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Foreword

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Foreword

A NEW JOURNAL

Why *Historical Performance* (HP)? Although the name has been applied chiefly to “early music”—with a chronological focus that has been something of a moving target—HP today is as relevant to the twentieth century as it is to the ninth century. Where “early music” refers most directly to specific repertoires, “historical performance” refers to an outcome of means, methods, interdisciplinary synergies, and their generative feedback loops that inform our interpretation of music coming from social and cultural origins that are now partially or wholly lost—or, as often, obscured by some assumed, and unquestioned, “tradition.”

No longer a renegade movement within Western classical music, and now more pervasively part of the mainstream in university and conservatory education (particularly in the US and parts of Europe), HP can draw from a long continuum of academic disciplines to reveal vital points of contact between theory and practice, with fruitful returns for modern performance. At a moment when universities and academic funding bodies place a high premium on interdisciplinary and collaborative research, it bears scrutiny to point out that many of the key steps forward in the early music movement have been taken repeatedly on interdisciplinary grounds—long before such approaches became institutional imperatives. Without such corroborative weight, HP might not otherwise have been positioned to achieve its enduring successes so quickly. Even where scholar-performers (or performer-scholars) have “gotten it wrong,” an increasingly reflexive orientation toward research/performance polarities of the past, and a progressive reshaping of field ontology in the present, have scrutinized errors, oversights, and omissions, fostering an ongoing dialogical process that has helped gradually to enhance levels of interpretative credibility and apparent precision.

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What makes HP relevant among today's arts and humanities disciplines? Very simply, the academic and performance sides of the field are equally critical to its aims—aims that cannot be fulfilled with reference to one or the other perspectives alone. As a discipline, sociologists would say that HP is both “affective” on the creative performance side and “knowledge producing” on the intellectual research side. As such, HP brings together disciplinary types and perspectives otherwise viewed by many to be mutually exclusive. HP thus has a significant contribution to make within a maturing interdisciplinary conversation that has gained inexorable momentum. By extension, HP by nature possesses both the conceptual and practical currencies to enhance many of the nuanced, processual outcomes of cultural production.

This journal serves further to explore HP, casting the net of inquiry as far and wide as possible, from antiquity through the twentieth century. Although the field has grown assiduously under the Western musical canon (with nods to colonialism, as well as living popular musical traditions of northern Africa, Andalusia, the Middle East, the Baltic States, Ireland, Scotland, and France, among others), HP is capacious enough a concept to accommodate traditions falling well outside the established reaches of Western European historiography.

1. HISTORICAL IMPROVISATION

An area of HP that has more recently gained critical mass (and funding) as a subject of research is historical improvisation. Appropriately, the first three articles of this inaugural issue offer fresh perspective: from fifteenth-century Naples and from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, Mantua, and Venice. It might seem odd that something as fundamental as historical improvisation should have been so late to stimulate interest as a scholarly focus. There had been no particular dearth of evidence to make such work prohibitive; but, of course, early improvisation treatises are best tested systematically on their own terms within the domain of performance—and, at that, only after due absorption of and immersive fluency in their guiding tenets. Institutionally speaking, it's been well acknowledged that on balance, musicology and performance long operated with a degree of overlap that was minimalist at best. It shouldn't come as a surprise, then, that it was only in the first years of the current millennium that organized research programs in the subject began to take on cohesive shape, with publications correspondingly increasing in number. Today, the flow of original research is at a high level, with no signs of subsiding. Tellingly, except for a very few educational institutions that pioneered courses in the subject, historical improvisation has only recently begun to enter curricula at the college/university level more generally.

The essential resource of improvisational facility, especially during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, was developed through a methodical training of the memory. The path-breaking work of the medievalist Mary Carruthers (and subsequently from musical quarters, Anna Maria Busse Berger) first revealed the historical, taught systematizations of a great cerebral repository that could store vast, intricately indexed webs of information to be called up at will. Mnemonic techniques prescribed by medieval authors suggest the development of memory on a scale that a culture relegating the same facility to the smart phone would find difficult to grasp today. A well-trained medieval memory operated as the primary, concrete domain of knowledge, invention, and musical practice. By contrast, the bare two-dimensionality of written notation or text was deemed the more imperfect residual impression left behind by a mind in full command of its applied skills—arguably the truest crucible of invention and agency in performance for the greater portion of musical history. Paradoxically however, we can only engage with these non-written performance traditions through their notated or written remains.

To this end, Elizabeth Elmi delves into the topic via late quattrocento Naples and Giovanni Cantelmo's *Cansonero napoletano* of 1468, along with cognate sources, revealing a special example of performing practices within which humanist traditions of "mixed orality" combined variously and seamlessly. Elmi elucidates important complementarities between text and music in such performance milieus, deploying a fresh methodology that offers utility for scholars undertaking research in similarly integrated areas of literary and musical culture not only in Renaissance Naples, but further afield throughout Europe. Jonathan Oddie's analytical study of the use of *stretto fuga* and sequential schemata in the keyboard fantasies of Orlando Gibbons immediately immerses us in the groundswell of current research directed toward improvised counterpoint from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries. A technique "reverse-engineered" and first given currency some twenty years ago by the musicologist John Milsom, *stretto fuga* refers to a formulaic process of improvising counterpoint in strict imitation, whether sung or played in a consort, or performed on a solo keyboard or plucked instrument. Oddie's lucid analyses provide fertile material for interpretation in performance, particularly in the context of that highly porous relationship between improvisation and composition. Dealing with this latter dichotomy closest to the written end of the spectrum, Massimo Ossi investigates Monteverdi's apparent ambivalence toward extemporé performance in his own works *ex licentia*—all at a time, of course, when *passaggi* and ornamentation were *de rigueur*. As Ossi argues, however, with evidential support, Monteverdi discourages no less the newer-fangled ornaments and gestures encouraged by

leading proponents of the movement that the composer himself described as the *Seconda Prattica*.

