have all contributed, and are contributing to even as we speak, really doesn't concern the kinds of things this Festival is all about.

There have always been two kinds of Early Music. We always use the same term for both, and sometimes we may even mean both at once; but they are really two things. One is antiquarian performing—that is, the resurrection of old repertoires, by which I mean repertoires for which there is no continuous performance tradition. And when you are doing that it seems perfectly appropriate to use old instruments and old performance practices that you introduce from records of the past, because there's no other way of getting at them.

Then there's the other thing, which is encroaching now on our mainstream concert life, where early-music performers—schooled originally, of course, in antiquarian performance—are now challenging ordinary performers of standard repertory. That's where all the debate has been taking place; and there's very little of that sort of thing going on at this Festival. So if we're really going to get into the issues that are confronting us all, we're not really talking about this week's activity to any great extent. Even Bach, for example, has not been much represented. We have had a Handel performance, but it's a performance of a work which for various reasons belongs to dead performance traditions, not living ones; *La Resurrezione* is one of the Italian oratorios, which have nothing to do with the English oratorios that are still in the repertoire, at least to some extent. Once again: we're really not talking about one thing but two things. The Festival is addressing the one, and we are talking today about the other.

Now, of course, I was invited to participate because—well, because I'm here, I suppose . . . but also, I am identified with that “modern” position. It's the position that I introduced into the debate, and I suppose I'll be asked to defend it today. I just want to clear up a few things about what the modernist position is.

It's not really a position, not really an advocacy of something. It's a diagnosis. What I've been saying is that what we are doing under the umbrella of Early Music is not historical, never has been historical,

and never will be historical because it *can't* be historical. And it *shouldn't* be historical. . . . You can show that Early Music is unhistorical in any number of ways—and you don't have to invoke Ortega and T. S. Eliot and Stravinsky, you just have to compare what we hear to what we know to have been the historical case. People just do not follow the evidence which is available to them.

I'll give you three examples right off the bat. One is the use of countertenors in so much early music today. The whole repertory of the Roman Catholic Church is now given Anglican performances everywhere, and that is considered the "authentic" style for that music. We heard an Anglican performance of Monteverdi's Vespers early in the week. Now, I'm not criticizing it, I'm simply saying that it is not a historical performance and it doesn't make a pretense—or perhaps it does make a pretense, but if you look at that performance objectively, you can't really maintain its historicity.

I remember very vividly, right here in Zellerbach Hall some years ago, Frans Brüggen brought his Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century to perform Beethoven's *Eroica*. I went to the dress rehearsal, and first I heard what one usually hears from Brüggen in this repertory: I heard a very comfortable old Bruno Walter performance with old instruments. (Obviously that's one of the reasons it's being so successful—it's not challenging anybody's taste very much, this kind of performance.) And particularly what was Bruno Walter-ish about it was the tempi, which were all the traditional tempi which we are used to, not the ones that you read in Beethoven's metronome marks.

Then in the intermission of the rehearsal, when Brüggen was available for questions by the audience, somebody asked, basically, "well, what are you trying to do, anyway?" And his answer—it was a knee-jerk answer, the answer you always hear—"We want to be obedient to the composer." Well, if you really wanted to be obedient to the composer, you would have looked and seen what the composer asked you to set as his tempo and tried to set it. But Brüggen never made any such attempt.

Now, as some of you may know, I've praised very extravagantly one conductor who has made it his business to follow Beethoven's metronome markers in the symphonies—although such a thing has often been written off as impossible, and there are all kinds of myths about Beethoven's broken metronome, and all of that, to bolster the reluctance of modern performers to come to terms with those markings. But Roger Norrington has tried to do it, and in many cases he has succeeded. Now, when I praised him for it I was told "you say you're not historical or not a historicist, but the reason why you're praising Norrington is because he has better history than, let's say,

Christopher Hogwood.” Well, that wasn’t the reason. I was very refreshed, I was very encouraged to see that somebody was trying to get outside of self, trying to remake himself to perform this music in what he thought of as an historical way.

And how do you do this? You have to adopt some kind of a given; you can’t make yourself over from within. So he said, I suppose, all right, we’ll take those tempi as a given. We’ll change everything else, but we’ll make sure we keep to those tempi. We’ll find ways of articulating the music, we’ll find ways of phrasing the music, we’ll find ways of breathing for the winds, bowing for the strings, and so on—so that these tempi may be saved.

