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Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, 'Moral judgement in response to performances of western art music'. In *Remixing Music Studies: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Cook*, edited by Ananay Aguilar, Eric Clarke, Ross Cole and Matthew Pritchard (Routledge, 2020), 91–111.

'[E]ngagement with the other is an irreducible dimension of musical creativity', writes Nicholas Cook (2018, 67). This view of musicking—embracing the many ways, actual and symbolic, in which music can be social—is deeply appealing. And yet, looking at the way classical performance is policed at the moment, one is bound to wonder how other that other may be.<sup>1</sup>

Performances of Beethoven's violin concerto with Patricia Kopatchinskaja as soloist include a first-movement cadenza in which she interacts passionately with groups of cellos and double basses (the combinations varying to suit the players), the leader, and the timpanist, or in the CD recording multitracked with herself (Kopatchinskaja 2009, 2014, 2018). Admittedly this is unusual as a realisation of the pause mark in Beethoven's score, but it generates powerful and engaging musical experiences. Reactions in the press and on YouTube (which hosts the video recordings) tend towards the extremes. Critic and broadcaster Andrew McGregor, writing for the BBC's music website, felt that the cadenza 'amplifies the sense of adventure and genuine re-discovery' in playing whose 'soaring sound and improvisatory flair are compelling, and ultimately highly musical' (McGregor 2009; also from the BBC, Anonymous 2012). Robert Braunmüller, reviewing a 2015 performance in the *Abendzeitung München* and sneering at her gender ('eine Dame ... mit ihrer Geige', a lady with her violin), was unashamedly hostile:

Patricia Kopatchinskaja dekonst[r]uiert Beethovens Violinkonzert wie Regietheater. Nur leider nicht wie gutes. (Braunmüller 2015)

Patricia Kopatchinskaja deconstructs Beethoven's violin concerto as if it were Regietheater. Only, unfortunately, not as well.

For him, the cadenza was 'a typical virtuoso insert'. Nearer the bottom of the scale, rondo1presto, a YouTube viewer, dismissed it as 'a piece of shit' and went on, 'damn her with that childish Cadenza.' (Comments appended to Naïveclassique 2009. Would the same have been said of a male soloist?)

Reading all the YouTube comments is fairly depressing. The differences of opinion are as wide as can be imagined, from Andrea Haubmann's 'Ich liebe Sie!!! Bin

ein totaler Fan!!' ['I love you!!! I'm a massive fan!!'] to JeffPuha's 'This woman should dig a hole and crawl into it to hide her shame.' (Comments appended to Kopatchinskaja 2014.) But what is very clear is that many of the enthusiasts are aware that Kopatchinskaja was drawing on Beethoven's own cadenza written for his arrangement of the score as a piano concerto; and many of the objectors are not. That many of the notes Kopatchinskaja plays, while they may sound new, were actually written down by Beethoven seems to matter desperately to people: it changes their entire feeling about what just happened. On the one hand it was an engaging musical experience, on the other it was shit. Yet the sounds were much—in some cases exactly—the same.

With this example I want, first, to illustrate the distinction between responses mediated and unmediated by familiarity with classical performance ideology, and, secondly, to show how easily and how completely that ideology controls response even—in fact especially—in those educated to bring contextual knowledge to bear. Belief founded in that knowledge seems so deeply embedded in musicians through their training since childhood that it functions as powerfully as other kinds of structural prejudice. When we come to the language of professional (as opposed to YouTube) performance criticism, and through that directly to the ideology to which it conforms and which it promotes, it may be unsurprising therefore, if still dispiriting, to find that other kinds of structural prejudice also have a powerful influence on what we think about what we hear. The depth of the link between performance and structural ideology was already suggested by Suzanne Cusick (1994, 80–1): 'the cultural work of all classical music performances ... might be understood to be the public enactment of obedience to a culturally prescribed script.' Christopher Small (1998, 43, 134) reached a similar conclusion—that classical music claims, 'this is who we are'. A generation later, little has changed. Being subject to powerful prejudice is a price that still has to be paid for being allowed to work with music as performer or—as we shall see—as gatekeeper. But must that always be so; or could we choose to think differently, and what would be the musical and social consequences if we did?

