INTRODUCING HuCPeR

On the occasion of our launch, it seems appropriate to say a few words about my own understanding of HuCPeR and its context. The content here suggest itself to me as points to be raised, discussed and debated, and in a wide range of musical, chronological and genre contexts, as the centre moves forwards from these first steps and towards, as I hope it will, the fruition granted by becoming a vibrant and fully-fledged part of the music department landscape.

One of the things that struck me when I joined the university in 2010 was the extraordinary wealth and range of musical creativity, innovation, and performance-related research. Indeed, our department is, it seems to me, unusually ‘performance based’ for a university setting. What concerns us here of course is the postgraduate scene – in which we are privileged to work with numerous professional performers. At the root of this however, and often it seems to me somewhat separated from this side of our activities, is the nature of performance provision for our undergraduate students. This, as I see it, sets a number of ‘guiding threads’ through our performance activities in the department, linking students and staff alike. We offer undergraduate students a superb programme of performance-related modules and educational experiences, ranging from individual, solo pathways, to group performances in a wide range of contexts, and the opportunities to practice skills (such as improvisation and conducting) that are unlikely to have been the prior experiences of many of our students before they come. This is underpinned not only by our instrumental part-time staff, but also by academic staff who are internationally-recognised performers, and performer scholars. The dominant activity, academically, then, is what might be described as ‘applied musicology’ – musicology with a direct bearing upon performance and, indeed, I would argue, a reciprocal relationship between research and practice.

Of course, an area in which we are already recognised is in terms of contemporary music, with an internationally-recognised ‘critical mass’ of scholars, composers and performers (staff and
postgraduate students) working in this field. This is reflected in one of our most established centres – CeReNeM.

What is sometimes less well known is that there are a range of performance scholars working in other fields of work. By definition, I suppose, if something is not ‘contemporary’ it is pre-contemporary, and if it is not ‘new’ then it is somewhat older, or perhaps even historical. The fact that I am havering here and avoiding making HuCPeR synonymous with historical performance research, or performing practice (which most people use as a term to mean historical performance is actually for a good reason. What I think all of us involved in setting up the centre felt was that this should be something able to embrace a wide range of possibilities, chronologies, repertories and indeed, methodologies. In my opinion at least, the co-existence of HuCPeR with centres such as CeReNeM is actually rather more profound than one might think – it means that there exists, here at Huddersfield, a diverse range of scholars and performers and in fields where cross-fertilization is relatively uncommon. There are themes that link all of our activities. This is one of my hopes for our new centre.

AREAS OF STUDY (HISTORICAL AND OTHERWISE)

The common factor in all of this is of course not a specific ‘music’ or repertory – but rather people – performers and, ipso facto, the act of performance itself. But what are our needs for ‘research’ into the act of performance, and what form can it take? This may all seem to be basic, down-to-earth stuff but it is worth perhaps looking at some first principles.

I suppose that the various manifestations of ‘historical performance’ act as a natural context for research into performance, and talking about them is not simply because of my own performance and research interests. And, of course, we all know what this means, or looks like – or we think that we do. Repertories as concentrated upon by my colleagues John Bryan, Graham Cummings and Duncan Druce in particular (see HuCPeR website) require a good deal of root-and-branch work into historical instruments, various philological processes in terms of interpreting musical scores, and a whole host of other aspects of archaeological detective work. The developing infrastructure of such an approach – particularly since World War 2 – has been in terms of creating centres of learning – teaching, research, scholarship and practice. This has led to the production of ‘scholar performers’. One thinks of the dual status of such luminaries as Lawrence Dreyfus or Richard Taruskin –who combine freely and seamlessly the areas of research and performance. Moreover, in pre-eighteenth-century repertories, such an HIP approach is perhaps the dominant one stylistically and practically. Modern instrument performances of Monteverdi are thus something of a rarity now, whilst even the provincial choral society will employ a harpsichordist and gamba player for the Bach St Matthew Passion (even if the rest of the ensemble are on modern instruments, the harpsichord is, heaven help us all! – electronic, and the chorus and soloists maintain a very twentieth-century-style vibrato magnitude and frequency). Such things result in a historical hotch-potch, but, looked at as generously as one might, they do show how research into such repertories has some degree of hegemonic influence.

