

Performance Practice Review

Volume 4
Number 2 *Fall*

Article 9

1991

Communications

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Recommended Citation

(1991) "Communications," *Performance Practice Review*. Vol. 4: No. 2, Article 9. DOI: 10.5642/perfpr.199104.02.09

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Communications

Regarding Erich Schwandt's review of my *New Essays in Performance Practice Review* (Spring 1991) my first impulse was to ignore it, but I finally decided to write a brief answer, because, among a number of irrelevant, and outright false statements he did score one point in singling out a careless sentence of mine. He made this sentence the focal point of his critique by blowing its importance out of all proportion.

The sentence in question occurs in the essay "Bach: Progressive or Conservative," and I need therefore to sketch briefly the purpose of this essay. In it I took issue with Robert Marshall's thesis that Bach's music during the whole period of 1730-45 was strongly indebted to the *galant* style. I took up every single one of Marshall's arguments in support of his thesis and tried to show that and why they all fell short of proving his point. There was Cantata 51 with each of its movements, the Cantata "Phoebus and Pan," the "Coffee" and the "Peasant" Cantatas, the "Christe eleyson" and the "Laudamus te" from the B Minor Mass, and finally the "Goldberg" Aria, which Marshall considered a particularly strong card to play, since it is unquestionably a *galant* piece. Having, I trust, conclusively answered the arguments up to the point of the aria, I contended that the latter was not by Bach, but by an unknown Frenchman and could not therefore provide evidence for Bach's *galant* leanings. I gave a series of reasons to support my claim and Schwandt quotes some of the facts that first aroused my suspicion: "the un-Bachian flavor, the flimsiness of its substance, the shallowness of its melodic content . . . the sudden stylistic break of the last six measures, where the *galant* fractionalized melody suddenly turns into Baroque-type

Fortspinnung figuration Such breaks do not occur in Bach's dances or related pieces." Certainly, those reasons justify suspicion. To these I added others. First I pointed to the un-Bachian ornamentation and it is here that I slipped with the sentence, "There are above all, several collisions of different ornaments in the left and right hands in a manner used by French keyboard composers but not by Bach." Thereupon Schwandt lists several instances where simultaneous ornaments in left and right hand do occur in Bach. While admitting a careless mistake, I do not retract my statement that the ornamentation is un-Bachian. There is "the excess of embellishments, strewn over the music as in a shower of confetti"; at the end of the first part the "clumsy and redundant" use of the same *port de voix* on the identical pitch on two successive beats; the combination of two *ports de voix* in parallel fourths in m. 26, which Mr. Schwandt will be hard put to find in a Bach autograph.

I gave other reasons still. The term "aria" is certainly not used in the sense of a set vocal piece — today's routine connotation; rather in the archaizing 17th century sense of a standardized, *pre-existing* bass or harmonic progression such as the *Aria di Ruggiero*, or *Aria di Romanesca*, etc. When Anna Magdalena entered an earlier version in her Note Book of 1725 (that showed some forty odd deviations from the later printed text), she neither named Johann Sebastian as author, which she would have done had it been his composition, nor did she call it "aria," for the simple reason that it was not yet an aria, and became one only after Bach used it as a precomposed theme for his variations.

Furthermore, I pointed out that independent variation works (not movements in a composite work) other than *chaconnes* and or *passacaglias*, were in the 18th century up to Mozart's time almost routinely set to a borrowed theme. That is true of all of Bach's variation works: the early *Aria variata*, again called "aria" because the theme is borrowed; the several sets of *Partite diverse*, all set on chorale themes, and the late *Canonic Variations* set on a Christmas song. I also mentioned that the *Goldberg Variations* are built according to a strict symmetrical plan with every third variation in canonic form, proceeding stepwise from the unison to the ninth; with an overture starting the second half of the 30 variations. Then the last variation, a *quodlibet* using two folksongs, completes the symmetry, in that the ending as well as the beginning uses preexisting material.

I have listed all these items not to argue with Schwandt about the authorship of the aria, since he is not committed to an opinion one way

or the other. But I have done so because Schwandt clearly implied that my hasty sentence invalidates my whole argument against Bach's authorship. That is not at all the case: in view of all the evidence presented, Bach's use or non-use of simultaneous ornaments becomes quite unimportant.

I had mentioned irrelevant and false arguments in Schwandt's critique, and in order not to let these charges be suspended in a vacuum, I'll list one example of each.

As to irrelevancy: Schwandt declares my criticism of Hans Klotz's *monograph on Bach's keyboard ornamentation* to be a waste of time, because he, Schwandt, has a low opinion of Klotz's Bach scholarship. Now if Schwandt's opinion were widely known and widely accepted, he might have a talking point. But the late Klotz is highly regarded in many quarters, most of all in Germany, and his book was published in 1984 by the prestigious Bärenreiter Verlag. There was every reason to take his ideas seriously. Mr. Schwandt surely overrates the weight and influence of his own opinions.