The online archive of (*The*) *Gramophone* magazine offers a remarkable resource for studying attitudes to performance and performers. *Gramophone* has published monthly issues since 1923 (since 1997 with a 13<sup>th</sup> Awards Issue), reviewing new (and often older) recordings of classical music (and, until the 1980s, jazz and light music). A series of recent studies by Alessandri et al. (2014, 2015, 2016) has examined the language of *Gramophone* reviews, using Applied Thematic Analysis to discover values that inform reviewers' judgements. The authors show critics navigating complex webs of interrelated factors involving musical parameters (tempo, dynamics etc), technique, structure, emotions, character, style, novelty, authenticity, taste, and preference. They are surprised to observe how much critics attribute to a construction of the performer imagined as the embodiment of what they hear in their performance, as if the way they play can show the kind of people they are. It is this latter process which I examine here. Methodologically I take a rather different approach, focusing on one significant metaphor and examining the language that surrounds its use. My interest—because this belongs within a more wide-ranging project on the nature

and enforcement of classical music performance norms—is specifically in the ways in which reviewers in *Gramophone* promote normative performance (and normative performers) by pinpointing moments that seem to them to threaten it. The key concept I examine is ‘mannerism’. As reviewers sometimes acknowledge, there is a fine line between acceptable expressivity and mannerism:

It is just that lack of mannered, as opposed to individual playing that makes these records so remarkable. (*The Gramophone*, Mar 1938, 430)

...drawing out elements that you’ve never heard before, yet without sounding mannered. That is quite something. (Feb 2015, 62)

... toeing that fine line between expressive and mannered. (May 2012, 98; note the implication of obedience in ‘toeing the line’.)

Much of the work reviewers do involves policing that line. What is so striking about the first two of these comments, so far apart in time and yet so consistent in values, is the surprise they convey, as if to be innovative in musical performance without that being objectionable is extraordinary. Musical creativity has been much discussed recently (Cook 2018, Hill 2018, Rink et al. 2018), and so it may be timely to ask how creative a practice may be where almost anything unexpected tends to be experienced as problematic.

When one counts them, ‘mannerism’ and ‘mannered’ prove to be common accusations in *Gramophone*, used to criticize a wide variety of things performers do that reviewers find unwelcome. Figure 1 charts the use of these terms through the magazine from the first issue until September 2016, when the data was gathered from the online *Gramophone* archive. (The statistics and the discussion are restricted here to applications of these terms to performances of classical scores, and excludes expressions such as ‘well-mannered’, ‘mild-mannered’ etc.)

It is obvious how use of these terms rapidly increases from the mid-1950s, and it seems safe to suggest a link between this and the oft-observed changes in general performance style that took place from the same time, or a few years earlier, as the overtly expressive habits of older singers and players were superseded by a more literal reading of notation by the generation emerging to prominence after the Second World War (Leech-Wilkinson 2009, 253–4). ‘Mannerism’ is thus symptomatic of a widespread trend in performance style-change and in attitudes to the role of the performer in relation to the score, with faithfulness and regularity fast emerging as overarching values. At the same time (from 1951), the use of these terms switches from reviews of singing to reviews of instrumental playing, as if the notion that an instrumentalist might need restraining emerges quite suddenly. From this point on, only the older singers, plus Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, and Joan Sutherland, are regularly accused of mannerisms; while instrumental playing apparently becomes rife with it. This switch comes before