Things are particularly interesting, variable, untidy, challenging and – frankly – contentious – in what one might describe as ‘canonical’ repertory certainly beginning with Bach and the great and
celebrated exponents of the high Baroque, and forwards through what our school textbooks called ‘classical’ and ‘romantic’ music. Thus, I define such canonical repertory as eighteenth and nineteenth century music, in the main, doubtless reflecting the legacy of the Leipzig school of composers, performers and scholars clustering around the figurehead of polymath Felix Mendelssohn in the nineteenth century who acted as pioneers perhaps in the wider dissemination of historical music as well as perpetuating and feeding the gestational phase of canonicity. Here we begin to get a divergence of approach, not only to performance aesthetics, but also to the perceived role and legitimacy of performance research. And we think we know what this looks like as well. Many of us here will remember, first hand, the ‘anguished debates’ (to use George Kennaway’s rather nice phrase) concerning what used to be called ‘authenticity’ before Richard Taruskin obliterated the word from responsible academic debate. Certainly, at a time when ‘Early Music’ was still the vogue term for HIP, a bi-partitite distinction could be seen (and very convenient it is too) between what is still referred to commonly as ‘mainstream’ performance, and HIP. I refer the reader not only to Taruskin’s Text and Act of 1995¹, but also the little volume of essays from 1988, compiled and edited by Nicholas Kenyon, which summarise things of this time rather well². Mainstream performance was branded by HIP as unhistorical, unreflective, uninformed, complicit in the misleading notion of ‘continuing tradition’ in performance – a term used to head up the section by Howard Meyer Brown in the New Grove 1 (1980) section on music after 1750 in the article on ‘performing practice’ to suggest that music, maybe after Bach and certainly from Mozart onwards has been in continuous performance and therefore does not need to be ‘rediscovered’³.

Certainly, the idea of the performance of music of the past has changed radically in recent times. I remember, somewhat vaguely, watching a television programme in 1979 (the year in which I started to learn the violin) featuring the late Christopher Hogwood and what I recall even at that young age as something that was little more than a curiosity. In the mid 1980s, when I bought the complete Mozart violin sonatas with some ABRSM prize money, my teacher had no qualms about recommending the Schnabel/Flesch Peters edition from 1912⁴ (full as it is of what I now see as ‘historically-interesting-in-themselves’ bowings and fingerings suggestive of early twentieth-century practice). Even as recently as my own undergraduate career (which, admittedly, was a little longer ago than I care to admit!) performance teachers spoke of ‘Brahms sound’ to mean, I suppose, something like this:

[Sound clip 1: Brahms Symphony no. 2, op.73 opening – Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra cond. Herbert von Karajan, Deutsche Grammophon 429 153-2, first released c.1964. The clip demonstrates a ‘traditional’ aural image of Brahms – heavy vibrato, steady tempo, very ‘serious’ and substantial sound-world]

Much more recently, a provincial viola player asked me whether it was true that the Brahms violin concerto would have been played by Joachim ‘without vibrato’ (by which, I think, he meant, without the kind of wide, prominent pitch wobbliness to which we have become more recently

4 Complete violin sonatas, C. F. Peters, Plate Number 9700, Leipzig, 1912.
It is important to defenestrate ourselves from our lofty ivory towers, and remember that those outside the academy – what is often misleadingly called the ‘real world’ – are not necessarily as familiar with matters as we assume. Indeed it is our job, and the job of a centre such as this, to practice what current jargon calls ‘knowledge transfer.’ It is equally fascinating to see, in this particular encounter, such an embedded acquiescence to today’s aesthetic paradigm that anything ‘other’ seemed to be almost unthinkable – an issue perhaps worth bearing in mind when we study the writings and other surviving evidence of past ages.

So indeed, the HIP agenda, chronologically if nothing else, has extended further forwards in time to, at the very least, the foothills of the twentieth century. At Stanford University’s Reactions to the Record III symposium in 2012, there was a performance of Bach arranged by Stokowski. Now HIP might indeed be something other than the fascinating but, of course, logically limited confines of trying to perform, as best we are able, according to the stylistic conventions and notational expectations contemporaneous with the piece of music being played. Besides which, there is no single ‘idea’ here – and monothematic, positivist distillations are much to be resisted. So performance is not just HIP, but also HOP (historically-opinionated performance). Apart from HIP HOP, we also have a whole range of other methodologies subsumed within the traditional confines of ‘historical performance’ including recordings-informed performance – perhaps rather portentously abbreviated to RIP.

So, maybe HuCPeR isn’t a ‘historical performance centre’ because it attempts to defy traditional conceptions of what this means. Whenever I try to explain to someone that I work in the area of historically-informed performance, many – including musicians- assume that I mean baroque performance or ‘early music’. This is perhaps reflected in the fact that quite a lot of performance institutions have ‘early music specialists.’ Indeed, this does, legitimately, mean something other than musicians peculiarly impervious to the difficulties of making music before breakfast. We ourselves have an ‘Early Music Studio’. And there’s nothing wrong with any of this at all, but, of course, the definitions of historical performance are much larger.

---

5 In fact, Joachim did use vibrato, as evidenced by his recordings made for the Gramophone & Typewriter company in Berlin in 1903. It is, nonetheless, a very narrow and discrete application and is certainly not continuous, with many notes being without it. Nineteenth-century aesthetic theory (as eighteenth century theory before it) allowed for the device at times of heightened emotion, and it seems plausible to assert that the impassioned utterances of this concerto would have allowed for it. See David Milsom, Theory and Practice in Late Nineteenth-Century Violin Performance 1850-1900 (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2003) for discussions of ‘theory’ (in the form of treatises) and ‘practice’ (in terms of analyses of early recordings, including Joachim’s). Caution must be exercised however – the term ‘vibrato’ was not in universal use until the twentieth century, and may (and in some cases certainly did) mean different things. A conspicuous voice to question this orthodox reading of historical use of the device is David Hurwitz whose various writings suggest that, to him, ‘vibrato’ was more widespread in the long nineteenth century than many suppose. See, for example, ‘Vibrato, the Orchestral Organ and the ‘Prevailing Aesthetic’ in Nineteenth-Century Symphonic Music’, Nineteenth-Century Music Review, 11 (2014), pp. 93-112.

