

editorial

Aesthetics, Authenticities, and Appeals to Authority: The Auditor as Author

By Daniel N. Thompson

The sound may be the object, but man is the subject; and the key to understanding music is in the relationships existing between subject and object, the activating principle of organization.

—John Blacking

Because authenticity is an issue that has periodically arisen within ethnomusicology, I have with some interest followed the early-European-music community's authenticity debates for the past several years. Whether "authenticity" is discussed by ethnomusicologists or early-music scholars, however, it seems to me that a reasonable response to these debates might be: As an object of study, our understanding of music and its practitioners can only benefit from empirical research into historical (or other contextual) performance practices. As a vehicle for aesthetic satisfaction, on the other hand, it seems only natural that there should be a plurality of performance practices.

Although some ethnomusicologists seem to believe as vehemently in "aesthetic correctness" as do the most reactionary conservatory teachers, most ethnomusicologists have for the past several years accepted aesthetic diversity. This aesthetic tolerance, in fact, is what first drew me to ethnomusicology. What I have therefore found to be most striking about the early-music authenticity debates that have taken place is the falsely dichotomous "historical authenticity vs. aesthetic correctness" stance often maintained by some of the more vocal members of the (formerly?) mainstream camp, as well as the corresponding mistake made by some scholars and performers from the other side: the conflation of aesthetic superiority with historical accuracy.¹ Taruskin was surely right when he wrote, "Authenticity is knowing what you are, and acting in accordance with that knowledge" (1995: 67). For many people, however, "aesthetically authentic" musical activity includes performing and consuming "historically authentic" early European music.

In ethnomusicology, we generally start from the presupposition that aesthetic sense is not a quantity to be graded on a universal scale (still less

to be thought of as a quality that some people have and some people don't), but is, rather, a valuable indicator that can often teach us a great deal about the people with whom we share music. Consequently, aesthetics- and authenticity-related questions often lead ethnomusicologists to questions concerning identity: Authentic for whom? Beautiful for whom?

Even when scholars acknowledge that there are *authenticities* rather than *authenticity*, the listener is still too often ignored. For instance, in his book entitled *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance*, Peter Kivy recognizes "historical authenticity" as a category which he further divides into three subcategories, each of which is a kind of "faithfulness": "These are the notions of (1) faithfulness to the composer's performance intentions; (2) faithfulness to the performance practice of the composer's lifetime; [and] (3) faithfulness to the sound of a performance during the composer's lifetime" (Kivy 1995: 6-7). He then adds another category, which he calls, among other things, "personal authenticity" (108 ff.), and which he defines as "faithfulness to the *performer's* own self, original, not derivative or an aping of someone else's way of playing" (7, italics added).²

Although most ethnomusicologists would undoubtedly welcome Kivy's considerations of the composer's intentions and of performance as "practiced" during the composer's lifetime (in addition to the more usual attention to the "sound of a performance"), it seems to me that an ethnomusicologist would (or should) point out that this script calls for more characters than just performers and composers. There are also the listeners, who may or may not be "performers" or "composers"—at least in the conventional senses of these terms.

Let me add, therefore, what I think should be an important component to Kivy's performer-centric idea of personal authenticity. There is also *faithfulness to the [listener's] own self, original, not derivative or an aping of someone else's way of [listening]* (which includes aping someone else's "listening tastes").

The consideration of early music's aesthetic appeal for today's audiences, then, requires a shift of musicological attention from composition to audition/cognition, from composer to listener, and is reflected in my subtitle. Any listener may be asked: Do you like this performance (whether live or recorded)? Does it *work* for you? If a listener is aping the listening tastes of another, it seems impossible that the listener can respond honestly, which is to say, respond "faithfully" to him- or herself. Postmodernist writers are not the first to locate musical meaning within the listener rather than in the musical object. In a statement that prefigures the epigraph by Blacking (1973: 26) at the beginning of this essay,

the American liberal pragmatist philosopher John Dewey gave during the 1930s another description of art-as-process:

Art is a quality of doing and of what is done. Only outwardly, then, can it be designated by a noun substantive. . . . The *product* of art . . . is not the *work* of art. The work takes place when a human being co-operates with the product so that the outcome is an experience that is enjoyed because of its liberating and ordered properties. (1934: 214)

Presumably, then, the work of art changes when the human being changes (i.e., is transformed, or replaced with another person).