Concerning a false argument, Schwandt tries to ridicule as "old myth" my statement that "... the density of *agréments* in Couperin is closely linked to the quickly decaying, inflexible sound of the harpsichord . . ." and believes that his reference to a similar density in the organ masses, the *concerts* and the *pièces de viole* will explode the "myth." Now it so happens that the organ masses have very few ornaments: many pieces, maybe a good half of them, have no ornaments at all, others have a few trills and only rarely any grace. "Paucity," not "density," is the indicated term here. The *concerts* and the *pièces de viole* have more ornaments than that, but still decisively fewer than the *pièces de clavecin*.

Frederick Neumann
Richmond, Virginia

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Frederick Neumann is, of course, free to disagree with my review of his *New Essays*; however, I stand behind what I wrote. When an expert on ornamentation "slips up" and makes a "careless" statement about Bach's ornamentation in an attempt to clinch his argument that the Goldberg Aria cannot be by Bach, such an error needs to be pointed out strongly. Georg von Dadelsen declares the Aria to be genuine (*NBA*, V:4; *KB*, p. 93) as does Christoph Wolff (*NBA*, V:2; *KB*, pp. 109-111). Both of these

noted Bach scholars reject Arnold Schering's argument (which dates from the 1930s and is remarkably similar to Neumann's) that the ornamentation of the Aria is "un-Bachian."

When an expert on ornamentation reviews a book as "severely flawed" as Neumann finds Klotz's book to be, it hardly seems irrelevant to call his lengthy 15-page review of such an easy target a wasted effort, no matter how highly regarded Klotz may be.

When an expert on ornamentation revives the 19th-century idea that the ornaments in Couperin's music are there to help conceal the "inadequacies" of the harpsichord with its "quickly decaying, inflexible sound," such a statement deserves to be called what it really is — an old myth. (By the way, only seven of the 42 organ pieces — and not "a good half" as Neumann claims — have no ornaments at all, and these seven are all *plein jeu* pieces; moreover, some of the harpsichord pieces have very few ornaments, for example, *Les Baricades Mistérieuses*, *Le Petite Pince-sans-rire*, *Le Turbulent*, etc.) Couperin certainly did not think of the harpsichord as being an inadequate or inflexible instrument. Readers will find his own views clearly stated in the preface to Book I (1713), beginning with the words "Le Clavecin est parfait quant à son étendue, et brillant par luy même"

New Essays, as I said in my review, is not up to Neumann's usual standards.

Erich Schwandt
University of Victoria

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Many musicians will certainly welcome the recent spate of publications, including articles by Frederick Neumann and Neal Zaslaw in the Spring, 1991 *Performance Practice Review*, on the historical use of the vibrato. If it is true, as Mr. Neumann writes (and as seems likely), that we have "no way of knowing exactly to what extent vibrato was adopted by either soloists or orchestras" (p. 26), then anyone, it seems, is free to draw reasonable conclusions from the variety of evidence we do have.

Although like Mr. Neumann I am no fan of the desiccated, "anti-vibrato" style of singing and playing cultivated by some of today's early music performers, I find nevertheless, after a careful reading of his essay, that with respect to several central issues my interpretation of the passages he

quotes is entirely different from his. One of his major contentions is that vibrato "enrich[es] musical tone" (p. 14), that it "adds depth and richness . . . to the sound" (p. 25), and that in instruments vibrato is "superimposed on an essentially bland tone" (p. 14). Though he never actually seems to say that this richness is desirable, one can easily reach the conclusion from the context and the many repetitions of this idea that he must believe it is. In the passages he quotes, early observers of the vibrato describe it as "pleasing" and "beautiful"; it "sweetens the melody"; to Geminiani it even makes the sound of "short" notes "more agreeable." Yet neither in the passages Mr. Neumann quotes, nor in anything I can recall reading in other early references to it (with one exception, a minor question about 18th-century Bohemian horn playing), can I find anything that describes the vibrato as a way of enriching the tone. This particular application of the vibrato seems to me characteristically 20th-century. To my ear an inherently fine vocal or instrumental sound needs no added enrichment; if a sound is bland (or in Donington's description, "dead"), of what help is the addition of a vibrato? I am reminded of the great violinist and pedagogue Leopold Auer's scathing criticism, in his *Violin Playing as I Teach It* (1921), of players who use vibrato "in an ostrich-like endeavor to conceal bad tone production and intonation." Modern players or singers afflicted with a relentless vibrato (and this includes many of today's most famous artists) unfortunately can conceive of a steady, vibrato-free tone only in a negative way (as, indeed, does Mr. Neumann throughout his essay), by the elimination or suppression of an integral part of the normal tone-production. (It is possible, if not probable, that the tremendous volume of sound required from today's operatic voices cannot be produced without the heavy vibrato we are accustomed to hearing; such voices are presumably characteristic of what Will Crutchfield, in a quotation on p. 17, calls the "fully-developed" singer—though "over-developed" is what may come to mind.) Earlier musicians had the advantage of being able to consider the vibrato constructively (however frequently employed), as one of many added embellishments (Auer: "A means used to heighten effect, . . . to lend a touch of divine pathos to the climax of a phrase or the course of a passage . . .").

