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"The End of Early Music: A Period Performer's History of Music for the Twenty-First Century" by Bruce Haynes

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This book looks at performance practice from a performer's point of view. As such it runs counter to a main criterion in the field, the importance of returning to a composer's original conception. Performers have, however, contrary to this, often taken a more present-oriented view, holding that music takes on life and can be transformed especially through its manner of performance. Can these opposed outlooks be reconciled? This is a question to which I shall return later.

Professor Haynes' *The End of Early Music* is a provocative read, at times speculative, at times hyperbolic, at times iconoclastic. Essentially, the author stresses that our serious music-making has become very stiff and pedantic, in need—as he makes clear from his very first page—of increased performer involvement and improvisation; jazz is held up throughout the book as a salutary antidote to the present-day classical music scene.

Haynes' own background is from what he calls the “rhetorical” style, an innovative manner of performance that began to make itself felt in early-music during the 1970s and 80s, primarily in Europe and especially in Holland. In it, baroque music, which Haynes extends into the late eighteenth century, is provided a fresh interpretation, principally in the replacing of the smooth, linear manner of realization that has typified early-music performance with a continuity made up of brief gestures and minute dynamic nuances. Important representatives of this new kind of realization have been the cellist/conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt, the recorder player Frans Brüggen (Haynes' own teacher), and the harpsichordist/conductor Gustav Leonhardt, with whom Haynes has participated in a number of performances—Haynes himself being an accomplished baroque *hautboist*. There is much to be gained by our becoming familiar with this manner of performing and Haynes' book can serve as a useful introduction.

Perhaps the most novel aspect of the book lies in the recorded examples accompanying it—a commendable new direction in performance practice studies—seventy-two passages that can be downloaded from the internet. Haynes sometimes places two or three recorded versions of a single passage side-by-side, offering comments concerning their characteristics. This allows for a fascinating glimpse into the mind of an early-music performer, able astutely to observe the playing and singing techniques as well as artistic qualities of a variety of performances. It is not requisite, to be sure, that we concur always with his conclusions.

Particularly insightful is Haynes' laying out and clarifying of four distinct performing styles that have appeared over the past century from about 1900 to the present—the recordings are discussed mainly in terms of these four styles:

1. a “romantic” style (ca. 1900 to the 1930s), overtly emotional in expression, whose performers go back into the nineteenth century, some of them to the time of Brahms, Wagner, or Verdi;
2. a “modern” style (ca. 1940 to the present), more restrained in expression, a reaction against the “romantic” manner of performing;
3. a “period” style (ca. 1960 to the present), like the “modern,” except for its adopting of original instruments;
4. a “rhetorical” style (ca. 1970 to the present), a reaction against “period” style, especially by invoking a new sensitivity to various detailed aspects of performance.

The main attributes of these performing styles may be summarized as follows.

“Romantic” style: frequent rubatos and rhythmic alterations, portamento glidings between certain notes, slow (and sometimes ponderous) tempos, evenness of accentuation, incipient vibrato, and a connectedness between phrases, the so-called seamless legato;

“Modern” style: uniformity of rhythm, unyielding (and quicker) tempos, a close adherence to musical scores, prominent and continuous vibrato, and connected legato—a carry-over from the “romantic” style;

“Period” style, a fascination with the sounds and playing techniques of early instruments, although in other respects a continuation of “modern” style;

“Rhetorical” style, the introduction of brief musical gestures divided by breaks, note shaping (dynamic nuances applied to individual notes), beat hierarchy (a greater emphasis on the principal beats), and the enhancing of slurs through diminuendos.

Haynes provides written-out realizations of the “rhetorical” style (192-4), placing brackets under note groupings in passages by Couperin and J. S. Bach, thus illustrating in particular the abandoning of the seamless legato, which had been typical of the “romantic” and “modern” styles. As Haynes points out, early-music performers have had some difficulty in adjusting to the “rhetorical” style due to their ingrained habit of playing long-line legatos—even

though the adoption of original instruments has greatly facilitated the “rhetorical” manner of playing.

Original instruments and their playing techniques indeed have been of particular interest to “rhetorical” musicians, and Haynes goes deeply into the problems of reconstruction, advocating that makers not simply copy models but rather draw out (“emulate”) their best qualities. Haynes himself has made a detailed study of 174 different *hautboys*, and he provides minute descriptions of harpsichord-making, such as of the builder Skowronek, including his most well-known reconstruction, the Lefébure harpsichord.