“Listening practice” received some attention in the early-European-music community with the publication of the twenty-fifth-anniversary issue of *Early Music* in November 1997 (its usual section entitled “Performance matters” was temporarily retitled “Listening matters”); however, even in that commendable issue, the presupposition of “aesthetic correctness” was unfortunately evident:

As the neglected member of the holy trinity of those involved in the conception, realization and reception of music, the listener should rightly now receive more attention. . . . You can take, and most people naturally do, a totally relativistic view of listening; just as you can of performing—anything goes if it works; everyone’s reaction is equally valid. . . . But the very effort we all make to try and agree on a reaction to a concert shows how wrong is a totally nihilistic view: some performances are *good* and some are *bad*, and we struggle to articulate why. (Kenyon 1997: 555, italics added)

What does Kenyon mean by “good” here? Historically accurate? Or aesthetically pleasing? And who are these people (“we all”) who “try and agree on a reaction”? And if by “good performances” he means aesthetically pleasing ones, why is it so important that “we all” agree on personal constructions such as (what might be called) the “aesthetically good”? (It seems to me that when most people try to decide which performances are *aesthetically* good, they are employing essentially the same sort of taste discrimination as when trying to decide which compositions and composers *are* good.) And because some scholars, apparently, try to “agree on a reaction to a concert,” how does it follow, therefore, that this shows “how wrong is a totally nihilistic view”? Finally, is it *nihilism* if people have honest aesthetic disagreements and then decide *not* to “try and agree on a reaction to a concert”?

The trouble lies in the presupposition that "some performances are good and some are bad." As long as the statement is formulated in this way, it seems likely that scholars and others will continue, as Kenyon says, to "struggle to articulate why." This is a euphemism for saying that scholars will continue to argue about the music. It would, of course, be so much more accurate to say, "I liked some performances and I didn't like others," but this would require us to shift our attention from the sounds to ourselves and, under the auspices of the conventional scholarly attitude toward the investigation of music, would obviate much of the authority that accrues to those who are considered to be experts on various musical topics.³

The Temporal Orientation of the Auditor

Perhaps one of the first questions that should be asked when discussing *any* performance is "What does a performer intend to accomplish with this performance?" Do performers wish, for instance, to convey *what* they believe the composer wanted to communicate (i.e., the *effect* he intended the music to have on his listeners) or, rather, do they wish to convey the musical sound in a manner as historically accurate as possible? For those performers for whom it is most important to convey *what* they believe the composer wanted to communicate, it may be important—given the cultural conditioning and expectations of today's audience—to employ other means than did the composer during his own lifetime.

On the other hand, those performers for whom the medium *is* the message (regardless of other considerations) will undoubtedly attempt a best effort at the production of historically authentic sounds. If, however, they feel that the response the composer may have intended to elicit from his audience can best be accomplished by using the same *means* as did the composer (and performers of his time), then they may not have taken adequate account of the fact that *audiences* have changed.⁴

Unfortunately, the audience has too often been ignored in conventional musicology, apparently because of a presupposition on the part of some scholars that the audience is just *there*, inert, with nothing to add to the onrushing evolution of Western music. The idea that "pieces" of music and performers are variable but that audiences are not helps to lead to confusion between the ends and the means of performance. If early-music scholars presume that audiences interpret music precisely the same way that they did a few hundred years ago, then it would logically seem that the use of modern instruments would, indeed, lead to perhaps quite different interpretations. Again, however, because listeners *are* culturally conditioned very differently from how they were a few hundred years ago, it seems entirely reasonable to suppose that different means (e.g., modern instruments) might be required to communicate the "original message"

(assuming, of course, that we even *could* know what the composer intended to communicate).⁵ This argument has sometimes been used by those musicians and scholars who reacted negatively to the authentic performance movement, and is an appeal to the traditionalists' authority as carriers, particularly in music conservatories, of the Western art music tradition.

The ideal of the unchanged and unchanging audience seems to be presupposed in many standard musicological works. For instance, even in the generally measured and reasonable "Performing Practice" article in the 1980 *Grove*, the authors presuppose that we can know what a composer "imagined." They also seem to assume that the listener is *tabula rasa* (or is at least part of an audience whose musical conditioning has not changed at all, even over the course of centuries).