6 I must attribute this term to my wife, Ruth Milsom.

7 ‘Recordings informed performance’ lies at the heart of work by Anna Scott, whose PhD thesis, defended at the University of Leiden in December 2014, is entitled Romanticizing Brahms: Early Recordings and the Reconstruction of Brahmsian Identity. RIP also describes my 2006-2009 AHRC Research Fellowship (pages currently still under reconstruction by University of Leeds, but will be published on the HuCPeR site as soon as they are available).
THE SYNERGY OF PERFORMANCE STUDIES

Maybe, indeed, everything – certainly in the realm of notated music – is – or soon becomes something like Historical Performance, at least, methodologically. I often think about this when our undergraduates undertake performance commentaries, justifying, explaining, and rationalising their performance decisions – much of the activity seems to be identical to that of HIP, even if the sonic decisions are rather different (or a bit different). On one level, if so, the term becomes meaningless, as does ‘historically-informed’ performance which, presumably, can only really exist in the presence of ‘historically uninformed’ or ‘historically misinformed’ or ‘historically ignorant’ performance – nasty terms yes, and not ones that we can easily prove one way or the other, whatever the veracity of our opinions. If HIP methodology defines much of what we do (certainly, those of us working with conventional staff notation and with works by deceased composers – something that I know does not apply to everyone here) it can do so only in broad categories, but it is worth perhaps thinking about some of these – and the activities that they embody as ‘performance research’. Of course the list isn’t exhaustive, of course there are exceptions and of course this is a generalisation, but many of the basic issues here concern a large number of those of us involved in a range of so-called ‘performance research’:

- **Scores – their ‘reliability’** - relationship between what the player has on the stand in front of them and what a composer actually wrote down [Slide 2]

This seems to be perfectly reasonable and obvious. Although no-one in this room is under the misapprehension referred to by Peter Hill in his article ‘From Score to Sound’ that a ‘score’ is ‘the music’, most of us would consider that the score itself is the principal means by which a (conventional) composition survives and comprises its most basic elements and, as George Kennaway argues in the conclusion to his book, *Playing the Cello*, researchers and musicologists are apt to forget that for most musicians the research (and relationship) with a musical work begins, instrument in hand, and music on stand. Consequently, Nicholas Cook suggests that Beethoven’s plan for a complete, authoritative edition of his own music acted as stimulus for ‘the most ambitious project of twentieth-century musicology: the production of authoritative editions.’ Now it has become the sine qua non of ‘responsible’ teaching to suggest that one obtains a ‘good edition’ – preferably ‘urtext’ or, at least, one with a reliable paper trail back to the composer.

- **Scores – what they ‘mean’** [Slides 3-10]

This, naturally, follows on, and much of our activity, whether we are a flutist considering Rampal’s performing practices in Poulenc, or a violinist looking at a performance of a Brahms violin sonata, is broadly philological. Such philological processes circumscribe how we ‘analyse’ other media too – such as sound. Analysis of recordings (more later) often includes close listening and empirical dissection – as in the use of Sonic Visualiser, although, of course, even SV work has limits to its

---

8 Taruskin has also mused upon such logical extensions of the notion of ‘historically informed performance.’
9 The original Powerpoint slides have been provided with this script for reference.
13 www.sonicvisualiser.org/
empiricism because at some point the act of data interpretation is necessary. All of this sits within the same philosophy and similar investigative processes.

Some scholars allege that the twenty-first century way is, generally, to take scores at face value and to perform ‘literally’ what they say. But this is not only impossible at least by human performers, but also almost universally undesirable, whatever the score is. The singer will add ornamentations – in extra notes for eighteenth century music and before, and in tone colouring – the vibrato. The cellist will adapt, add, change or otherwise personalise bowings and fingerings, more or less – even if only for practical reasons (instrument capabilities, own technique, size of hall, etc.) and indeed, we all must remember that decisions about performance are (and should be) at least as much about practicality as they are about theory – or what I call my ‘does it work?’ test to student performers. Certainly there is a high degree of variability between players and performance persuasions – the HIP pianist, particularly if he is acquainted with Neal Peres Da Costa’s excellent book on nineteenth-century pianism, might experiment with arpeggiation of chords (notated or not). The ‘modern’ pianist almost certainly will not, unless it is written – but she nonetheless will have to face situations of adaptation – whilst it is not now customary to perform Bach on the modern pianoforte (one could utter pious statements here about such a performance inevitably being a ‘transcription’) – the performer of Rachmaninov or Grieg will be playing an instrument differently voiced to those of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The gap between sound and score is a substantial one, and this is where performance research comes in.