Yet Norrington, too, is not historical in his approach to tempo, because he insists that tempos, once established, have to be rigidly held, undeviatingly. And if you listen to his performance of Beethoven’s Ninth, I think you’ll find it is destroyed by the notion that a tempo once set has got to be maintained. It’s what everybody’s piano teacher teaches him about the “classical” period—which as you know, of course, was invented by the Romantic period. But there’s no evidence for it. In fact: when, spurred by my dissatisfaction with Norrington’s recording of the Ninth, I researched this matter and tried to find some authority for the idea that you’ve got to stay with a tempo once you set it, all I could come up with was contrary evidence. Nobody at the time talked about steady tempi. They all discussed tempo, but the only questions were how to change it, whether you get faster or slower—things like that.

The third item which I think can be easily falsified on the basis of historical data is the matter of the chasteness with which Mozart’s texts have to be maintained, adhered to, and transmitted without change. (I’m thinking of Mozart now because I recently reviewed the recordings of Malcolm Bilson and John Eliot Gardner of the piano concertos.) One of the things about twentieth-century aesthetics that is so different from that of any other period is the centrality of texts to our idea of what is “authentic” in music, rather than the idea of a performance practice. The latter idea is extremely performer-oriented, rather than text-oriented (and of course text-oriented means composer-oriented). But given these twentieth-century ideas about texts, you can’t embellish floridly—and that means you can’t do what Mozart did. You can’t do what Mozart expected others to do when performing his music.

Now: in no case am I criticizing the performances by saying they are not historical, because I don’t believe they ought to be. I believe it’s much, much more important to find our way of doing things than to try to pretend that we don’t exist as people and try to become other

people. I myself have very often been criticized for my negativism, for my negative attitudes toward historical performance; some of the people who have already spoken today have done this. But I think I'm very positive about this question, because I think it's much more important to be us than to achieve historical verisimilitude. Historical verisimilitude is just correctness, and correctness is a very paltry virtue. Correctness is the kind of virtue you demand of students, not of artists.

NICHOLAS MCGEGAN (*Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra*)

I approach this more from the point of view of a performer than a scholar, but I'd like to offer a few comments—a kind of credo, if you like, of what I agree with . . . though actually I agree with everything that was said in one way or another, even the stuff about baroque orchestras!

Just one or two remarks: first of all, I reject totally the idea of the moral health of authenticity—if you like the sort of whole wheat factor: the idea that we're somehow providing performances with lower cholesterol which should make you feel better than the creamy version provided by Mr. Leppard—the nutrasweet version. One of the reasons I think this idea is very dangerous is that it implies the one thing the arts can never provide, and that is the Right Answer. When Newton wrote the *Principia mathematica* he came up with some theories which are still true. I've never in my entire life, thank heavens, been able to do the same performance twice—even on consecutive days—of any piece. So if I can't do it on consecutive days, I don't see why anybody else should be able to do it either! Every performance is an emotional response to how you feel at the time and that must have been true then, just as it is now. You can't try, by getting more and more and more authentic, ever to get to some mythical Right Answer.

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One of the things that I wish to say has to do with the business of recording, because I am very much concerned with this. I spent a lot of time in the 1970s doing recordings of music in what were very much billed as authentic performances. Usually—and especially for the German market—they had “auf originalen Instrumenten” plastered across the side, like the rosette you give to a prize cow—as if somehow just being on original instruments was enough. It is equivalent, for me, to imagining a playbill outside this Playhouse for a performance of *Hamlet*, shall we say, that would advertise “tonight all the words are going to be performed in the right order.” That seems to me, as Richard Taruskin said, where you start.

The main purpose, the main philosophy of those recordings seemed to be encyclopedic: to record the complete whatever-it-was. In

my case, I think it was probably more Mozart symphonies than Mozart probably ever knew he wrote. They were recorded by instrumentation—in other words, we would do an entire day of slow movements from different symphonies if they had flutes in them, and the following day we'd do an entire day of trumpet minuets, regardless of key. We had one day's rehearsal a week—that was probably the only part that was vaguely historical about the whole thing.

But it was deeply under-rehearsed. One of the things that distressed me about this (apart from the small size of the paycheck) was that under-interpretation seemed to be part of the game. For the conductor to impose his personal opinion on the music was somehow inauthentic. He shouldn't get in the way; if you unleashed the corsets of the music it could breath freely of its own accord. I cannot imagine this to be authentic—I cannot imagine Handel turning up with his *Resurrezione* and saying, "well, I'd better not *interpret* this just because I wrote it." It seems to me that the dangers of these recordings are very similar to butterfly collections. The butterflies are very beautiful, all the colors are absolutely magnificent—but there's a ruddy great pin through every one which has killed it stone dead.

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Unfortunately technology now manages to preserve all our ghastly interpretations for a panel like this that will meet in 2090—when *Early Music* will be the equivalent of *The Yellow Book*, I would imagine—to discuss the quaint movement that happened a hundred years ago. My final comment is simply this: I believe you should make recordings because of personal belief in the music and a wish to convey your ideas to a wider public, not because you wish to devour, like Gargantua, the complete this and that.