

# Book Review: "Performance Practice: A Dictionary-Guide for Musicians." by Roland Jackson

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**Book review: Jackson, Roland. *Performance Practice: a Dictionary-Guide for Musicians*. New York: Routledge, 2005. ISBN 0-415-94139-3.**

**Peter Holman**

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Performance practice as a subject for scholarly enquiry has expanded enormously in recent years, driven by the early-music movement and the related but distinct group of those interested in historically-informed performances of more recent music. Roland Jackson, Professor Emeritus of Music at Claremont Graduate University, has contributed substantially to the process as the founding editor of *Performance Practice Review* and the compiler of *Performance Practice, Medieval to Contemporary: a Bibliographic Guide*.<sup>[1]</sup> A dictionary devoted to performance practice is such an obvious and potentially useful idea that I am surprised that no one has thought of it before, though performance practice does come into *A Dictionary of Early Music*, compiled by Jerome and Elizabeth Roche as long ago as 1981, and of course there are substantial entries relating to performance practice in *Grove Music Online*, *MGG*, and other general music dictionaries.

Professor Jackson defines performance practice as “an attempt to return, inasmuch as this is feasible, to the composer’s original conception of a musical work, and to re-enact how music sounded at the time of its original presentation.”<sup>[2]</sup> The idea that the aim of historically-informed performance is to obey or recreate the composer’s intentions lies behind much of the performance-practice literature, though it has recently been challenged by Laurence Dreyfus, John Butt, and others, and it limits the subject in an unfortunate way. It tends to exclude, for instance, those genres that depend more on the performer than the composer, such as jazz, the various European vernacular traditions, twentieth-century popular music, and non-Western music. Furthermore, the idea of the “composer’s original conception of a musical work” ought in theory to exclude later revisions, such as Handel’s Foundling Hospital versions of *Messiah*, as well as what we might call the reception history of performance practice – that is, the study of the subsequent history of particular works in performance. The latter cannot be ignored now that Mozart’s orchestration of *Messiah* and Mendelssohn’s version of the St. Matthew Passion have been performed and recorded.

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Jackson, *Performance Practice, Medieval to Contemporary: a Bibliographic Guide* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Roland Jackson, *Performance Practice: a Dictionary-Guide for Musicians* (New York: Routledge, 2005), ix.

Thus, by focusing mainly on Western art-music from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, Professor Jackson evokes an older and more innocent musicological world, before *The New Grove* embraced non-Western and popular music, and before the New Musicologies promoted agendas that by implication tarred traditional historical musicology with the brushes of elitism, sexism, and even racism. I do not mean to imply that there is anything wrong with focusing on the performance of music by Dead White Males, only that a dictionary with the unqualified title *Performance Practice* needs in this day and age to cast its net rather wider than this one does. Although there are articles on some twentieth-century composers, they tend to be rather perfunctory, and there are some obvious topics ignored even within Western art-music, such as the use of electronics in performance, improvisation in twentieth-century music, indeterminacy, and the *ondes martenot*. Virtually the only material relating to music outside the Western “classical” tradition that I could find were brief entries on ragtime and (oddly) on the American fiddler Dan Emmett, a figure hardly known this side of the Atlantic. There are other signs of partiality towards American music, notably the article on William Billings, about three times as long as that devoted to the whole of English parish church music.

Of course, the choice of articles, not unreasonably, has been dictated to some extent by the existing literature: the article on Dan Emmett, for instance, was prompted by a section on performance in Hans Nathan’s *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy*.<sup>[3]</sup> While Professor Jackson has cast his net far and wide and provides useful bibliographies at the end of each article or the major sections of articles, there are some major omissions, even of recent works. Notable examples are Michael Cole’s *The Pianoforte in the Classical Era*,<sup>[4]</sup> Peter Allsop’s *Arcangelo Corelli, New Orpheus of our Times*,<sup>[5]</sup> Matthew Spring’s *The Lute in Britain: a History of the Instrument and its Music*,<sup>[6]</sup> Bruce Haynes’ *A History of Performing Pitch: the Story of ‘A’*,<sup>[7]</sup> though his 1995 thesis is listed; and Richard Maunder’s *The Scoring of Baroque Concertos*,<sup>[8]</sup> which would have informed the discussion of the sizes of ensembles in the