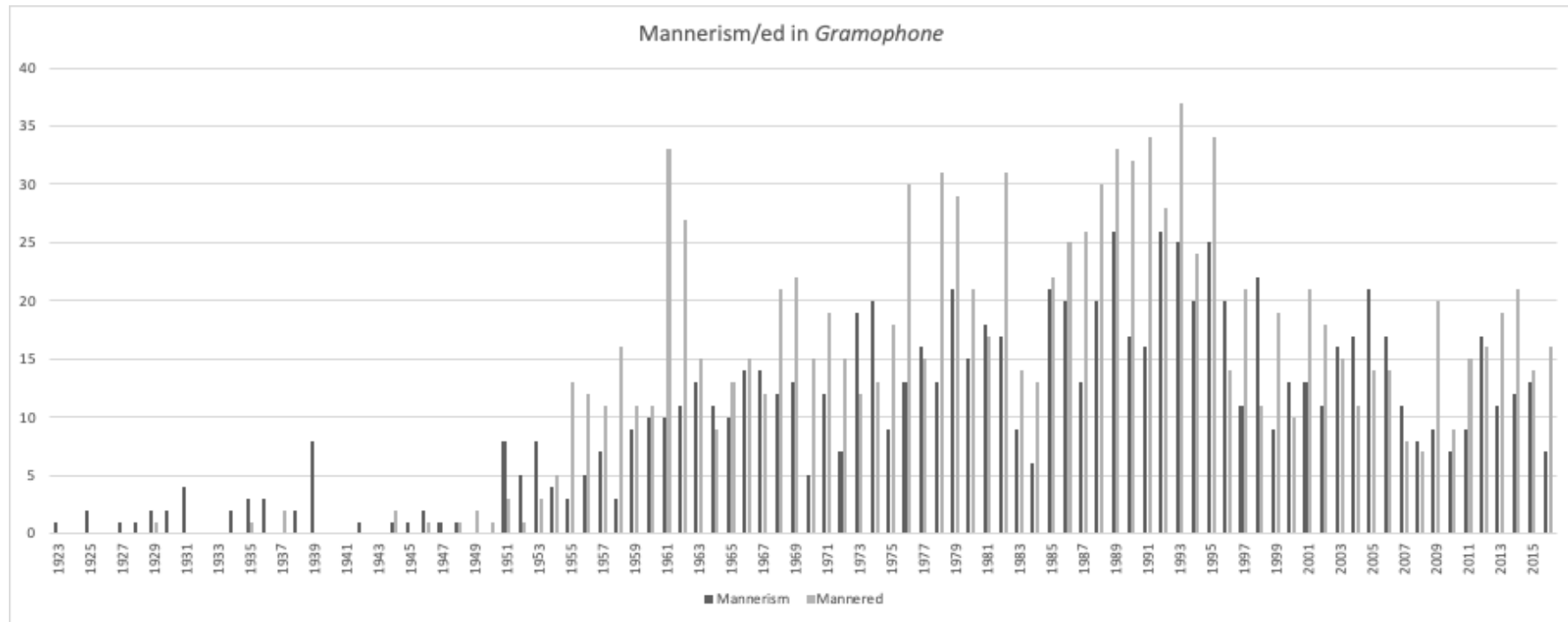


Figure 1: Annual use of 'mannerism' and 'mannered' in *Gramophone*

the magazine begins to expand in length (in 1953), but soon after the introduction of the LP which over these years greatly increased the number of large-scale instrumental compositions on disc.

In the 1950s and 60s almost the whole reviewing team uses the terms, albeit some more often than others. A sense of the team's self- and group-awareness comes from William Mann writing in June 1959 about a disc of baroque and classical repertoire from pianist Gyorgy Cziffra:

[NN, one of Mann's fellow reviewers] would have a fit if he were reviewing Cziffra's performances, he would think them so twee and mannered (Jun 1959, 17)

Mann's vocabulary elsewhere in this review, with its descriptions of Cziffra's floor show, saucy inflexions, seductive legato and café allure, raises issues that will become relevant later on.

