

"Performance Practice: Issues and Approaches" by Thomas Watkins

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This valuable set of essays, as its editor Timothy D. Watkins points out in the preface, seeks to expand performance practice “beyond the repertoires associated with its exciting heyday” (x). This is especially true of the entries devoted to music in the Americas and to those concerning medieval (and later) monophony. But it is applicable as well to forays into music and dance and music and poetic recitation. As such, the book opens a number of promising new possibilities for further endeavors in the field.

The contents are divided into four main areas: “Monophonic Traditions,” “American Musics,” “Baroque Repertoires,” and “Romantic Contexts” (to follow the subheadings of the volume), to which a final essay is added concerning the impact of recent recording technology on musical performance. In the following summary, I will attempt to bring out what is innovative in each essay, showing how the authors have added to the field as we have known it.

MONOPHONIC TRADITIONS

Jann Cosart (“Echoes of St. Andrews: Performance Practice Questions in the Chants of W1”) demonstrates how the rhythmic interpretations associated with the polyphony of this famous (Notre Dame) manuscript may have affected its monophony as well, most notably in a group of Sanctus and Agnus tropes “tucked away” in the tenth fascicle. For example, the diamond-shaped *currentes* in the polyphony, indicating a more rapid execution, are present as well in these chants. A further idea advanced by the author is that certain chant notes may have been sustained more lengthily than others within the prevailing Mixolydian mode, namely G, C, and D (and to a lesser extent B).

Joshua Veltman (“Notation and Rhythm in the Medicean Gradual”) shows that post-Tridentine chant—which held sway for nearly three centuries, from Gregory XIII’s initiation of reform in 1577 until the Solemnnes revival of earlier chant notation in the latter part of the

nineteenth century—was very likely performed rhythmically, this on the basis of lozenges, squares, etc., designating differing note lengths in Giovanni Domenico Guidetti's early, 1582 edition.

Allen Scott ("Die Meistersinger von Breslau: Adam Puschman and the Breslau *Meistersingerordnung* of 1598") casts new light on the nature of Meistersinger performance in the sixteenth century on the basis of the detailed prescriptions concerning the judging of singers, as spelled out in an *Ordnung* of the time. Textual clarity was of foremost concern, as was attentiveness to the preserving of established melodies.

AMERICAN MUSICS

Timothy D. Watkins ("Performance Issues in Early Colonial Mexican Polyphony: A Critical Examination of Some Colonial Accounts") concerns choir sizes and instrumental accompaniments in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century polyphony performed in the Mexican colonies. The evidence rests on communications (letters, etc.) provided by Spanish monks regarding the choirs they were directing. These choirs consisted generally of fifteen or sixteen singers—larger than those of contemporary European chapels—and instruments were sometimes drawn upon for accompaniment, this despite the strictures of the Council of Trent. The occasional presence of alternating choirs pointed toward early-baroque practice.

Timothy Crain ("The Dilemma of Instrumentation in the Early American Theater: A Portrait of the Colonial Charleston Orchestra") explores the little touched-upon topic of accompaniments in the vocal music of late eighteenth-century American plays, taking the city of Charleston as a focal point. Although most of the extant sources for this city survive only in piano reductions, a full score does exist for the 1774 production of *Thomas and Sally*, and this can serve as a model for other similar presentations. This score shows a full contingent of strings and woodwinds, of particular interest being the presence of a second flute to double and support the vocal line of the soprano.

Charles E. Brewer ("The Interface between Literacy and Orality in the Performance of Music by William Billings") looks into an aspect of Billings research thus far little treated, the comparing of later versions of his psalm tunes in Baptist and Methodist hymnals as a means of arriving at a clearer sense of how they were first performed. Taking the well-known tune "Jordan" as an example, Brewer shows that its initial version—the source of the modern edition of Billings—was probably printed in an abbreviated form, which was filled out by the singers of Billings's original choir or congregation, who would have been familiar with the verses (of Watts's text) that were not provided.

BAROQUE REPERTOIRES

Virginia Christy Lamothe (“Fanning the Flames of Love: Hidden Performance Solutions for Monteverdi’s *Ballo delle ingrato* in Dance Practice”) demonstrates the value of dance research for solving a quandary in Monteverdi’s *Ballo delle ingrato* of 1608 (published in the Eighth Book of Madrigals of 1638). According to the rubrics, Pluto intervenes in the middle of this torch dance, but the music consists of but a single continuous piece. Through comparisons with an earlier, similarly interrupted torch dance of 1601, and on the basis of certain remarks made by the dance-master Fabritio Caroso in 1581, Lamothe is able to show that a break in Monteverdi’s piece most likely occurred between its segments in 6/4 and 3/2 time. Monteverdi’s own directive at the end of the rubric, “. . . the sound as before,” provides further support for this idea in that the 3/2 section repeats essentially the same music as the one in 6/4, only the meter being changed.

Charles Gower Price (“In Defense of *l’ancien goût* in Regency France: the Free Graces of Montéclair’s Instrumental *doubles*”) extends our knowledge of French improvisation—a practice generally suppressed prior to the Regency period—by directing attention to a number of instrumental elaborations (or *doubles*) of vocal pieces provided by Michel de Montéclair in his published collections of 1721.