Reproducing as closely as one can the techniques and timbres known to be appropriate to a given period can never replace performances that are musically convincing to the audience; and yet the means and style of performance *imagined* by a composer are so indissolubly bound up with the whole musical fabric that he has set down, that the *communication* and *impact* of the composition are seriously impaired if the sounds he *imagined* are not at least kept in mind when preparing modern performances. (Mayer Brown and McKinnon 1980: 14:371, italics added)

"Communication" and "impact" are dependent upon far more than just the composer's imagination. (They are also dependent upon more than the imaginations of those who imagine what the composer imagined.) They are ultimately dependent upon "receivers" (i.e., listeners), and it seems unlikely that the ancient composer could have accurately imagined the impact that his composition would have on an audience that lives, say, a few hundred years into the composer's future. Again, the reason for this is that audiences' musical conditioning has undoubtedly changed substantially during the (perhaps many) years that have elapsed from the time of composition to the time of today's reception. Furthermore, each listener has her own individual historical context; listeners "bring their contexts with them" to each concert. In this sense, each listener is, as indicated above, her own author.

Finally, audiences are not the only ones who change. Composers' ideas of how they wanted things performed often changed during their own lifetimes. In addition to the question "Authentic for whom?" is the obvious question "Authentic when?" (a point brought out by, among others, Mayer Brown 1988: 28 and Brett 1988: 110).

However, an interesting and probably unintended consequence of the proliferation of early-music recordings and performances over the past few decades is that ordinary listeners as well as musicians have been increasingly empowered—to experience music that (at least for a large part of the musical public) more closely matches their individual aesthetics. In other words, different listeners at different times prefer different recordings and performances, and although they may not always choose to hear the more historically accurate performances, they often *do* (as shown by the vastly increased popularity over the course of the past several years of early-music performances that owe little to nineteenth-century musical aesthetics). The traditionalists' expostulations about the sterility of historically accurate performances have too often ignored the fact that many early-music listeners (including several of my own personal acquaintances, not all of whom are ethnomusicologists) don't care whether the performances are historically accurate or not; rather, they like the sound of the harpsichord, they like the sound of the Baroque violin, they like the smaller choir. They simply *like* it.

Apparently, however, many traditionalists had been so imbued with late-nineteenth-century aesthetic values that they often didn't seem aware of their own inherited prejudices. One obvious example is the concept of musical expression. A note struck repeatedly by critics of the early-music movement has been that "authentic" performances lack expression. What strikes me, however, is how unquestioningly have those in the musicological mainstream equated wider dynamic ranges, the presence of vibrato, much nineteenth-century instrument technology, etc., with greater expressivity (for one example among many, see Temperley 1984: 16–20). These writers seemed to seldom interrogate their own presuppositions regarding musical expression. (In other words, I have never read an account of a serious consideration of the alternative idea that "less is more,"—i.e., less vibrato, dynamic range, etc. might be *more* expressive.)

We are fortunate that we have choices. We can listen to *Messiah* performed with a late-nineteenth-century orchestra or we can hear it performed with Baroque instruments. Many people tend to prefer that with which they are familiar, and this is as true of musicians and musicologists as it is of the musical layperson. The greatly increased acceptance of early music that is performed in a "historically accurate" manner is undoubtedly due to the public's increased exposure to it (e.g., there are now numerous recordings of early music performed with early instruments; the public that listens to European art music is exposed to early-music programs on public radio; more craftsmen are making Baroque violins, violas da gamba, etc., than in, say, 1910; etc.). This increased activity is due to the increased public demand, which is in turn due to increased activity, and so

on. Listeners' increasing familiarity with the sonorities of an earlier time have multiplied the number of options for music consumers (including performers), which has allowed more of us to perform and hear music in ways that more closely match our individual tastes (i.e., ways that are personally authentic) at any given time. In other words, one answer to the question "How is a piece of music to be made most convincing/effective/expressive for today's audience, regardless of the wishes *or* tools of the composer?" may be (depending upon who the auditor is): "This piece of music can be made most expressive and convincing by engaging in historically accurate performance practices."

The Spatial Orientation of the Auditor

What of the performance of contemporary music? Three decades ago Willi Apel wrote—or at least apparently still believed—that "in the period after Bach the problems of performance practice largely disappear, owing to the more specific directions of composers for clearly indicating their intentions" (Apel 1969: 659).

The short answer to Apel is that he clearly never attended a rehearsal of his *own* compositions! In regard to the issue of following a composer's intentions, living composers *may* have the option of personally telling performers exactly what they want (or even demonstrating such). Some composers even have the power to dismiss recalcitrant performers; however, the disparity between what a composer wants and what the performers produce does not disappear simply because a composer may be alive (or even *present* at rehearsals).