A spike in uses, in 1961-2, is caused by Edward Greenfield joining the team from October 1960. (There is another, smaller increase in 'mannered' from 1968 when Denis Arnold joins.) Whether he realized or was advised, Greenfield's use falls off quite soon. Figure 2 shows this, the Y axis reminding us how common the idea was among other reviewers, five to nine of whom use it in each year, between one and four times each. From there it finds its way into the occasional advertisement (its pejorative sense missed), as in this for Philips tape recorders: 'Every familiar mannerism ... to be played back again and again.' (Aug 1959, Advert 52)

Otherwise, as Figure 1 shows, there is a general upwards trend from the early 1950s for almost forty years, reflecting the increasing length of the magazine, followed by a sudden drop in 1997, after which numbers remain lower until they

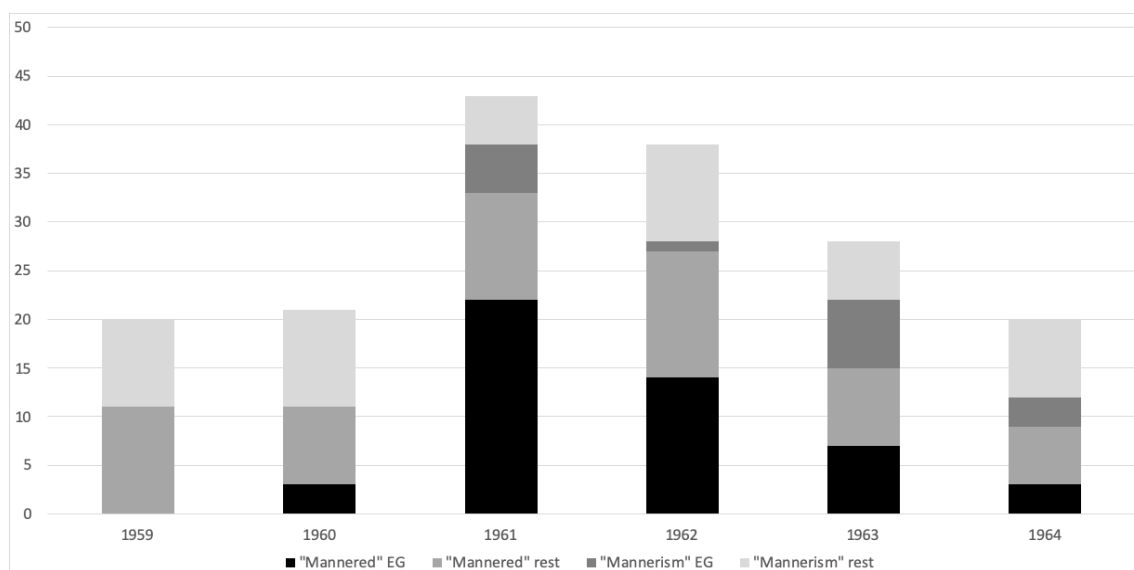


Figure 2: Use of 'mannered/ism' by reviewers as Edward Greenfield joins the team in October 1960

creep up again from 2009. An explanation for the drop is not hard to find. In 1995 the veteran and highly-respected voice critic John Steane, who had been reviewing for *Gramophone* since 1972 and had raised this matter back in 1983, wrote in his 'Quarterly Retrospect', apropos recordings of Purcell's *King Arthur* by Christie, Gardiner, and Pinnock:

The word 'mannered' is a critical term dishonoured by decades of ill-defined, snide and sometimes poisoned usage, but it would be apt here. A 'manner' has been adopted: the punctuation marks (for example) shall not merely be observed but shall, even by the most casual of observers, be seen to have been observed. (July 1995, 32; for a previous critique see Apr 1994, 32)

Steane returns to his theme the following January (Jan 1996, 34) on the subject of Furtwängler's *St Matthew Passion*—"some might say "mannered""—and again in April on Schwarzkopf, whose singing he had already defended from the 'absurd' accusation of mannerism back in 1983 (Oct 1983, 531):

The comparison also reinforces my own conviction that not only is the word 'mannered' misapplied, but that the pendant to it – 'she *became* so mannered' – is cultish claptrap. (Apr 1996, 106)

This after quoting earlier in the issue his colleague and fellow song reviewer Alan Blyth using the word (Apr 1996, 38). This is beginning to look like a campaign; and it seems to have an effect, because from *Gramophone* 1997 the use of 'mannered/ism' stumbles briefly (Figure 3).