The meanings of scores are, moreover, often localised, personalised, and a prey to (at times) quite substantial variation. A mark of articulation or accentuation can mean all sorts of different effects at different times and in different places. Take, for example, the slurred staccato or portato marking over a sequence of piano chords. Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870) wrote in his Studies op. 70 that ‘when dots are used with slurs over double notes and chords, these should be struck very slightly in the Arpeggio manner.’ Today, such a marking would almost certainly not have this meaning in performance. In violin performance, only study will acquaint one with the fact that, although Louis Spohr’s scores frequently contain dots over notes, it is well known that he disliked the spiccato bow-stroke and would have played these on the string at the point. Even (as in the case of fingered and bowed editions by historical figures) specific performance directions can result in many different aural outcomes. This means that studying meanings is almost certainly a good idea. It also means that no-one should defend dogmatism in a field of interpretative study that is open to many different understandings.

- Investigation of context [Slide 11]

The historical, social elements of the music... too obvious for any further unpacking here.

---

14 This suggestion has been made on numerous occasions by Clive Brown in relation to modern ‘mainstream’ performers.
17 This is evident from reading Louis Spohr’s 1833 Violinschule (trans. C. Rudolphus, London, 1843). Spohr’s dislike of the sprung stroke is well known and frequently reported. The technique was only introduced to Spohr’s method in Henry Holmes’ revision of 1880.
Performing techniques, and performance ‘style’ [Slide 12]

This flows, naturally, out of our philological concerns. I might add to this too – the issue of period instruments, or, more generally, ‘appropriate’ instruments. These issues are obviously not the exclusive preserve of HIP, although the largeness of the HIP project and in so much repertory means that much repertoire, certainly before the twentieth century, is so considered. Often a ‘negotiated stance’ is agreed upon, intersecting initial training (with which we are comfortable, which is reliable, and which allows for unimpeded musical ideas from brain to fingers) with knowledge and incorporation of period techniques (or, for that matter, techniques that are appropriately contextual in other ways). Technique and style are, of course, mutually co-dependent – and this is an almost universal matter of concern, even if decisions made are not historical ones.

Awareness (in older music) of legacy of other performances [Slide 13]

This is less of an issue to performers of more recent repertory, but many of us are faced with interesting issues here. I am firmly of the belief that the existence of sound recordings exerts a powerful – and in many ways profound – influence – upon performance. Not only are we aware of performance globally, but also we are faced with 120 years of previous renditions, many of which are granted monumental status in one way or another. One can bear in mind the clichéd advice to undergraduate students – either pay no regard whatsoever to recorded performances, or listen to many – never just one or two. For those of us working certainly in pre twentieth-century music, it is likely, more or less, that our research of a work will involve studying other recordings, particularly those considered seminal in order to orient ourselves, knowledgeably, around pre-existing renditions. Much performance research historically involves more-or-less minute analysis of the ‘meaning’ of recordings – at the moment I’m working on about forty recordings of the first movement of Mozart’s ‘Turkish’ concerto, and some time ago, in one of our more general Research Forum sessions, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson discussed performances of Chopin by Alfred Cortot – known (supposedly) for his spontaneous performance style – and yet when listening to various performances of the same work (and over long time scales throughout his career) one found that they mapped remarkably well on top of each other which is interesting in itself.

In a more everyday sense recordings cause us all sorts of headaches, and issues to solve. Does one create a hierarchy of obtained performances? If you want to listen to something on Naxos Music Library and there are 26 recordings to choose from, what influences your choice, and why? Let’s suppose one was learning the Shostakovich Cello Sonata. If the 1959 recording played by the composer and Rostropovich was listed, perhaps this would rise to the top – and obviously so – whatever the complex dynamics involved in composer-performances, there would perhaps be an almost unconscious assumption that this provided a perspective of the work in a, well, authentic way. But if, as recently, one wanted to listen to Smetana’s Ma Vlast and looked it up on Naxos Music Library, one would not find so obvious a connection, yet similar processes might be at work. One

---


19 University of Huddersfield Department of Music Research Forum series, 2012-2013 programme.

20 Shostakovich, Cello Sonata op. 40 (Dmitri Shostakovich, piano, Mstislav Rostropovich, ‘cello, originally released on Melodyia, 1959; re-issued on Russian Treasure 31 0179-2).
might pick a Talich recording, on account of his Czech/Moravian origins perhaps – and a sense that he was a specialist in this genre. In a recent discussion of the work which was performed at an ad hoc performance day here in Huddersfield, several of us made reference to Talich’s interpretations. I’d like to think that this was not just because one of his recordings is the first in the Naxos Music Library list but reflected some estimation of his prowess in such repertory. But you would need to know this in order to influence your choice by this means – something that cannot be taken for granted. In any case, a hierarchical relationship is soon created, privileging some information over others, and this requires a precise and informed perspective to make sense of it. And many of us are familiar with what happens when this goes wrong – in a student presentation accidentally using certain scores and recordings. Then there is the influence of recordings in teaching. If you are studying Mozart’s 40th Symphony in an analysis class, which recording do you play and why, and how does one deal with the invisible barrier between musical work and musical act and the elucidation of structure as written and structure as sounded?