Perhaps the more important response to Apel's statement is that the reason there aren't more performance-practice treatises on works by living composers is that the composer whose work is being interpreted might publicly dispute the statements of the scholar (and it seems doubtful that such contradiction would help any hermeneuticist's career).

The study of creative tension between performers and living composers would be an extension of the relatively recent tendency to include the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries within the matrix of performance practice. Problems of performance practice remain, moreover, even when a composer coaches a rehearsal, the performers have the requisite musical skills, and there is every intention on the part of the performers to follow the composer's wishes. (Of course, a listener might feel that the "mistakes" made in performance make the listening experience "better"—what might be called "more aesthetically authentic" for that listener.)

Hans Keller noted in the mid-1980s that the problems of performance practice only "end" with computer or electronic music that doesn't require live performers. "[T]he interpretation of anything except electronic

music, which does not need it, is the tail-end of composition" (Keller 1984: 517). I'm glad to see Keller's emphasis on interpretation, but his statement clearly refers to the fact that electronic music does not need conventional *performers*. Performers are certainly interpreters, but there are interpreters other than performers. In the case of electronic or computer music, members of the audience are the only interpreters left in the equation: problems of interpretation have morphed from issues of performance practice to those of listening practice.

One listening-practice issue for live performances is "audience placement," because depending upon where one sits in the auditorium or other performance space, one is likely to hear music that is different from what the composer intended. We could go further, and say that any two people that (hypothetically) sit in the same spot—or that in reality sit in almost the same spot—will hear two different things. In both of these cases, performance practice has been transmuted into listening practice, and would perhaps more fittingly require the assistance of music-psychological/cognitive and ethnomusicological methods and theories during investigation and explication.

Audience placement is of course important not only for computer music. Nicholas Kenyon notes in his introduction to *Authenticity and Early Music: A Symposium* that "Berlioz was explored in a Norrington weekend in London in March 1988, which included successful performances of both the *Symphonie fantastique* and *Romeo and Juliet* using not only period instruments but adapted 'period' seating plans for orchestra and chorus" (1988: 11).

But how about a seating plan for the audience? Although the reception of Berlioz's music might not be *greatly* affected, it seems likely enough that for performances of at least some works—certain secular works by earlier composers, for example—the audience should be eating, drinking, and otherwise making merry. In his contribution to the same volume, Robert Morgan takes account of this part of the problem: "[E]arly music was not intended to be performed in concert. Indeed, if we take the notion of context at all seriously, we are left with the painful realization that any concert performance of this music constitutes a basic perversion of its original intentions" (1988: 71). (Morgan doesn't indicate why he finds this realization "painful.")

For absolutely authentic performances—to continue this line of thought—we should probably duplicate the size of the original concert hall, the design of the auditorium, the materials of which it was made, and on and on, until—in order to include the listeners' perception/cognition—we finally arrive at considerations of audience placement as well as the *individual histories of the original listeners*. Clearly, however, this ever-

expanding spiral of consideration cannot continue indefinitely. Although the audience is not a homogeneous mass, we obviously have to “draw the line” somewhere. Nevertheless, the boundary that delimits admissible evidence is the boundary beyond which lies the impossible, purist’s ideal of absolute authenticity.

The perception-and-cognition/audience-placement dilemma can be easily illustrated with an example from my own research on Irish music in New York. At a *seisiún* [session]—in which the aesthetics of the concert hall play little part—players sit in a group and perform tunes (usually reels and sometimes jigs) from memory. For the past several decades, *seisiúin* have generally taken place in bars and pubs. There is usually a significant amount of ambient noise present, which is expected (and often preferred) by the musicians. Players come and go throughout the evening, and although there exists a concept called “session etiquette,” informality reigns.

Which versions of the tunes played are authentic? It depends on whom you ask. It also depends on when you ask, where you ask, how you ask, and, perhaps most importantly, why you ask. It probably also depends on where the listener is sitting. What does she hear? If she moves to another seat she will hear something different. Is the performance she now hears more authentic than what she heard a moment before? Or less so?

The musicians who attend sessions perform music—usually learned without the aid of notation—in a venue where people are eating and drinking and where listening to music is not the primary objective for much of the “audience.” It might therefore be objected that this situation is so entirely different from listening to music in the concert hall that it won’t bear comparison. But the problems of perception/cognition still exist. It can be said that when one sits in a different spot in the concert hall, one is listening to a different “version” of the music, that the sounds are, in fact, *different music*.