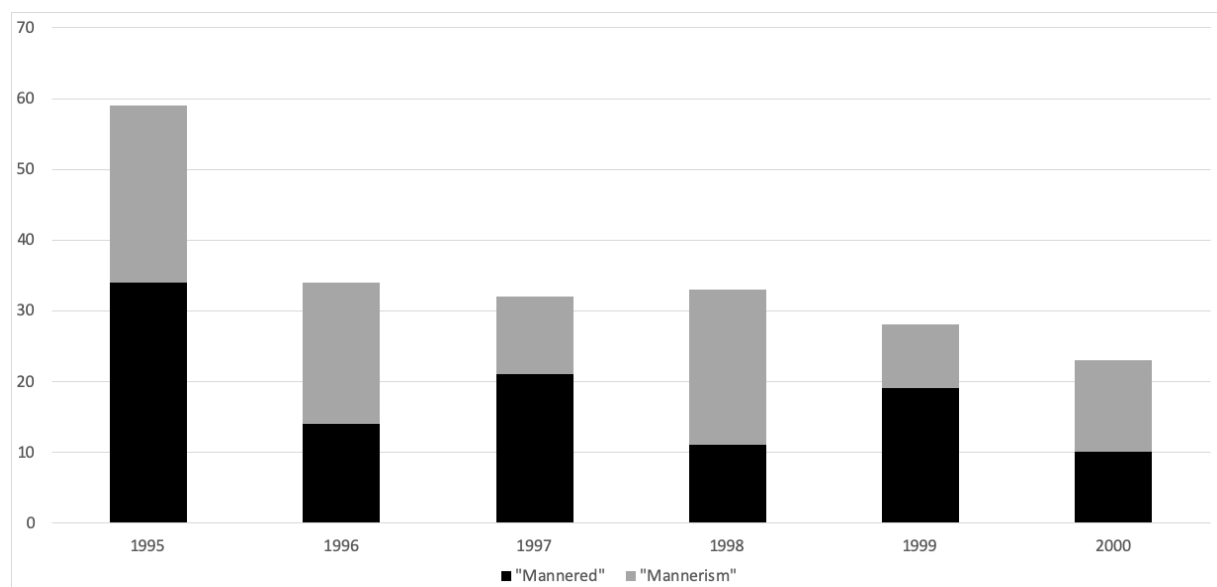


Figure 3: Effects of John Steane's 1996 critique

Steane inserts a reminder in July 2000, jumping off a reader's letter (July 2000, 30) regretting the clichés used about Fischer-Dieskau.

As for what Dr Gabriel calls the clichés of criticism ... too often (I agree with Dr Gabriel), they are the hand-me-down, penny-in-the-slot, knee-jerk reactions of prejudice. 'Mannered' and 'studied' come from the same secondhand store: both carry a deadly subtext, a charge of affectation... (Sep 2000, 23)

Although instances over the next few years do not recover to anything like the levels of 1995-6, by 2006 Steane (who criticised it again in Sep 2003, 76) had had enough. The problem was again Schwarzkopf, the target possibly Blyth. Blyth had accused singers of being mannered five times each in 2002 and 2003, and three in 2004, and although he was by no means the only frequent user at the time it may have been this case that irritated Steane:

... she makes a most mannered and artificial traversal... Lovely as the singer's tone may be, beautiful as she looks[!], the results are laboured... (Feb 2004, 85)

Steane's detailed rebuttal emphasizes the extent to which a thoughtful reviewer was aware of what 'mannered' might imply. Checking the dictionary Steane found "'artificial and exaggerated", "arch and selfconscious"', but thought 'mannered' was 'favoured because it is obviously drawn from the handbook of elite criticism'. While agreeing that 'making a point of it' was a habit he also resisted in a singer, Steane paused to ask why.