The same might be said as well as regards historical editions of music – editions with editorial performance markings within – the kinds of editions for a long time demonised as the problem the ‘urtext’ supposedly solved and yet editions that in themselves convey much potentially fascinating information about performing practices from the time the edition was made. Study of them has not come up as an item in this list of generic areas of performance research because relatively few of us do this in great depth, and in fairness, string editions are unusually rich in explicit performance information21. Even here, and until recently, information and archival tools were poor. After a major project at Leeds and Cardiff Universities (which included very substantial work by HuCPeR VRFs, George Kennaway and Duncan Druce, as well as me – before I started work here in 2010) – we now have an enormous archive of string chamber editions of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and there is a link to this site – CHASE – on the HuCPeR website22.

So – if you wanted to look at a Beethoven violin sonata – you’d get all of these editions – Auer, 1917, Brodsky, 1894, David, 1868, Dont, 1883, Gruzmacher 1874 (arranged for ‘cello), Halir, 1905, Hermann, 1890, Joachim, 1901, Kreisler, 1911, Rosé, 1901, Seybold, 1919, and Singer, 1887.

Almost immediately and doubtless subconsciously, there would be a hierarchical filtering process if you knew anything about the subject, or probable confusion and the need for further research if you didn’t. You might choose to look at David’s edition as the first, or Joachim’s, given that he was only one step removed from the composer, and a noted ‘Beethoven authority’ as a performer at the time. So decisions would be contextualised, and if one was in a state of ignorance – then navigating the peculiar riches open to modern performers via the internet (a situation not evident even fifteen years ago!) would be difficult, and performance choices and influences would be, at best, ‘random’.

---

21 String editions, as edited by ‘celebrity editors’ from the mid nineteenth century onwards can (sometimes) include detailed bowings, fingerings, as well as editorial changes to dynamics, articulations, metronome markings, etc. But this degree of detail is not always as evident for other instruments. Vocal scores, for example, can convey relatively little about the essential qualities of vocal sound and, barring issues of underlay, there are relatively few differences between them.

22 http://chase.leeds.ac.uk/
• Consideration of ‘imagination’ – how a performer may be creative, and in what context

[Slide 14]

This is too obvious to discuss at great length, but as soon as one puts this under any kind of enquiring pressure, the contradictions and difficulties bound up in the idea rise quickly to the surface. What IS imagination and individuality? Can anyone really be original, and if they were ‘totally’ original, then to what extent would the outside world be able to assess such musical originality in a qualitative way? Usually, what we mean is original enough for this to be seen as a good thing, whilst at the same time being sufficiently not original to be familiar and recognisable...but it exists as something that we all have to consider, consciously or not. Context is everything, I think.

• Concerns relating to projecting this picture to an audience [Slide 15]

I use the triangle here (embodied I think I’m right in saying, in Collingwood’s work of 1938) as an expression of performance relationships. Tellingly, old Werktreue attitudes still tend to put the composer in the position of a deity – at the top. Audiences receive at least some recognition (if only as the ones paying the bills) and therefore the interface between performance and audience usually takes on a quasi-consumerist form – we have to give audiences things that they will like/appreciate/that will entertain or move, up to a point, at least. I suppose that this leaves performers here in a dusty corner as the humble servants of art, but the dynamic relationship of the three poles, and the different focae and concentrations – apt to be distorted and transmuted according to repertory – circumscribes much of what we do. But to what extent do performers misrepresent the expectations of composers by being notationally faithful, and to what extent is such a concern important?23 How, why and in what circumstances might performers emerge from the lowly status often granted by being in the bottom right-hand corner, here?

All of these things are nicely summarised for our undergraduates at Huddersfield by means of the deceptively simple question – why do you do what you do? It seems to me that this basic question underlines so much of our activity in terms of research as performance (and indeed maybe performance as research). For me, this is the fundamentally reflective obligation beholden upon us as scholars and performers in equal measure.

Of course, it also tends towards creating gradients between that which is ‘appropriate’ and that which isn’t...and in terms of historical performance, there can be an annoyingly (but inevitable) ‘moral’ extension to this argument too – this means that we assess performance qualitatively not only in terms of whether or not we like it, or whether or not it is meaningful to us, but also in terms...