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<sup>3</sup> Hans Nathan, *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Cole, *The Pianoforte in the Classical Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Allsop, *Arcangelo Corelli, New Orpheus of our Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Spring, *The Lute in Britain: a History of the Instrument and its Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Haynes, *A History of Performing Pitch: the Story of ‘A’* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Richard Maunder, *The Scoring of Baroque Concertos* (Woodbridge and Rochester: Boydell Press, 2004).

“Concerto” entry, as well as those in relevant composer entries. Similarly, “Orchestra” (and many composer articles) would have benefited from *The Birth of the Orchestra: History of an Institution, 1650-1815*,<sup>[9]</sup> by John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw, though periodical articles by them are listed.

It might be objected that these items came too late for inclusion (the bibliographies mostly only go up to the late 1990s), though there are also important earlier works missing, such as Richard Hudson’s *The Allemande, the Balletto, and the Tanz*;<sup>[10]</sup> Lyle Nordstrom’s *The Bandora: its Music and Sources*;<sup>[11]</sup> John Butt’s *Music Education and the Art of Performance in the German Baroque*;<sup>[12]</sup> ‘*Amour et Sympathie*’: *Actes du colloque sur les instruments à cordes sympathiques, Limoges 28/29 novembre 1992*,<sup>[13]</sup> which contains important articles on the *viola d’amore* and the baryton; and Colin Lawson’s book on Mozart’s Clarinet Concerto in the Cambridge Music Handbook series.<sup>[14]</sup> One is always gratified to have one’s own work cited by others, though it is strange that my brief and rather popular article, “Purcell’s Orchestra,”<sup>[15]</sup> is referred to in the Purcell entry and several others rather than the much more detailed treatment of the subject in *Four and Twenty Fiddlers: the Violin at the English Court, 1540-1690*.<sup>[16]</sup>

Omissions and anomalies of this sort are, of course, inevitable, particularly when a single author is trying to cover the whole of a large and rapidly expanding subject. For this reason, dictionaries and general surveys have tended in recent years to become a joint effort by a group of authors with different areas of expertise. Nevertheless, performers will undoubtedly find the

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<sup>9</sup> John Spitzer, Neal Zaslaw, eds. *The Birth of the Orchestra: History of an Institution, 1650-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Richard Hudson, *The Allemande, the Balletto, and the Tanz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> Lyle Nordstrom, *The Bandora: its Music and Sources* (Warren: Harmonie Park Press, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> John Butt, *Music Education and the Art of Performance in the German Baroque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Christophe Coin et al., ‘*Amour et Sympathie*’: *Actes du colloque sur les instruments à cordes sympathiques, Limoges 28/29 novembre 1992* (Limoges: Édition Ensemble Baroque de Limoges, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Colin Lawson, *Mozart: Clarinet Concerto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> Peter Holman, “Purcell’s Orchestra,” *The Musical Times* 137 (1996), 17-23.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Holman, *Four and Twenty Fiddlers: the Violin at the English Court, 1540-1690* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2/1995).

dictionary useful for quick reference, since it offers concise entries on musical terms, notational features, performance techniques, musical instruments, and the performance aspects of particular genres. Less useful are the entries on particular composers, since many of them discuss generic performance issues that are duplicated in the entries for other composers, or are covered in more detail in those entries devoted to particular genres or performance issues. For instance, the articles on Lully, Charpentier, and Rameau all contain sections on their use of the orchestra, much of which is duplicated in the main article “Orchestra.”