For instance, during a *seisiún*, the dynamic balance of the instruments changes if the listener changes seats. There is no perfect place for a listener to sit, particularly during ensemble playing (and the larger the ensemble, the more complex become problems of dynamic balance). This problem is not obviated in the recording studio: if a recording is made and dynamic balance is attained electronically in the studio, is it then an “authentic” recording? Or not?

This issue has also been raised in the case of early European cultivated music: “The sound technician has become a main participant in the interpretation of early music” (Goldberg 1997: 571). Morgan notes the same philosophical problem with regard to the “hyperrealism” of certain visual artists: “All details are rendered with a sort of absolute distinctness,

thereby acquiring a degree of 'purity' inconceivable in the realm of actual visual experience. Everything is equally in focus. . . . Are these painters in fact presenting reality 'as it really is?'" (1988: 74–75). He says later that the world depicted "is in fact one that could never be directly experienced" (1988: 75). In fact, in shifting the emphasis of investigation from music object to human subject, Dewey, Blacking, and others have continued the line of investigation employed by thinkers at least as far back as Aristoxenus (364–304 BCE), who argued that "music appreciation can only be understood by studying the mind of the listener, not the external collection of sounds that impinge upon the ear" (this translation cited in Levitin 1999: 505).

Appeals to Authority

Looking back on the past few decades, it seems that the practitioners of "historical" performances have generally claimed that their authority is based on historical accuracy. The traditionalist performers, critics, and musicologists, on the other hand, apparently derive *their* authority from their traditional influence on Western art music performance and study, as well as from their own individual interpretive acuity. It seems, however, that each camp was really fighting for authority *itself* (i.e., fighting for control of the early-music narrative). And in order to claim authority for themselves, they appealed to what they both considered a higher authority: the composer. Crutchfield's statement below is an example of appeal to a different authority:

Authenticity implies authority, and ultimately an author. The author of a performance—of a bow stroke, a crescendo, an impulse, a radiant act of absorption—is the performer, with whose condition we must be concerned if authenticity is what we're after. (Crutchfield 1988: 26)

I agree with this as far as it goes, but if the author of a performance is the performer, then the author of the listening experience is the auditor, because it doesn't, after all, matter what *either* the composer or performer intends to transmit if the message is perceived differently from what either of them had intended. "Transmission" cannot be separated from its perceiver.⁶

Although *absolutely* authentic performances are obviously impossible, it nonetheless seems extraordinary that the early-music movement was so vehemently attacked in the scholarly press. I suspect that at least part of the reason is that many in the "authentic performance" movement ignored

the aesthetics lectures of their critics. In doing so, they empowered the audience as well as themselves. The net effect is that Western art music's narrative is no longer explicated exclusively by traditionalist musicologists (i.e., musicologists whose aesthetic sensibilities are largely a product of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) and its performance is no longer largely controlled by musicians immersed in *fin-de-siècle* performance practices of a hundred years ago. In other words, the reason why the mainstream so vociferously attacked the proponents of early instruments and early-music performance practices is that during the last few decades of the twentieth century the scholar-critics' views had become increasingly irrelevant to many performers of early music as well as to much of the record-buying and concert-going public.

As mentioned before, what both the authenticists and the traditionalists had in common was an appeal to authority. Authenticists appealed to the authority of (what they hoped were) historical facts, and traditionalists appealed to the authority of their positions as experts who, through both conventional practice and intuition, "knew" what composers had intended (or who knew—at times—even better than the composer⁷).

Some "nonauthenticists" have argued for "more interpretation" and less dependence on "cold facts," but it seems that they have often been only interested in more of their own interpretations (which is logical, I suppose, if one indeed takes the position that, due to one's own authoritative "intuition," one's own aesthetics should be universal). Taruskin's statement that "what is only personal is irrelevant" (1988: 153) seems to express the modernist belief that in the realm of aesthetics there is a right and a wrong. (Another way of saying this is that in order for there to be winners, there must be losers.) The rules of *this* game would undoubtedly tend to make anyone combative because they virtually dictate that scholars must fear a loss of power if they are unable to force others to adopt their aesthetic preferences. Aesthetics decisions, however, are highly personal matters, and it seems likely that no individual listener's aesthetic sensibility will be exactly the same as any other listener's. Because they *are* personal, they will not validly conform to any other listener's aesthetic agenda. In fact, in a listener-centric model, *only the personal is relevant*.