---

23 Scholarship into nineteenth-century performing practices has raised these points in numerous contexts, discussing aspects of style that require a ‘reading between the lines’ relationship with the music as notated – this can often lead to theorised manipulations of score-notated aspects of the music – especially as regards tempo and rhythm. Whilst this is likely to characterise all music up to a point, the scale of difference between sound and score (and in many ways the unimaginable gulf between music as written and performed, and the often substantial differences between performance in theory and performance in practice) in nineteenth-century music is startling. Crucially, the existence of sound recordings and those made by the first generation of players captured by the phonograph, gramophone and piano roll show that often composers and ‘trusted’ performers of works would depart radically from what is written. A recent and good example is Anna Scott’s work referred to in footnote 8. I am hoping to encourage Scott to come to Huddersfield and talk about her work, in the near future.
of whether it is ‘right.’ And how does all of this square up with industry expectations that we are all ‘innovative’ and ‘individual’? It seems to me that much of our activity is a matter of navigating around often ultimately contradictory expectations.

**THE IMPACT AND CONTROVERSY OF PERFORMANCE RESEARCH**

Research into performance, then, can take many forms other than what I have described above; but even this perhaps naïve ‘scratching of the surface’ reveals just how subtle, complex and riven with dilemmas our activities actually are. This said, it has never been without its detractors. Musicology itself is, of course, a relatively young discipline, and performance research even younger still. When Robert Philip applied at Cambridge to study old recordings in the 1960s, he was told that this was not an academic subject fit for study. There is still an endemic cynicism towards ‘academics’ in music and their allegedly parasitic relationship with the act of performance itself. I experienced this myself a few years ago. A discussion with a famous string quartet leader (who was for a time my teacher) resulted in him saying that he didn’t see why he had to listen to academics ‘telling him what to do’. He also invoked the phrase— ‘I play as I feel it’…perhaps the ultimate put-down to the practice of performance research.

And one can sympathise. As Robert Hill suggests in his chapter, ‘Overcoming romanticism’: on the modernization of twentieth-century performance practice’ in Bryan Gilliam’s *Music and performance during the Weimar Republic*, a new aesthetic – which Hill dates from about 1914 and which likewise he links with societal changes cognate with this date – towards what I suppose one could term the objectivisation of performance. Ironically, given the socially rigid society of the nineteenth century, with its repressive attitudes as regards gender, sexuality and morals and the still-hegemonic role of religious moral codes (not to mention, in Europe at least, inflexible rank and class), romantic music performance in the increasingly egalitarian world of the twentieth century was characterised as debauched, slovenly, egocentric… degenerate. A process of purification took place. Pianists soon ceased the arpeggiation of chords, and melody/accompaniment de-synchrony that characterised nineteenth-century playing (as far as we can tell) and – for that matter – acted as a continuation of much earlier practices (Neal Peres Da Costa show persuasively). Solo instrumentalists soon became embarrassed by portamenti as ‘sentimental’ and, as Adrian Boult would recall later in life, they seemed to die out around mid-century. More importantly, performances became increasingly ‘strict’ – including their approach to notation, and unwarranted and unscripted departures from ‘the text’ (which soon became synonymous with ‘the music’) were frowned upon – as far as we know – more than at any time in history. Hill gives many examples of thought from this time, to show such attitudes. There are also countless others in the work of

25 Peres Da Costa, *Off the Record*. Da Costa opines convincingly about the parity between harpsichord practice, and piano (or, to use the HIP jargon, ‘fortepiano’) practice. As a harpsichordist himself, Da Costa is able to make the point that harpsichordists are perfectly happy to arpeggiate, but for some reason, fortepianists aren’t. There is little if anything in the literature to theorise a change in practice cognate with the adoption of the piano, and numerous accounts of piano arpeggiation in nineteenth century literature – and indeed, in early twentieth-century recordings. Yet the practice is scarcely if at all practiced by present-day ‘HIP’ musicians. This has always struck me as rather curious!
Frederick Dorian\textsuperscript{26} which I will not read to you now, but instead a couple as quoted by Hill make the point well.

Marcel Dupré, who made organ roll recordings of Bach in 1922 and 1923, commented:

‘The interpreter must never allow his personality to appear. As soon as it penetrates, the work has been betrayed.’\textsuperscript{27}

Virgil Thomson, whose criticism of the 1940s onwards is at least as entertaining as that of George Bernard Shaw half a century earlier, mixes an admiration (albeit tinged with a certain sophisticated urban irony) with a rather ambivalent characterisation of academicism in music too:

‘A more satisfactory academicism can scarcely be imagined. Mr Lhevinne’s performance...was both a lesson and an inspiration. He made no effort to charm or to seduce or to preach or to impress. He played as if he were expounding to a graduate seminar: ‘This is the music, and this is the way to play it.’ Any authoritative execution derives as much of its excellence from what the artist does not do as from what he does. If he doesn’t do anything off color at all, he is correctly said to have taste. Mr Lhevinne’s taste is authoritative as this technical method. Not one sectarian interpretation, not one personal fancy, not one stroke below the belt, not a sliver of ham, mars the universal acceptability of his readings. Everything he does is right and clear and complete. Everything he doesn’t do is the whole list of all the things that mar the musical execution of lesser men. This is not to say that tenderness and poetry and personal warmth and fire are faults of musical style, though they frequently do excuse a faulty technique. I am saying that Mr Lhevinne does not need them. They would mar his style; hence he eschews them. He eschews them because his concept of piano music is an impersonal one. It is norm-centred; it is for all musical men. Any intrusion of the executant’s private soul would limit its appeal, diminish its authority. Thus it is that Mr Lhevinne’s performance is worthy of the honourable word academic. And if he seems to some a little distant, let us remind ourselves that remoteness is, after all, inevitable to those who inhabit Olympus.’\textsuperscript{28}