It is also inevitable that a single-author work of this sort will contain omissions or errors of fact and interpretation. Here are some things that caught my eye in the first three letters of the alphabet: “Ariosti”: it is not made clear that he wrote for *viola d’amore*, not violin; “Bagpipe”: it would be useful to have a discussion of later instruments, particularly the Italian *zampogna* (the inspiration for the Italian Baroque *pastorale*) and the Irish, Northumberland, and Scottish types; “Band”: it should be mentioned that this has been a common word in the English-speaking world for instrumental ensemble or orchestra from the sixteenth century to the present; “Baryton”: no reference is made to the seventeenth-century instrument, the subject of much research in recent years; “Bassoon”: it is not made clear that the dulcian was a common bass instrument in seventeenth-century German church music, and that the Baroque bassoon was developed later than the Baroque oboe, recorder, and flute; “Bells”: something should be said about English change-ringing and Dutch carillons, and the possibility that surviving sets of bells can provide useful information about pitch and temperament; “Buxtehude”: Jackson states that “no specific instructions” exist for the use of multiple strings in his works, but there are several references to large string orchestras in the libretti of his *Abendmusiken*; “Cello”: it is strange that this entry is not found under “Violoncello,” and it is weakened by the refusal to accept the existence of the bass violin as a separate instrument, related to, but distinct from, its descendant, the violoncello; “Charpentier”: his orchestral string writing is normally for violin, two violas, and bass violin, not two violins, viola, and violoncello; also, the discussion of his use of time signatures is weakened by a failure to mention C-stroke and to discuss how it might be different from “2”; “Chiavette”: it should be mentioned that transposition also applied to instruments;<sup>[17]</sup> “Cittern”: the illustration on p. 90 shows a double-headed lute, not an archlute; “Clavichord”: it should be mentioned that the placing of the tangents on surviving instruments can give information about temperament; “Consort anthem” and “Consort song”: it should be made clear that “consort” in the seventeenth century carried the implication of a mixed ensemble of several kinds of instrument (as did *concerto* and *concert*), and that the modern use of the word is anachronistic; “Continuo”: it needs to be made clear that continuo playing developed from the practice of doubling voices or groups of instruments by playing from score, and that more-or-less-literal doubling was used for much of the seventeenth century, particularly in Italian, German, and English church music; also, we cannot assume that the picture on p. 104 shows “a continuo group of bass viol, trombone, and

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<sup>17</sup> See Peter van Heyghen, “The Recorder in Italian Music, 1600-1670,” *The Recorder in the Seventeenth Century: Proceedings of the International Recorder Symposium, Utrecht 1993*, ed. David Lasocki (Utrecht: STIMU Foundation for Historical Performance Practice, 1995), 3-63.

harpsichord [accompanying] a solo violin,” for the keyboard instrument seems to be an organ, the trombone was often a tenor-range *obbligato* instrument in early seventeenth-century Italian instrumental music, and at this stage continuo lines were not routinely doubled by single-line bass instruments; if it represents anything, the picture may show the performance of a piece for violin, trombone, and bass viol *obbligato* with organ continuo; “Cornett”: it is unwarranted to call the illustration on p. 109 “an ensemble” and to assert that “it shows that cornetts were capable of blending with soft as well as with loud instruments”; it is generally accepted today that fifteenth-century pictures of this sort do not represent realistic ensembles, particular since minstrelsy was essentially a solo or duet activity; also, the picture on p. 110 does not necessarily indicate that “the cornett sometimes served as part of an accompanimental or continuo group”; if it shows anything specific (which I doubt) it could just as easily be a transcription of a part-song with the cornett playing one of the polyphonic lines; “Countertenor”: it should be mentioned that tenors in England reportedly sang above the stave in *falsetto* for most of the eighteenth century.

To sum up: this dictionary has its shortcomings. It would have been better if either its title reflected more accurately Professor Jackson’s focus on Western art-music, or if it covered performance practice outside the Western tradition more thoroughly. It is perhaps inevitable that the work of a single individual will contain errors of fact and interpretation and will fail in places to reflect recent research. Nevertheless, Professor Jackson is to be congratulated on producing a handy work of reference that will be a useful guide for musicians to a large, complex, and rapidly expanding subject.

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