If an organist working on a piece of Bach (let's say) decides on a semi-staccato touch for the notes of a certain recurrent figure, is that 'mannered'? Isn't it rather a decision about style and part of a perfectly valid artistic process? ... No, I don't really buy 'mannered', not even that relatively intelligent version of it. (Jan 2006, 25-7; corrected Mar 2006, 19)

His uncertainty is exceptionally thoughtful: rarely does a reviewer stop to ask what kinds of rights a performer might have. Steane is close here to rethinking the normative relationship between performer and score, emphasising—realistically and humanely—that the performer always has artistic rights.

This time, Steane's broadside had a shorter effect (Figure 4). 'Mannered' drops off immediately, followed by 'mannerism'; yet neither takes long to reappear, and in recent years they have crept up again. The concept seems irresistible, and we shall need to ask why. But first we can get a richer sense of what mannerism means, as a reaction to difference, by looking closely at the words that *Gramophone* reviewers use together with it as they qualify accusations of mannerism with other descriptive terms. From here on, I avoid identifying reviewers (other



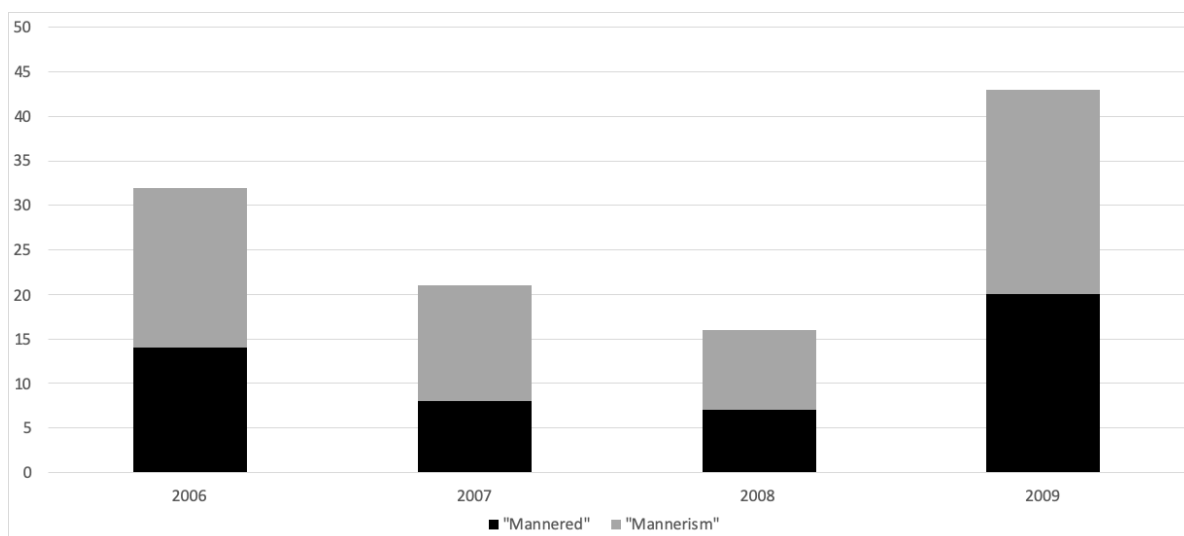


Figure 4: Effects of John Steane's 2006 critique

than myself): my aim is to discuss a culture of thought about performance, not to point to individuals. That culture extends throughout the musical profession, and it is only the unparalleled coverage provided by the *Gramophone* archive that makes it such a valuable and revealing source.

Complaints about mannerism often present it as a process of degeneration, physical (descending, lurching, collapsing into mannerism) or moral (degenerating, lapsing into, resorting, stooping to, parading mannerism), the two conveniently overlapping.

...late in Mravinsky's career ... the sinews could stiffen and the taut, intense style harden into mannerism. (Jan 1995, 37)

...only to give way periodically to mannerism. (Sep 1990, 537)

Without resorting to preening mannerisms... (Jul 2002, 67)

Table 1 gives a more comprehensive selection of the terms and phrases used in this way.