Although a long time separates us from this line of thinking and many of us would find this quaint at best and abhorrent at worst, there is much in this way of thinking that has been perhaps \textit{unconsciously assimilated} by performers – especially so-called ‘mainstream’ performers who are, methodologically and philosophically perhaps, more conservative than some other more conspicuously research-driven performer-scholar communities. Writing in 1994, Hill for one was polemically anxious for the legacy of such attitudes to change – to see modernism for what it was (that is, a particular ‘fashion’ or ‘phase’) and not what it could easily become (that is – ‘better’, ‘morally upstanding’ – ‘true’ and – even - respectful of a composer’s ‘intentions’ – the latter perhaps all too easily being equitable naively with ‘the authoritative score’\textsuperscript{29}). Certainly, he saw the influence of such tendencies as limiting and agenda-driven, with their cognate tendencies to practice a

\textsuperscript{26} Frederick Dorian, \textit{The History of Music in Performance} (New York, Norton, 1942).
\textsuperscript{27} Quoted in Robert Hill, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{28} Quoted in Robert Hill, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{29} One might indeed encapsulate this as ‘problematising modernism’ – a process essential in my view to developing a more dispassionate, reasonable and ergo less bigoted stance towards ‘romanticism’.
virulent form of ‘anti-romanticism’ at the same time (and this is easily corroborated in Dorian’s remarks upon the ‘classical German school of composition in the nineteenth century) – in creating a purer (and definitely non-romantic!) image of the classical style. For Hill, this is mainly a matter of tempo, rhythm (and the improvisatory elements within these) being taken out of the perview of performers and thus, he writes in a somewhat snide tone, that ‘In banishing the artistic manipulation of time, modernists simplified the job of interpretation enormously.’

Thus the performer’s role is diminished and she would then fall back perhaps upon the deceptive advances of ‘definitive’ and ‘perfect’ performance – technically – and one that was also perhaps given a thick gloss of tonal sophistication (vibrato!) to sugar-coat this particular pill.

This is a bald characterisation, of course, navigable by its exceptions. It does perhaps explain why the quartet leader in question, in being presented with a gift of my book, _Theory and Practice in Late Nineteenth-Century Violin Playing_, intended as an act of friendship, was dismissed as ‘academics telling me how to play’31. For HIP could be seen as an even more extreme case of the modernist performer curtailment – telling performers not only that they mustn’t do various things and should rein in their individuality, but, moreover, that here is a set of further requirements without which performance is ‘unhistorical’ and wrong – the unintended consequences of performance research, perhaps!

So –in certain contexts then and defying the universality of my little list of points from earlier, performance research is by definition, controversial, delicate, sensitive, and far from without its detractors.

In all fairness, the study of something is not necessarily the same as creating regulatory systems or propositional dicta –such things can arise from study, but not necessarily. One of the great philological studies of classical and romantic music – Clive Brown’s substantial text of 199932 – expresses a mood of optimism in terms of giving performers a wider range of research tools with which to perform historical music and a collegiate spirit of reasonableness and ‘unpossessiveness’ inhabits Brown’s own introduction, within the global context of ‘historically-informed’ performance of classical and romantic music:

‘Much heat has been generated by philosophical and aesthetic debate about the ways in which theoretical knowledge of historical performing practice has been utilized in the modern concert hall and recording studio; the author’s standpoint may become to some extent apparent from the content of this book, but it is not a part of the present purpose to engage directly in that debate. It may, however, be stated as his firm conviction that dogmatism is seldom, if ever, appropriate in matters of musical performance.’31

Moreover, he also sounds affably relativist:

30 Robert Hill, p.43.
31 See footnote 6.
33 Brown, CRPP, p. 1.
'The conclusions about historical performing practice that are presented here are offered, therefore, rather as a stimulus to consider a wide range of possibilities [...] The author acknowledges that a fine, communicative, contemporary performance may take absolutely no account of the relevant historical performing practices, and may depart radically from anything the original composer might have conceived; but he is convinced that performers can always be enriched by greater awareness of the notational and stylistic conventions familiar to the composer and by a knowledge of the range of techniques employed by the instrumentalists or vocalists for whom the music was intended.'