2. PERFORMANCE ISSUES OF THE BAROQUE

Two freestanding articles offer fresh insight into baroque performance practice issues regularly encountered by today's performers. Edward Higginbottom's "A Play on Words" puts forward a stimulating hypothesis tested against a stylistic interrogation of modern HP conventions in the French baroque repertory. While baroque dance offers a long-accepted interpretative influence on such music clear enough to require little or no elucidation, Higginbottom concentrates on a variation of another well-acknowledged layer of musical interpretation that obliged musicians to shape melody in accordance with vocal/textual inflection—in this case, within a purely instrumental genre bearing no texted origins at all: the French overture. While on the face of it a majority of period instrumentalists have long embraced a text-oriented, vocally inflected approach to articulation, Higginbottom reveals the potential extent to which we still may have missed a definitive historical mark. Investigating the veritable mania of Lullian parody publication that swept Paris for nearly half a century (1690s to the 1740s), Higginbottom brings into focus a leading cultural practice and social priority adopted by literate professional and amateur musicians alike that is sure to test and enhance current models of interpretation.

Within equally crucial quarters, Robert Rawson draws us into the opaque area of bowed basso continuo practice of the seventeenth century, bringing new evidence to light from the Kroměříž Court. Rawson examines the already hazy historical chronology of the use of 16-foot pitch in basso continuo playing. No less, he queries the modern notion that instrumental ranges in extant instrumental parts of the period determine a priori the deployment of specific instruments. Taking into account HP basso-continuo conventions adopting 16-foot pitch since the 1960s, as well as the semantic ambiguity and fluidity inhering in ubiquitously deceptive terms such as *violone*, Rawson supplies tantalizing documentation that will likely add to our understanding of the history of basso continuo performance—some of it bearing links from Kroměříž to London via Gottfried Finger, with other examples leading to Austria by way of the luthier Jacob Stainer.

3. EARLY RECORDED SOUND

Of course, sound archives are hardly new resources, but taking as examples the relatively recent establishment in the UK of the British Library Sound Archive, the AHRC's funding of the Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music (CHARM), and a resultant flood of published studies, this area of

endeavor has substantially enlarged its importance within historical performance studies, among other areas. The evidence makes clear a broad range of coexistent approaches to style and gesture, sometimes seeming to originate from contradictory principles. That state of affairs counters a number of key suppositions taken for granted around notions of historical periodization.

Accordingly, George Barth leads us on a critical odyssey in recorded sound that makes plain many apparent “quirks” of nineteenth-century style, seemingly all but exclusive to this type of evidence. In his piece “Effacing Modernism,” Barth characterizes such phenomena and their absence from written sources as owing to “the invisibility of the familiar”—recurring gestures taken for granted that don’t appear among the aesthetic principles outlined in any surviving treatise, chronicle, or contemporary theoretical evidence. One could say that a heterogeneity of practices coexisted, each contributing a layer of variegated stylism to a period once characterized with historical hindsight in terms of relative uniformity. Focusing on solo piano performance, Barth interprets the advent and influence of modernism (hastened by a burgeoning recording industry) to have imposed a corrective purgation of practices on musicians active during the flourishing of nineteenth-century performance styles. Barth traces a variety of routes through which these new influences fashioned a new aesthetic order that effectively whitewashed away all that had been distinctively essential to nineteenth-century performance traditions.

4. HISTORICAL PERFORMANCE TODAY

The hegemonic rise of modernism, its aesthetic priorities and ensuing stylistic imperatives, also exerted a defining influence over pedagogy in the leading conservatories, which arguably came to strongest fruition in the post-war period. It is from this temporal starting point that Nick Wilson’s concluding article traces the rise of the early music movement from the mid-twentieth century, showing how in rejecting modernist musical values it nonetheless successfully “co-created a new version of musical culture.” Wilson’s publication *The Art of Re-Enchantment: Making Early Music in the Modern Age* (2013) contributed the first comprehensive ethnography and sociology of the early music movement in Britain. Taking a step further within these pages, Wilson reconciles the field’s work in scholarship and performance with the hard realities of a contemporary global economy and its attending models of entrepreneurship. As the entrepreneurial playing field shifts emphases from one generation to the next, Wilson highlights a fertility of opportunity available to HP today, built on the lessons of the past. For many folks in the arts, the term “entrepreneurship” still evokes suspicion, e.g., the idea that one has “sold out” cherished artistic values to the

economic and political exigencies of the moment. Wilson invites us instead to see entrepreneurship as a special kind of pragmatic idealism that has actually been present in different forms during much of musical history. It's the ability to "balance the competing forces of artistic autonomy and economic reality." To do so with success, as Wilson suggests, constitutes "a mark of real authenticity" and a valuable indicator of "cultural capability."

This inaugural issue of *Historical Performance*, then, offers scholars and performers some of the most recent research in the field. As the aforementioned area of early-recorded sound is of current importance, we are especially pleased to incorporate multimedia musical examples via the online version of this publication, as well as the links provided in the print version for subscribing readers.

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It is our sincere hope that this new annual series will be long running, to open new avenues of inquiry and communication within the discipline of historical performance.

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