Furthermore, although it may be true that "the choice of what to make into a 'text' can only proceed from a rather thorough understanding of the historical context and its implications" (Brett 1988: 107), to what degree should the *scholar's* historical context enter our considerations of the history he writes? In his contribution to *Authenticity and Early Music* Gary Tomlinson makes his own bid for authority, replacing the authority of performers as well as specialists in early-music scholarship with the authority

of the cultural historian. In his article, he writes that the more context we know, the fuller will be our historical (factual?) appreciation of a piece of music.

I agree. It is important to point out, however, that the people who attend concerts and read program notes—as well as the scholars who study monographs on the history of Western art music—would have an even greater understanding of what the historian writes if they understood the context out of which the historian works. In other words, to have an even fuller understanding of the history of a piece of music, we need to know as much as we can about the *historian's* life (i.e., his or her own historical context). Then we might have a better understanding of why the historian has chosen to highlight some aspects of the history of a piece of music, and not others; why he chose to study this music or composer, and not others.

The authentic meaning of a musical work is not the meaning that its creators and first audience invested in it. It is instead the meaning that we, in the course of interpretative historical acts of various sorts, come to believe its creators and audience invested in it. . . . [T]he authentic meanings of a work arise from our relating it to an array of things outside itself that we believe gave it meaning in its original context. . . . Such interpretation is the province especially of the cultural historian, and the authentic meanings gained through it are given fullest voice through his or her methods. (Tomlinson 1988: 115, 123, italics added)

We? To whom does Tomlinson refer? Other historians, perhaps? If so, he seems to appropriate for himself and other historians *authentic* meanings, which apparently leaves *inauthentic* meanings to the rest of us. (This is problematic, for what happens when the cultural historians disagree? Who are *we*, then?) It might seem at first that a shift to “meaning” is a signal that we are for the moment no longer considering “historical truth.” But a shift from “authenticity” to that of “authentic meaning” doesn’t really help, nor does the shifting of his terminology from the singular “authentic meaning” to the plural “authentic meanings.” Tomlinson seems to be saying that because cultural historians know more *facts* about the past than do other people, the *meanings* that they project onto a musical performance are authentic. (In an about-face, however, he denies the value of the “objective” knowledge of the one group that conceivably knew more about their environment than do today’s historians: the people who actually lived during the historical periods discussed.)

I would have felt better if, in the first line of the immediately preceding extract, Tomlinson had at least written, “*Our* authentic meaning of a musi-

cal work is not the meaning that its creators . . ." or "*For us*, the authentic meaning of a musical work. . ." He has stated the above in such a way that it seems he presupposes an Authentic Meaning (or Authentic Meanings) irrespective of the passage of time, and that he is merely substituting the new authority of cultural history for the other authorities (conventional musicology, historical authenticity, the conservatory tradition—even the authority of performers who were contemporaries of the composer).

It is doubtful that it is any easier to separate the historian from the history than it is to separate the musical work from "its" history. As mentioned above, however, this ever-widening net of consideration must be delimited. In order to use language we have to draw the line somewhere, and—because I have observed that many scholars would prefer to speak about objects and events "outside themselves" as if they were able to do so independently of their own personal histories—I suspect that it is easiest to draw this line in such a way that it separates us from the world we are supposedly objectively observing.

Taruskin has written that "old instruments and old performance practices are in themselves of no aesthetic value," which is undoubtedly true, but *nothing* is "in itself" of any aesthetic value whatsoever. He then says that "the claim of self-evidence for the virtue of adhering to a composer's 'intentions' is really nothing but a mystique" (1984: 3, 7), but it's difficult to understand how this is more of a mystique than the authority claimed by the performer or scholar who either challenges the composer's intentions, or who claims that the composer actually intended something different from what might be indicated in the score.

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Looking back, it seems clear that the historical performance movement won most of the battles (if not the entire war) because it has increased the number of listening choices available to the consumer (and if a listener viscerally enjoys particular performances and recordings, it seems doubtful that any amount of hectoring in scholarly journals will—or should—affect that enjoyment). The early-music performers have not provided us with just one historically authentic version of each piece of early music; instead, they have given us a number of performances and recordings that we might enjoy (some of which—depending upon how we define the terms—are probably more historically accurate than others). The several different recorded renditions continue to be added to those we already own or have heard, and if a significant number of listeners respond enthusiastically, then these sundry performances are undoubtedly aesthetically convincing for those people, regardless of where these performances may fall on the continuum of historical authenticity.