However, as George Kennaway also notes in the conclusion to his text, Playing the Cello, Brown’s attitude had changed significantly around ten years later in his recordings review, ‘Performing 19th-century chamber music: the yawning chasm between contemporary practice and historical evidence’ in Early Music in 2010. The title hints at Brown’s wrath at performers who wilfully ignore performance research, some of which is actually mine, but quite a lot of which is his own. Ultimately, he writes with scarcely concealed ire:

‘It is clear that the vast majority of the instrumentalists represented on these discs have very little understanding of the (easily available) corpus of primary and secondary sources that can tell us so much about how 19th-century music was actually performed. More troubling is the extent to which the recordings suggest that these gifted and polished musicians have failed even to inform their understanding of the composer’s notational practice by basic research, and that they are content wilfully to ignore the composer’s explicit instructions.’

So, performers can be intolerant of meddling academics, and academics can be intolerant of headstrong, ignorant, and disingenuous performers. A yawning chasm indeed, if only between different musical communities. And all of this is a pity. In this specific context, late nineteenth-century performance aesthetics provides us with all sorts of interesting challenges and possibilities. My thoughts go to Anna Scott’s recent talk at the IMR on reconstructing the performing practices of Brahms’ protégés – as a window upon a very different understanding of Brahms pianism. In the interests of full disclosure, I must state that I am a member of the opposition panel at the defence of her thesis in Leiden in December. One might take as an example Ilona Eibenschutz (1872-1967) playing Brahms’ Intermezzo op 76 no 4, in a recording made in 1952. Eibenschutz, studied by Scott (and emulated by her most convincingly), had a direct lineage back to Brahms – she was introduced to him (as a pupil of Clara Schumann) in July 1891, developed a close friendship with the composer, who is said to have remarked that he liked her performances of his music the most.

Although the recording dates from some 55 years after Brahms’ death, her recordings from the turn of the twentieth century are very similar in style and Eibenschutz’ isolation from the concert

---

34 Brown, CRPP, p. 2.
36 Ibidem.
37 Re-issued on Brahms: Behind the Notes 1903-1952 (Arbiter 160).
38 See footnote 8.
39 Liner notes, Allan Evans, Arbiter 160.
platform (like many women of the time she gave up her career in 1902 when she got married) means that, in addition to the observable similarities with those at the turn of the twentieth century, she perhaps did not feel the need to modernise her way of playing – especially since it was exonerated explicitly by the composer. We hear an extraordinary looseness, an informality, and an improvised quality, here – as well as a very heartfelt one – a very different image of the composer than the heavy, complicated, ‘learned’ one which we have inherited largely, I would argue, as a result of twentieth-century styles of playing.

And I have been involved in this too, in my own small way – as an AHRC Research Fellow at Leeds between 2006 and 2009, I was involved in various projects, on period instruments, to try to reawaken aesthetic languages in experimental ways. This project also has a website and, after five years of gentle encouragement, this will be available soon in a corrected and slightly tidier format and when it is so, I will provide a link to it on HuCPeR. In lieu of being able to do this ‘live’ as part of the HuCPeR launch event today I refer the reader to a recording I made of the Brahms-Joachim 1st Hungarian Dance, with my colleague Jonathan Gooing playing an 1870 Erard piano, (and violin on gut strings) - trying to practice the traits of style one can discern as part of Joseph Joachim’s practice. Joachim’s 1903 performance is well known (along with the Eibenschutz example, it has been re-issued in a marvellous new restoration by Allan Evans, with whom too I intend to explore links in the interests of our new research centre 40). What I tried to do was not to copy Joachim slavishly, but rather, as if as a posthumous disciple of his tradition, to reflect (with full and ultimately inescapable integration of my own personality) something of this aesthetic language. This recording of 2008 is itself a historical document – I’d do it differently now, particularly I would be more daring with my rhythmic manipulations, but it is an example of how research-driven performance might be practiced in this specific area even if, like most things in life, it has more than a slight passing resemblance to Dr Johnson’s dog!

So, the rift between performers and scholars must be avoided not only for the sake of continuing experimentation in these specific research and performance contexts. The importance perhaps lies in what can sit on my own music stand on a regular basis – a collage of scores stretching from Purcell to Brahms, to MacMillan, to Christian Wolff, and in my post here at Huddersfield in which I needs must opine intelligently on subjects as diverse as Goedicke cornet music, and contemporary percussion works.

As performers then, we live in a challenging world, not of music, but of musics, of myriad different understandings of score notation and performing practices, if indeed we are using scores in the conventional sense at all - an ever widening range of music, delving further back, broadening within each epoch as (for example) Viennese (and male!) – dominated canonicity is increasingly questioned and, as we learn here in Huddersfield like perhaps no other place – the ever expanding legacy of continued composition and in all sorts of contexts.

These challenges can be met by discussion, collaboration, co-operation, and the kinds of receptive and enquiring minds that are not only the birthright of the scholar, but the fundamental duty and purpose of seats of learning, such as universities. My hope is that HuCPeR can place itself

40 On Arbiter 160, see footnote 38.
helpfully within this vibrant macro-environment and, as the oak is in the acorn, so too we might become a force for change and renewal.

It won’t be easy. There may well be heated discussions and disagreements but, to paraphrase Charles de Gaulle, at least we will not be bored.