Guido Olivieri (“Cello Teaching and Playing in Naples in the Early Eighteenth Century: Francesco Paolo Supriani’s *Principij da imparare a suonare il violoncello*”) addresses the question of when the cello emerged as a solo instrument independent of the continuo. Olivieri provides evidence for the importance of Naples in this development, pointing out that the renowned virtuoso cellist Francesco Alborea began his performing career in this city prior to and into the 1720s, and that a local painting of 1732 shows a single cellist in the foreground, thereby emphasizing the player’s soloistic role. Furthermore, a manuscript treatise prepared by the Neapolitan instructor Francesco Paolo Supriani (d. 1753) divulges significant solo cello techniques hitherto kept secret.

Christine Kyprianides (“*Musica sui generis*: Confronting the Obvious in Bach’s Cello Suites”) casts new light on the difficult interpretative problems encountered in Bach’s cello suites, which are exacerbated by the absence of a composer autograph. The articulations and bowings in the available sources are inconsistent, and other difficulties involve large stretches and challenging chords. Kyprianides, herself a skilled baroque cellist, attempts to recreate the original playing techniques through information gained from various baroque theorists. She also explores the special problems of performing on the *violoncello da spalla*, which Bach seems to have employed, at least for the sixth cello suite.

Evan Jones (“Two Facets of Eighteenth-Century Performance Practice: A Dialogue between Melodic and Harmonic Dynamic Prescriptions in Quantz’s *Versuch*”) looks more deeply than have previous scholars into what Quantz has to say concerning dynamics, both in melodies and in chordal accompaniments. Conflicts between the two sometimes arise: e.g. a high note in a melodic line occurring in proximity with a diminished seventh chord in an

accompaniment, both of which are to be played loudly. Jones looks at such seeming contradictions, however, as a potential “dialogue,” affording a promising enrichment of both the melody and the harmony.

ROMANTIC CONTEXTS

Siegwart Reichwald (“Mendelssohn ‘Unfinished’: Newly Discovered Performance Parts of the Premiere of *St. Paul*”) affirms the value of arriving at the definitive version of a work, in this instance of Mendelssohn’s oratorio *St. Paul*. The “new discovery” here consists of the performing parts for the 1836 premiere, which, as it turns out, unsatisfactorily represented Mendelssohn’s final desired version. This was only achieved in his 1837 published score, and Reichwald goes over Mendelssohn’s successive stages of composition, clarifying thereby the superiority of this later version by showing that it represented the work as the composer finally wished it to be.

Marian Wilson Kimber (“The Peerless Reciter: Reconstructing the Lost Art of Elocution with Music”) takes us into a “lost” Romantic performing art, the reciting of poems, such as Poe’s “The Raven,” to a (usually improvised) musical accompaniment. Although such renditions are something apart from musical performance practice per se, they do touch on it in certain respects—one thinks of melodramas, such as in *Fidelio*, or of *Sprechstimme*, as in *Pierrot Lunaire*. Of potential value for musical performance are various late nineteenth-century guides to elocution, which include the careful distinguishing between spoken pitches—musical scales are taken as guides—and the selecting of tempi appropriate to the different portions of a text.

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Standing apart from the period or genre studies in the rest of the volume, **Stephen Meyer’s** “Technology and Aesthetics: Historically Informed Performance Practice and the Compact Disc” draws parallels between kinds of recordings (LPs, CDs, the iPod) and recent and current attitudes toward performance practice. He relates the rise in popularity of the CD from about 1980 to 2000 with the intense debates concerning “historically informed” performance that occurred during this same time. The subsequent decline of the CD in favor of the iPod since 2000 corresponds—as he demonstrates—with a lessening of interest in historical practice. Meyer further relates the LP, prior to its being replaced by the CD, with a time in which personal or Romantic interpretation was more prevalent. He compares, as an illustration, the Klemperer LP of the *St. Matthew Passion*, with its large choruses and ponderous tempi, to a more recent CD by McCreech, with its limited number of voices and quicker pace. In Meyer’s view, such distinctions may now be growing less important, in that iPod downloading enables listeners to cherry-pick performances, and even parts of performances. This has resulted, he feels, in a lessening of interest in whether a piece is interpreted in one way or another. These are, to be sure, rather far-reaching conclusions, and it remains to be seen whether performance practice and

its ongoing ideal of attaining an approximation of the original rendition of works will actually be curtailed in the coming time.

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In light of the innovative researches set forth in the present volume **Christopher Hogwood's** foreword represents a curious disconnect. His remarks, albeit rather randomly expressed, revert mainly to the concerns of performance practice that were current about twenty years ago, in particular as to whether performers were being infringed upon by scholars. He refers, for instance, to the “encoded” messages of theorists, the “personal choices” made by editors, or the “down-time with Quantz” resorted to by uninspired pedagogues. There is also the “discrepant” conductor, with his “white tie and baton,” presiding incongruously over otherwise viable early-music renditions. Hogwood’s conclusion is that “an abyss still separates the practice room of the conservatoire from the library of the academic” (ix).

To end on a personal note—my feeling is that while such disparities undoubtedly exist, the historical performer can (and should) retain his or her individuality and personal expressivity. Historical knowledge is not an impediment, for there is always a place for subtle nuances of dynamics and rhythm that lie beyond it. These are, indeed, the keys to individuality, just as they have always been throughout history, and they inevitably transcend what a composer was able to indicate or stipulate.