Today we can listen to music from almost any place on the planet and from almost any historical period, and the increasing popularity of musics that for the contemporary West are both spatially and temporally distant is strong evidence that many listeners—including musicians—clearly enjoy this variety. How far can one go in interpreting a piece of music? (For many members of the musical public, the most aesthetically convincing performances of plainchant are those that employ drum machines and synthesizer washes; for many, the most convincing performances of Bach can only be accomplished on a grand piano.) Traditionalists probably have come to realize that their arguments for “intuition” can be used against them by supporting interpretations that many of them would never condone, for there are certainly as many *aesthetically* authentic ways to perform (and appreciate) music as there are listeners.

I suspect also that the debates have died down because scholars and critics have slowly come to understand that there isn't really anything to fight over. It seems doubtful that the early-instrument performers have taken away a great number of audience members from the mainstream (which is to say that the lovers of traditionalist performance practices have not suddenly stopped patronizing their favorite performers). The dissemination of early music isn't a zero-sum game.

I submit that what has happened instead is that a *new* audience has been created, and in a brief attempt at the sort of disclosure I have asked for above, I should admit that I am a part of this audience. For one example among many: I have never responded positively to heavy vocal vibrato, and once I began to listen more frequently to early music, I found refreshing the light, or even absent, vibrato. Furthermore, it is a matter of historical interest to me that early instruments, for example, are more historically accurate conveyors of early musical sound than later instruments; however, what is primarily important to me is that I generally find their sounds to be more pleasing.

For that portion of this new early-music audience that has been drawn from pop and “folk” music audiences, I suspect that the congeniality of certain early-music performance practices (e.g., reduced vocal vibrato, use of lutes and other early instruments) together with other aspects of much of this music (e.g., generally straightforward harmonies, relatively narrow dynamic ranges, etc.) is due to the fact that these attributes are often exhibited by the vernacular musics with which this audience is already familiar. (In fact, the investigation of audiences' perceptions of how “common practice” and early music compare with selected genres of popular music might constitute an interesting ethnomusicological project. The researcher would have to engage identity issues, of course, because listeners' cognition of the music cannot be separated from their own personal historical contexts.)

Empirical researchers—the results of whose investigations have increased the number of performance choices for listeners in the present—should recognize that an increased understanding of the past should be the primary motivation for their historical research. “Historical authenticity” should never be used as a stick to beat others when the issues involved are, in truth, aesthetic. Still, empirical research is an enterprise that builds on itself, its value eventually becoming evident to even its most entrenched opponents. Polemical essays on aesthetics, on the other hand, are themselves aesthetic objects, which may please because of their rhetorical force or the erudition displayed by the author, but as vehicles that convey anything *other* than the personal preferences of the writer, become increasingly irrelevant (and valued more and more for only their performative qualities). With the benefit of hindsight, Nigel Rogers’s words now seem prophetic:

It should not be necessary to remind scholars that they are also subject to change, even if perhaps less mercurially than performers are. . . . The derision and oblivion that the scholars are happy to remind us are waiting for us round the next corner may be waiting for them round the one after that. (1984: 525)

Empirical research is hard work, whether done in the field or in an archive. It often requires long, irregular hours, extended periods of travel away from home, and tedious, painstaking tasks. It is, in the parlance of economists, labor-intensive. Perhaps it is easier to publish opinion pieces that promote one’s aesthetics. But why bother to argue about the aesthetics of music? I’m reminded of a statement made by Arthur C. Clarke in regard to certain political and economic issues, although in this context I would substitute “aesthetics”: “The time will come when most of our present controversies on these matters will seem as trivial, or as meaningless, as the theological debates in which the keenest minds of the Middle Ages dissipated their energies” (Clarke 1962: 13).

* * *

As noted above, “Authenticity implies authority, and ultimately an author” (Crutchfield 1988: 26). In any case, authority has often followed authorship. With the advent of audio recordings, however, a new type of document made its appearance, and with it, an implied challenge to “print” authorities. In *Authenticity and Early Music* Taruskin calls audio recordings “‘documents’ of a special narcissistic kind” (1988: 143). How so? Are they any more inherently narcissistic than essays? In the same book, Howard Mayer Brown incisively warns that “personal commitment is a necessary virtue for performers (who ought not to play music in a

particular style unless they are in sympathy with it), but it may be a luxury to which scholars ought not to aspire" (1988: 55). Nonetheless, too many of the articles and essays on authenticity that have appeared throughout the past several years seem to me to be themselves performances in which "personal commitment" is indulged to the point that it seems to devour the other "necessary virtue[s]." (This is not to say, of course, that there should be no place for the airing of aesthetic opinion: newspaper reviews of musical performances and audio recordings are perfectly legitimate vehicles for this type of rhetoric, as well as for the emotional, "huffing and puffing" mode of discourse that is often a part of the critical performance.)