* * *

A key phrase for Haynes, a kind of central motto in the book, is one he happened upon at the University of Amsterdam inscribed on a portal: “To say something differently is to say something new.” This he recasts into musical terms as “a piece played differently is a different piece,”(22) an idea that deeply bears out his innate proclivity toward the contribution of the performer. He chooses as an example Mahler’s Sixth Symphony, a work that has been conducted increasingly more slowly in recent years, which for Haynes turns it into “a different piece,” or at least, as he says, alters “our conception of [its] identity” (24). From this vantage point the performer’s role takes on a considerably enhanced importance.

Of all the performance styles he goes into, Haynes displays a particular dislike for the “modern” style (ca. 1940 to the present), wherein he feels the performer’s expression has been unduly restricted. He describes performances in this style as “impersonal, literal, correct, deliberate, monotonous, and regular,”(49) a “disastrous blight” on the concert life of the later twentieth century (32). In adopting this view he allies himself particularly with Richard Taruskin, who in a number of articles in the 1980s and 90s—collected and summarized in his book *Text and Act*—also deplores the rather detached and unemotional manner of modernist performers, ascribing it specifically to a Stravinskian influence.^[1]

A question might be raised, though, regarding this rather severe judgment. Especially when it is considered that performers of the time—Haynes mentions Toscanini, Schnabel, Serkin, Heifetz, Menuhin, Salonen, and Rifkin and others—had as an underlying aspiration a desire to rid their performance of what they perceived to be the distortions and exaggerations found in “romantic” performances of the earlier part of the century (from ca. 1900 to the 1930s). Their primary aim, in fact, was to free themselves of such excesses and make their renditions more nearly conform to what a composer originally had in mind. This explains their careful adherence to the score (or *Urtext*)—Haynes’ “strait” style (as in a strait jacket). Despite these attitudes, however, it is not at all apparent, at least to me, that their performances have been that

¹ Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

much lacking in personal expression, even though such expression may not have been overtly apparent.

At this point I might return to the query posed at the outset of this review, and enquire whether reconciliation is possible between the composer's demands and the performer's need for self-expression. I have earlier proposed that such an accommodation might be reached in the Introduction of my *Performance Practice: a Dictionary-Guide for Musicians* (2005), from which I quote:

“What, then, might be considered the ideal performer? A player or singer, who, on the one hand, finds out whatever he or she can about the original performance aspects of a musical work, but who, on the other hand, enters fully into the music's emotional content, particularly by the adding of rhythmic and dynamic nuances. Such a performer enhances and complements the composer's original expression with his or her own individual feelings. When such a combination is achieved, knowledge and feeling come together, each in its way contributing to the propitious recreating of a composer's musical works.”^[2]

In my estimation such a propitious compromise can be discerned in many of the performances of the above-mentioned artists, including those of Menuhin, Salonen, and Rifkin, who come off rather unfavorably in Haynes's comparisons of their recordings.

Another era towards which Haynes feels little empathy is that of nineteenth-century romanticism (prior to the recorded examples of the early-twentieth century). This period, significantly, was the one that replaced the “rhetorical,” with which Haynes most closely identifies himself. In his view, the French Revolution (begun in 1789) represented historically a critical turning-point, when many earlier performance aspects were turned on their head: when rhetorical gestures gave way to legato lines, when composition as a craft became composition by inspiration, when freedom of improvisation was curtailed by composers (who insisted, for instance, that their own cadenzas now be utilized), and when aristocratic salons were supplanted by people's concert halls, filled with submissive (and silent) audiences. Haynes deplores these developments and questions their underlying assumptions, which remain with us to this day. He is chagrined, for instance, by the exaggerated esteem often accorded composers, pointing to the fact that certain of their formerly-prized works have since been shown to have been misattributed—for example, Haydn's Opus 3, which turns out to have been by Hofstetter. This he compares with the fake paintings of Hans van Meegeren, which for a time were praised as genuine Vermeers. One might counter, though, that such misattributions, whether of Haydn or Vermeer, have resulted primarily from our own analytical shortcomings.

² Roland Jackson, *Performance-Practice: a Dictionary-Guide for Musicians* (New York: Routledge, 2005), x.

