Performance Practice Review

Volume 12 | Number 1 Article 2

Book Review: "Studies in the Printing, Publishing and Performance of Music in the 16th Century." by Stanley Boorman

Maureen Buja

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr

Part of the Music Practice Commons

Buja, Maureen (2007) "Book Review: "Studies in the Printing, Publishing and Performance of Music in the 16th Century." by Stanley Boorman," *Performance Practice Review*: Vol. 12: No. 1, Article 2. DOI: 10.5642/perfpr.200712.01.02
Available at: http://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr/vol12/iss1/2

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Claremont at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Performance Practice Review by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

Book review: Boorman, Stanley *Studies in the Printing, Publishing and Performance of Music in the 16th Century*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. Variorium Collected Studies Series, C815; ISBN 0-86078-970-5.

Maureen Buja

Copyright © 2007 Claremont Graduate University

This book gathers together eleven of Stanley Boorman's articles on sixteenth-century music. The articles as a whole reflect Boorman's wide-ranging interests and show quite distinctly how he uses his work on printing and publishing to inform his thoughts on performance. Although many of the articles will have a peripheral bearing on performance, for the purposes of this review, I will look primarily at these three articles:

- "Notational Spelling and Scribal Habit" (1984)
- "False Relations and the Cadence" (1990)
- "Two Aspects of Performance Practice in the Sistine Chapel of the Early Sixteenth Century" (1994)

"Notational Spelling and Scribal Habit" takes up a long-standing proposition: "that musical notation is both a product and an indicator of the provenance and the antecedents of sources" (IX, 65). Boorman's focus here, however, is looking at scribal habit when there may be a number of possible choices to be made, all with equal value. The scribal use of ligatures and other notational elements involve personal decisions and it is through those decisions that we can begin to look at scribal habit. A large part of Boorman's argument concerns the evolution of a music score: whereas it initially was a support for memory, it gradually became something to replace memory, i.e., something to be read from. As this evolution occurred, the notation itself had to evolve from a reminder to an indication of performance practice. The increasing use of special musical notation such as ligatures and other elements of *minor color* act as visual signs to the singer that something special has to happen–either rhythmic groups or cross rhythms, or text groupings (often equated with rhythmic patterns). In some scores it was used to tell the singer that although the rhythm may repeat, the text must change.

The use of ligatures has traditionally been taken as an aid to text placement and by 1600 ligatures had largely vanished (partially because of faster notational values) except for two clear

cases: text placement or following a model in a pre-existing melody (such as a chant with ligatures). However, in looking at the earlier sixteenth century, Boorman makes the argument that ligatures had other meanings because scribes and printers went to a great deal of trouble both to use them and preserve their use. Boorman proposes that "the use of ligatures in late fifteenth—and early sixteenth—century sources is related directly to phrasing and to musical and textual articulation" (XX, ??). In his numerous and well-chosen examples, Boorman shows again and again how the scribe has used specific notation to tell a singer, for example, to sing his line through the cadence that appears in the other voices. In other words, the notation is telling the singer to ignore his ears and the motions of the other voices and to follow his eyes.

For scholars and performers preparing performing editions, this article is crucial to a re-examination of our notions of the meaning of the notation of this music. Our modern ears and eyes often follow other clues than the contemporaries of the music would have perceived as important.

The second performance article, "False Relations and the Cadence," starts from an analysis for which, as the author cheerfully admits, there is no theoretical support. He builds his arguments through interlocking patterns of evidence from notation, composer's awareness of form, and questions of performance practice. He seeks to prove that certain composers, not the least Josquin and Arcadelt, of the early sixteenth century "expected theoretically forbidden false relations to occur in performance and … they composed in such as way that these harmonically rich sonorities" would occur (X, 221).