The devotees of early instruments and "historically authentic" performances have undoubtedly enriched the musical landscape, and in reviewing the reactionary responses of many of those who, throughout most of the twentieth century, could still be referred to as mainstream musicologists, it seems to me that these fights have really been as much about the authority and power of entrenched musicological interests and the legitimacy of the opinions of those who hold power as they have been about aesthetic correctness. I suspect, therefore, that although most performers will generally continue to engage in the performance practices they find most congenial, it is probably important for musicologists to continue to ask two groups of questions: What *kinds* of questions are we asking, and why? Is it necessary that others agree with our findings, and if so, why?

Aesthetics issues are, essentially, identity issues. Who are we that we listen to early music? (When I attend a concert by Columbia University's Collegium Musicum at the University Chapel, I find in attendance a very different audience from that which attends a Sunday matinee performance of Schumann at Avery Fisher Hall.) Music lovers who many years ago may have enjoyed, for instance, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir's versions of *Messiah* were eventually told that the performances they enjoyed were not authentic. This news was not always warmly welcomed.⁸ It seems to me that there are a number of ways to respond to such a charge: 1) Agree that the performances may not be terribly authentic but continue to enjoy them anyway; 2) Be afraid that by preferring the historically "inauthentic" performance one is being aesthetically incorrect, and then lie about one's true preferences in order to gain acceptance to the musicologically savvy crowd; 3) Argue that historical authenticity doesn't matter, that the only thing that does matter is one's own (universally correct) aesthetic opinions, and that opposing aesthetic opinions are therefore "wrong."

Why have so many scholars and performers apparently needed to appeal to authority in order to justify their personal tastes? When the topic is aesthetics, "Does it work for you?" is the only question that ultimately mat-

ters, which implies the demise of criticism that attempts to universalize its authors' aesthetics—particularly those writings that employ argument-from-authority. Understanding a listener's aesthetic sensibility is probably one of the richest avenues to understanding more of the whole person; moreover, the ultimate value of aesthetics is precisely due to the fact that everyone's aesthetic sensibility *is* different.

Notes

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1. Rather than engage in lengthy written qualifications each time I mention these two "camps" (which I have necessarily essentialized, to some degree), I will refer to them as "authenticists" and "traditionalists."

2. In his contribution to *Authenticity and Early Music: A Symposium*, Philip Brett makes reference to Peter Shillingsburg's "four editorial orientations, the historical, the aesthetic, the authorial, and the sociological on the basis of where the textual critic locates authority. . . . Yet in essence they can be reduced to the historical and the critical" (1988: 111).

3. Although there is probably more potential for disagreement when considering aesthetic value, the determination of even *historical* authenticity is largely determined by those parameters that we—as a culture or as individuals—have decided to privilege. To consider just one simple example: Is it more historically accurate to play a Bach harpsichord piece on a piano, or on a synthesizer that sounds like a harpsichord? It depends, obviously, upon which aspects of the keyboard we have decided to examine. If we focus upon timbre, for example, we must choose the synthesizer; if we privilege the instrument-making technology that existed closest to Bach's own time, we must choose the piano.

4. To take a different example for a moment: A common physical gesture, used all over the world, will often have very different meanings in different cultures, whether those cultures are separated temporally or spatially, and this is true for any number of gestures, facial expressions, visual symbols, etc. The opposite is also true: the "same" message can often be transmitted only by using different means.

5. The Buddhist maxim "To change with change is the changeless state" perfectly encapsulates the argument that makes the claim that in order to perceive the *same* verities as did audiences hundreds of years ago—assuming, again, that we even *could* know such a thing—it will probably be necessary to employ *different* means of performance.

6. The inadequacy of noun-centered language to describe uninterrupted process has often been noted in works of literature. Yeats's rhetorical question "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" is one well-known example.

7. See, for instance, Hans Nathan's comment from the 1950s: "A composer cannot always be expected to give an 'authentic' rendition of his own music" (Nathan 1952: 91).

8. "Discussion . . . as to the nature and purpose of authentic performance styles has led . . . to [a] . . . reaction on the part of some musicians against the idea of authenticity, or, as they would say, against a mindless obsession with authenticity. Their [reaction] can be attributed in part to . . . hurt feelings on the part of those musicians criticized on the grounds that they are inauthentic" (Mayer Brown 1988: 53–54).

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