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"Authenticity and Early Music: A Symposium," Edited by Nicholas Kenyon

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Kenyon, Nicholas, editor. *Authenticity and Early Music: a Symposium*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. xv, 219p. ISBN 0-19-816152-2 and ISBN 0-19-816153-0PbK

"Do we really want to talk about 'authenticity' any more?" demands Richard Taruskin, in his contribution to the set of stimulating and challenging essays that comprise this volume. I suspect that the questions raised by the enormous growth of the historical performance movement over the past two decades, and the impact that this movement has had on repertory and meaning in the traditional fare of our concert halls and recordings, have only just begun to attract the attention they deserve. For, as several of the contributors to this volume argue, the movement is but symptomatic of larger, critical questions that face us today — "a major cultural phenomenon," according to Robert Morgan, "it has emerged as one of the central musical issues of our time."

Will Crutchfield perhaps overstates the case, in portraying the movement as representing "a juggernaut, a steamroller, a conquering army"; but he does acknowledge that "historically informed performance has captured the spotlight of critical and scholarly discussion." It has been a discussion not devoid of some heat, however; beliefs run strong, and the debate is characterized as having "taken on the appearance of a battlefield" (Taruskin).

Most all the contributors to the collection are not new to the fray, being represented in earlier literature on questions herein raised. Authors in addition to Taruskin, Morgan, and Crutchfield include Howard Mayer Brown, Philip Brett, and Gary Tomlinson. But while there are disagreements among them, there are also important points of consensus: "authenticity" is generally considered an awkward term; the "composer's intention" is largely rejected as a guiding principle in performance; the central place of the performer in realizing the musical experience is reinforced; and the view that the products of the early music movement reflect not so much an earlier age as they do our very own is maintained. Ideas often coincide and the presentations borrow heavily from the critical thinking of sister disciplines (the "New Criticism" according to Brett). Achieving these and other points of consensus may well have been an object of the collection, for as the editor tells us, "this symposium was planned carefully as a set of interlocking, though not always congruent, pieces." Indeed, there is enough congruity of opinion on questions posed to make me wonder if, in fact, the volume may have been too carefully planned, thereby possibly denying other positions true

representation in the debate. Especially missed are the views of historical performers, whose work stands at the forefront of the quest for "authenticity," and whose artistic decisions have largely informed this discussion.

The Symposium resulted from a conference on "Musical Interpretation: The Influence of Historically Informed Performance," held at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in 1987. In the Preface to the volume, Nicholas Kenyon traces the origins and stimulus that led to formation of the collection, which he describes as being "a highly topical exploration of views and attitudes to the problems of authenticity in early music which have become current over the last few years. It aims to represent the present state of this debate." Kenyon also supplies a helpful Introduction, entitled "Authenticity and Early Music: Some Issues and Questions," in which he states the problem, presents a brief history of the early music movement, and provides an overview of the collection.

The set of essays proper opens with Crutchfield's "Fashion, Conviction, and Performance Style in an Age of Revivals," which argues that authenticity belongs to the performer, since only he can bring the sense of music's "aliveness" to the audience. Crutchfield urges performers to reject "the museum model" of early music, "the precise reconstruction of sounds as near as possible to those heard by the composer," and accept rather a sense of the music that is full of "interest and passion. . . . The author of a performance . . . is the performer, with whose condition we must be concerned if authenticity is what we are after."

Brown's essay, "Pedantry or Liberation? A Sketch of the Historical Performance Movement," is an extended review of historical performance in Western music, from earlier times until today, showing changes in attitude and identifying leading figures. In it, Brown demonstrates that concern for authenticity in music is a relatively new concept, dating from only the late nineteenth century. He insists that persuasion, and not authenticity, should be "the test of a good performance."

In "Tradition, Anxiety, and the Current Musical Scene," Morgan speaks of a general "anxiety" inherent in music of our time — a music that lacks a prevailing aesthetic and its own indigenous language, and has "no well-defined sense of the musical past." For him, historical authenticity is symptomatic of the age: it is fixed and remote, much like a fossil in a museum, and as such, it can never be part of a living tradition. He maintains that the early music movement reflects the "nostalgia and

novelty" characteristic of our time; through it, "we have made the past coexistent with the present, thus eliminating any meaningful distinction between the two."

Brett's "Text, Context, and the Early Music Editor" is a well-reasoned study that demonstrates the fallacy of the "definitive text," "author's intention," and "authenticity" as governing criteria for text editing. He argues that all musical editions carry biases that determine the nature of performance. "Editing is principally a critical act," he writes, adding that historical or diplomatic transcription is a form of "not editing." While the purpose of editions has changed over history, we are still largely constrained by the nineteenth-century legacy of authoritative and unified musical collections. He believes that the ultimate success of an edition is related to the editor's intuitive feeling for the music as a musician, and that a "strong intuitive feeling for the music itself, without self-consciousness," will mark the "maturity" of the early music movement.

In "The Historian, the Performer, and Authentic Meaning in Music," Tomlinson maintains that the goal of historical performance lies in realizing not a work's "authenticity," but rather its "authentic meaning," which he defines as "the meaning we come to believe its creator and original audience invested in it." He rejects the idea that authenticity resides chiefly in the performer, who he believes can convey only part of the meaning in a work of art; through an elaborate construct, Tomlinson seeks to demonstrate the importance of "historical intent" to meaning. "The most profound and authentic meanings of music will be found not in musical works themselves but behind them, in the varieties of discourse that give rise to them."

The final essay, Taruskin's "The Pastness of the Present and the Presence of the Past," is by far the longest contribution to the collection, and certainly the most spirited. It is a wide-ranging, perhaps over-long article, sometimes rambling but always engaging, which touches on aesthetics, literary criticism, performance style, scholarly attitudes, historiography — all to help trace on a large canvas the development of music and art in Western culture, as a means of gaining perspective on the nature and meaning of the early music movement and the call for "authenticity." Taruskin speaks of historical performance as reflecting the qualities of "high modernism" in art — objectivity, elitism, the fear of individual expression — in which the "art works of the past . . . are . . . devolved, decanonized, not taken quite seriously, reduced to sensuous play." For him, such performances are truly restoration and recreation, rather than art, and he decries their absence of values. His sympathy lies

with the sensitive and curious performers who use old instruments and historical information as a way "of enriching and enlivening what they do."

This fascinating collection of articles should serve as a primer to students of historical performance, with the caveat that it sketches only part of the ever-changing picture of the field. That part, however — important as it is, and offered chiefly by historians and critics — provides but a base for true achievement in their art: a convincing performance.

Albert Cohen