Boorman first looks at the presence of leading notes in more than one voice at the approach to a cadence. One of the leading notes will rise to its resolution, and the other will move in the other direction, almost always falling. When, however, *musica ficta* gets involved, situations may arise when a tone that carries through is superceded in another voice by the leading tone, which would expect to take a *ficta* sharp, but is in conflict with the already-sounded note – say an F♯ which is moving to G, but conflicts with an already-sounding F which will fall to D (the F and F♯ form the classic *mi contra fa* situation). He also examines situations, described by Osthoff and Sparks as *Satzfehler*, where the resolution pitch, such as a G in the example above, is already sounding when the F enters below, producing the effect of sounding the suspension (G) against its resolution (F). First thought to be found principally in cadential motions in the works of Josquin, *Satzfehler* is now found in works by a number of composers. One commonality in all the music where *Satzfehler* appears is that all, with one exception, were written for or copied at the Vatican, making it something of a distinctly Roman taste, though the argument may be made that this could perhaps be tempered by a Florentine connection through the Medici Pope Clement VII.

How are performers supposed to react to these situations? While their training may tell them one thing to do, their ears will certainly be telling them something else. Did composers, knowing the problem between false relations and chromatic alteration, deliberately write music that at times clearly avoided the problem and other times invited the dissonance? Boorman

argues that composers did precisely that, but that we cannot be certain of the outcome because we do not know how much singers' training would have helped them avoid or confront the sounds. So, what tools exist for modern performers? Works by James Haar and Thomas Noblitt have dealt with false relations and composers' intentions. Howard Mayer Brown points to other solutions. Brown examined intabulations (instrumental transcriptions of vocal music) and found, in general, a much more highly-charged musical palette than the vocal scores would indicate. But, again, we cannot know the relationship between the instrumental transcription and their vocal sources—did the instrumentalists merely present the vocal situation, or were changes made because of the capabilities of the instruments?

Through a wide-ranging set of examples, Boorman shows how scribes dealt with the false relations, and how composers, principally Roman musicians, used simultaneous leading notes more and more and that they handled them with increasing subtlety and skill. He argues that composers did not expect a single solution to the false-relations situations they created and that they set up these situations with great care. His arguments are detailed and have the result of giving the attentive reader (and performer and editor) much more freedom for experiment than was hitherto thought. As Boorman indicates from the first, there is no support for his hypothesis in the theoretical writings of the period, but he makes a convincing argument for tempering theory with practice and the evidence we find from other contemporary sources. This work has been carried further by scholars such as Peter Urquhart in his own work on false relations. The third essay, "Two Aspects of Performance Practice in the Sistine Chapel of the Early Sixteenth Century," first takes up the relationship between performer and manuscript and, by extension, the relationship between performer and scribe, before extending the question to the relationship between performer and composer through investigation of a particular performing convention. The Sistine Chapel in the seventeenth century, according to Jean Lionnet, did not rehearse for liturgical performances—Boorman posits the same situation probably held for the sixteenth century. The evidence he presents for it ties in with the arguments in the first paper in this collection, discussed above. The scribal practices for a choir that read at sight, as found in manuscripts prepared for the Sistine Chapel, differed from manuscripts prepared for other chapels. Text placement, ligatures, use of pause signs, notation of accidentals, and even locations of page turns are all specified, if not over-specified, in the Sistine sources. By focusing on a specific Vatican scribe, Claudius Gellandi, Boorman presents convincing evidence for the work of the scribe in supporting the extraordinary performance situation within the Sistine Chapel. Work by Richard Sherr on the Vatican rehearsal situation would also be of interest to researchers on this topic.

The three papers in the Performance section show an evolving set of research problems—in some cases, the evidence of one paper, as a generalization, is counteracted by the evidence of a later paper, examining a specific situation. There is a great deal of information here for both the scholar preparing performing editions and the performer who is using older editions that may benefit from a re-thinking.

Other papers in the book touch on performance questions but not as centrally as these three papers. The collection as a whole shows Boorman's willingness to extend research off the

page and broach the much more difficult questions based on interpretation and analysis to see how the music might have actually sounded at the time and what details within the scores meant. The issues he grapples with are not easy, nor are they obvious. In many cases, they cause a re-examination of a previously received wisdom in light of the practicalities of performance and expectation.

This collection would be valuable for Renaissance theorists and historians as well as early-music performers. For libraries, this collection brings together works from music journals (*JAMS*, *Early Music History*), non-music journals (*The Library*) as well as from hard-to-find, limited print books and conference proceedings. It would be difficult to find these papers otherwise in such a convenient format.