Haynes also takes umbrage at the idea of the interpretive conductor, who imposes his own conception of works onto his performers, a phenomenon that began in the nineteenth century. Here he draws our attention to what he regards as the more spontaneous attitudes manifested by “rhetorical” ensembles, whether under a violinist leader or a solo fortepianist—the latter exemplified, for instance, by the lively performances of Robert Levin.

Haynes, however, rarely presents his opinions about these or other matters in a very systematic manner, preferring instead to string together quotations from various writers, the contexts of their remarks rarely being spelled-out. As an illustration, a portion of the section entitled “Originality and the Cult of Genius” (79)—here the word “cult” being indicative of his bias—might be cited (the authors and dates of writings are placed before the quoted passages, but otherwise the continuity is as in the book).

(Higgins, 2004) “Why, one wonders, is genius so often associated with Romantic music but seems beside the mark when applied to Machaut or Dowland?”^[3]

(Dahlhaus, 1983) “Musicians in the Rhetorical era composed and performed using rules of thumb and craftsmanlike formulas. Where a Romantic composer would show their [sic] genius by transcending or reinterpreting mere rules, a Baroque musician would prove their ingenuity not by breaking but by fulfilling the rules.”^[4]

(Barnett—a choreographer rather than a musician—1987) Composition “was an art in the 18th-century sense of the word—a skill in the performance of actions using accepted, proven techniques and precepts.”^[5]

(Haynes) “Sounds like a craftsman talking. . .”

(Roger North, 1728) “In musick nothing is left to accident; all must be done either with designe or by inveterate habit, in a course duely establishd; and the cheif industry lies in procuring variety.”^[6]

³ Footnotes 3-10 are all cited by Haynes on the pages indicated above; the additional citations are provided here for easy reference. Paula Higgins, “The Apotheosis of Josquin des Prez and Other Mythologies of Musical Genius,” *JAMS*, vol. 57, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 443-510.

⁴ Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J.B. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983), 147.

⁵ Dene Barnett and Jeanette Massy-Westropp, *The Art of Gesture: The Practices and Principles of the 18th century Acting* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1987), 11.

⁶ Roger North, *Roger North on Music*, ed. John Wilson (London: Novello, 1959), 142.

(Haynes) “To a Romantic, this would not have done at all.”

This leaves the reader with a rather mixed impression. Apparently Haynes is attempting to convey that rhetorical craft is preferable to nineteenth-century rule-breaking. But is this a true picture? Was the nineteenth century devoid of craft or the eighteenth of composers incapable of transcending rules? Was genius something confined to the nineteenth century? Many past composers (including Machaut and Dowland) were esteemed in their time and afterwards, even though the word “genius” may not have been applied to them.

Another of Haynes’s criticisms is directed to the idea of composer intention, which in his estimation is linked especially to nineteenth-century romanticism. Yet many of the writers he cites as alluding to it were actually from the eighteenth century, i.e. his own “rhetorical” period, as the following examples demonstrate:

(Mattheson, 1739) “Those who have never discovered how the composer himself wished to have the work performed will hardly be able to play it well” (114).^[7]

(Avison, 1753) “For as Musically Expression in the Composer, is succeeding in the Attempt to express some particular Passion; so in the Performer, it is to do a Composition Justice, by playing it in a Taste and Stile so exactly corresponding with the Intention of the Composer, as to preserve and illustrate all the Beauties of his Work” (113).^[8]

(Schulz, 1771) “[It is desirable for the performer to play]“as if from the soul of the composer” (95).^[9]

(Petri, 1782) “[a rehearsal is] where the music director makes the players aware of the hidden intentions of the composers” (100).^[10]

In conclusion, Haynes’ book is of value for his defining of “rhetorical” style, for his distinctions between various twentieth-century performing styles, and for his discriminating comments concerning recorded examples. Objections might be raised for his lack of recognition of the undeniable contributions of “modern” performers, or for his failure to understandingly

⁷ Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (Hamburg: C. Herold, 1739), final paragraph.

⁸ Charles Avison, *An Essay on Musical Expression* (London, Printed for C. Davis, 1753), 108.

⁹ Appears in Mary Hunter, “‘To Play as if from the Soul of the Composer’: The Idea of the Performer in Early Romantic Aesthetics,” *JAMS*, vol. 58, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 364.

¹⁰ Johann Samuel Petri, *Anleitung zur practischen Musik* (Leipzig: J.G.I. Breitkopf, 1782), 181.

enter into what appears to be the lasting value and more universal applicability of nineteenth-century musical thought.