

## Correspondence: February 5, 2008

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## February 5, 2008

**Roland Jackson**

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I wish to thank Professor Peter Holman for his knowledgeable and perceptive remarks (*Performance Practice Review* 12, 2007) concerning my *Performance Practice: a Dictionary-Guide for Musicians* (2005). I welcome especially his singling-out of a number of references I neglected to cite, although some of these, including Bruce Haynes' *A History of Performing Pitch* (2002) or *The Birth of the Orchestra* (2004), edited by John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw, appeared after the end-point of my own research, and others, such as John Butt's *Music Education and the Art of Performance in the German Baroque* (1994), while independently valuable, contain little that adds to the categories of performance I had established.

Concerning omissions within the entries themselves, I am appreciative for Holman's pointing out of a number of details, such as Buxtehude's use of multiple-string instruments in his *Abendmusiken*, Charpentier's distinguishing between the tempi designated by a slashed C and a 2, and the fact that *falsetto* singing was already present in England during the eighteenth century. Some of what he alleges to be missing, however, is locatable elsewhere, such as the improvised accompanying of choirs, which appears under "Thorough bass" rather than under "Continuo instruments." And his claim that I fail to indicate the dulcian as a predecessor of the bassoon in Germany seems unwarranted in that I mention both Michael Praetorius' and Staden's use of this instrument. Some of Holman's suggestions derive from his broader interpretation of the field, and have more to do with "folk" than with "art" traditions, my own vantage point. Under "Bagpipes" and "Bells," for instance, I limit my coverage to the Middle Ages, thereby omitting discussions of such phenomena as Scottish piping or English change-bell ringing.

Other supposedly neglected aspects alluded to (albeit in passing) by Holman include the presence of multiple versions—he points, for example, to Handel's (later) Foundling Hospital performance of *Messiah*—although in several entries, "Troubadours and Trouvères," "Handel," "Verdi," "Mussorgsky," and "Bruckner," I raise the possibility that more than one version of a work may indeed form a suitable basis for a "historical" rendition. And as for my omission of performances reflecting reception theory—Holman mentions Mozart's version of *Messiah* and Mendelssohn's of the *St. Matthew Passion*, both recently recorded—I feel that these and similar

later arrangements, interesting as they are anachronistically, have nothing at all to do with the performance practice of the composers involved.

Holman's main criticism, however, rests on his questioning of the nature of performance practice as it has been carried out thus far. He takes issue with my view that it is essentially a composer-oriented discipline dedicated to realizing (as fully as is feasible) the original conceptions of composers. Instead he advocates a broader interpretation, embracing performance in general and representing a variety of kinds of music, including both popular and ethnic forms of expression. In this regard he writes:

“...to obey or recreate the composer's intentions . . . 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.”

This would seem at first glance to be both reasonable and appealing. Why should performance practice not reach out and take in more musical genres? Such an expansion would, after all, bring it more nearly in line with the latest thought in the field (that of “the New Musicologies” according to Holman's characterization), wherein other contexts and cultures are currently being drawn into the Western classical tradition.

One might enquire, though, as to how such a performance-oriented approach might be coordinated with traditional performance practice, something Holman never addresses. Until now the discussion of the performance of jazz, popular, vernacular, or ethnic music has tended to center on kinds of singing and playing, on comparisons between performers, on improvisation, or more specifically on the manner of decorating pre-existent melodic lines or chord patterns, fascinating and rewarding kinds of study in their own right.

Performance practice, however, is a rather different endeavor, one that looks back on how performances were once carried out and then attempts to emulate them. Its performers have a different role than do their counterparts in popular or ethnic music; as participants in a composer's emotional journey, they adhere to certain parameters or guidelines typical of a composer's time. This does not mean that such performers cannot be independently expressive. Each of them discovers and makes use of a wide range of emotional possibilities, especially through the introduction of minute dynamic gradations or slight rhythmic alterations that enhance an original. Such subtleties are indeed of such a minuteness that they could scarcely have been originally indicated by a composer (as the theorist Türk points out concerning dynamics), and therefore belong solely to the domain of the performer.

Thus, in essence, performance practice has been and remains distinctly set apart from ethnic or popular performance both in its aims and its manifestations. Professor Holman's suggestion that the two areas should in some manner be conjoined, therefore, in my opinion,

seems ill-advised as well as impossible of attainment. It would, moreover, result in a diffusing of the specific aims of each.

Professor Holman sums up his idea of the narrowness of performance practice as I have defined it in the following statement.

“...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 Musicologies promoted agendas that by implication tarred traditional historical musicology with the brushes of elitism, sexism, and even racism.”

Although there is no denying that performance practice has thus far centered upon the foremost composers of the European tradition, whose works have seemed most worth reviving in their original form, there is no inherent reason why female composers and composers of other parts of the world should not be included, and this will undoubtedly come about as studies move forward. At the same time, the ideal of greatness or of genius, a reverence for the power and beauty of the music of certain composers has been and remains a driving force in the field, accounting for the dedication of innumerable scholars who have sought and continue to seek to restore the instruments, clarify ornaments, arrive at approximations of tempi, etc. These concerns have recently moved from earlier music into the nineteenth century, enabling a fresh look at Beethoven, Berlioz, and Brahms. And one of the aims of the *Dictionary-Guide* has been to encourage twentieth-century research, for which the recorded versions of composers such as Mahler, Debussy, Schoenberg, Bartók, Stravinsky, and many others, performing their own works is set forth as of primary importance (making Holman's claim that my treatment of twentieth-century composers is “perfunctory” difficult to understand).

In sum, it is my hope that performance practice will retain its uniqueness as a discipline, that it will profit from all that has been accomplished thus far, and that it will continue along similar lines in the future. These seem in my estimation to be eminently worthwhile objectives.