Far from an enrichment of the sound, the continuous vibrato (as I construe the evidence) was long known and condemned as a defect; it is referred to quite clearly as such by several of the writers whom Mr. Neumann quotes: what else could "palsy," "permanent fever," or "paralytic" be describing but the affliction of a continuous, uncontrollable tremor? I interpret these rather dramatic comparisons to medical conditions to mean that their authors were familiar with involuntary (or

willful) constant vibrato and considered it pathological, an example not to be emulated, as in the unfortunate case of the aging voice. This interpretation may help answer Mr. Neumann's ironic question of why, if it is a defect, "a 'paralytic' sound should be used for a long note" (p. 24): it is only "paralytic," and thus defective, if it cannot be shut off. The properly trained singer is able to control the vibrato, which, like the trill, is a deliberate disturbance of the pitch of a note introduced at times for expressive purposes.

Finally, I would like to suggest that it is time to lay to rest the widespread notion that the vocal vibrato is a universal phenomenon, arising naturally in every mature voice. In this age of musical pluralism, many observant listeners will have noticed that this is not at all true in many vocal traditions outside Western classical music. The Indian acoustician B.C. Deva admitted surprise at being unable to find in classical Indian singing the vibrato that Prof. Seashore was convinced, from a lifelong study of the subject, is present in all types of music, though, as he acknowledged, not always easily perceived. The result of Deva's investigation, which included analysis of slowed-down recordings, was that "the tone of the Indian singers was extremely flat [steady]; no amount of effort could reveal the presence of the vibrato. [Electronic] acoustic measurements . . . amply confirm this auditory analysis" (*Psychophysics of Music and Speech*, Madras: The Music Academy, 1967, p. 116). It may be added that unlike the Western singer who cannot disengage an habitual vibrato without suffering muscle stress and fatigue, Indian vocalists (who use vibrato as an occasional ornament) produce this rock-steady yet vibrant tone with no evident effort or vocal strain.

Douglas Leedy
Oceanside, Oregon

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This illustration of Michael Costa conducting the first performance of the Royal Italian Opera at the newly renovated Covent Garden theatre [presented hereafter—Ed.] should have been reproduced as illustration seven in the article "The Emergence of the Modern Conductor in Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera" found in the last issue of this journal. First published in the *Illustrated London News* on 10 April 1847, it replaces the illustration of the opening of the second Covent Garden theatre in 1809 found on page 46 of *Performance Practice Review*, vol. 4, no. 1.

Born in Naples, Michael Costa (1808-1884) received his chief musical training from Niccolò Zingarelli. At the direction of his maestro, Costa first went to England at age twenty-one for a performance of a cantata by Zingarelli. For the rest of his life, Costa developed his career as a conductor and a composer in England where he made his home.

The discipline Costa brought to the orchestra earned him respect from his fellow musicians and admiration from the public. In 1846 he left Her Majesty's Theatre and participated in the formation of the Royal Italian Opera, which opened its first season the following year at Covent Garden. Most of the orchestra followed him to his new venue, where he achieved unqualified critical acclaim.

This illustration depicts the first production of the Royal Italian Opera, Rossini's *Semiramide*. Widely discussed in the British press, this event was reported in musical newspapers throughout Europe, and Costa's role as conductor of the orchestra was featured prominently in many reports. The correspondent for the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* mentioned the beauty of the newly refurbished theatre and the popular admiration for Costa when he wrote that "as soon as the theatre was illuminated, the packed audience burst into unanimous, tumultuous applause, that broke out again at the appearance of maestro Costa" (vol. VI, no. 16 [18 April 1847]: p. 126).

Costa's virtuosity as a conductor reflects the musical habits of northern Europe rather than his native Italy. As in this illustration, his position at the edge of the stage with the orchestra at his back was a procedure widely practiced in northern theatres, including those performing Italian works, but was virtually unknown on the Italian peninsula.

Besides his work in the opera house, Costa conducted other groups in London, including the Philharmonic Society and the Sacred Harmonic Society. His influence reached outside of London when he conducted choral festivals in provincial capitals such as Bradford, Leeds, and Birmingham.

Luke Jensen
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Michael Costa conducting at Covent Garden theatre, 10 April 1847. Acknowledgement for reproduction is hereby accorded to THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS PICTURE LIBRARY.