Mannerisms are cited in two settings in *Gramophone*: most commonly when the performer 'descends' or 'lurches' or 'lapses' into them, and less often when the critic celebrates a performer's lack of mannerism. What is curious about the latter is the need to point to the absence of something encountered relatively infrequently: Table 2 provides the statistics. It is as if a mannerism detector is constantly on, giving feedback, nagging at a reviewer to report its findings; as if somewhere out there is a host of badly-intentioned performers struggling to irritate,

recourse to (6) resorting to (6) degenerate/tion into (5) lapses/ing into (4) descending into (2) crosses to (2) give way to (2) spill over into (2) collapses into crystallize into eroded into falling into harden into lurching into morphed into shade into solidified into stoops to courting parade	mannerism
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Table 1: Mannerism as degeneration

<i>Observations of:</i>	
mannered performance	1119
mannerisms	559
absence of mannerisms	352
performance that is not mannered	95

Table 2: Mannerism observations in *Gramophone*, 1923–September 2016

tire, distract, annoy, and infuriate their listeners with mannerisms, which only the critic's constant vigilance can keep at bay (Table 3).

...again there are infuriating mannerisms (Oct 1989, 704)

I could also have done without the irritating mannerisms... (Oct 1995, 51)

... a slow, emphatic, languishing account of 'Che farò' that I find unbearably mannered.  
(Feb 1983, 963)

The Table 3 terms have little to do with the performers and much to do with the listener: the performer gets the blame, though, because anything contributed by

irritating (37)
tiresome/tiring (21)
distracting (18)
infuriating (7)
unbearable (7)
uncomfortable (6)
annoying (5)
intolerable (5)
disturbing (4)
disconcerting (3)
maddening (2)
objectionable, aggravating, distressing, disquieting, exasperating, insufferable, irksome, nasty, painful, trying, unsettling (1)

Table 3: Irritating mannerism

(self-)indulge (33)
self-conscious (26)
egocentric/egotistic (13)
preening (12)
draws attention to itself (5)
posturing (5)
self-regarding, self-serving (3 each)
vain/ity, narcissism/tic, disingenuous, pretension (2)
attention-seeking, exhibitionism, self-aware (1)

Table 4: performers drawing attention to themselves

them conflicts with the underlying belief, characteristic of the whole culture of classical music practice, that agency should lie with the composer alone.

I was guilty of exactly this in 1985 in a review (in *Early Music*) of a recording of Bach's *Art of Fugue*, arguing that that score above all needed to be heard without noticing performers, and going on to accuse Musica Antiqua Köln of being 'irritating' and 'distracting' (Leech-Wilkinson 1985). If I can see the problem now, it does not excuse what I said then. In this, as in *Gramophone's* rhetoric, it seems that performers are annoying the listener only in order to draw attention to themselves. Thus (Table 4) mannerisms are self-conscious, egocentric, preening, self-indulgent, affected, self-serving, vain, narcissistic, posturing, self-regarding, even disingenuous.

...the self-conscious gestures and exaggerated mannerisms of Nikolaus Harnoncourt's...  
(Aug 1986, 263)

Here the famed idiosyncrasy collapses into self-serving mannerism... (Awards issue 2003, 91)

These Table 4 accusations seem quite shocking: personal and insulting to a degree that suggests more than simply a disagreement over performance gesture.

This extends well beyond references to mannerism. A search under 'narcissism' throws up this (apropos Gidon Kremer):

...I don't really care for the musical personality this performance reveals or for the narcissism which afflicts his interpretations. (Aug 1985, 225)

and this:

... its beauty is entirely cosmetic, like a reflection of Eschenbach's own narcissism. (Aug 2007, 60)

Here, how the performer plays is taken to reveal who he is. The strength of feeling suggests that what is at stake is identity: the critic's, as revealed by his own response, and therefore (the critic needs to suppose) the performer's. And so it seems as if distinctive performers are playing with no other purpose than to be admired. I wonder if that is really our experience of performers. Do they not on the whole share the critics' belief that their role is to serve the composer? Yet for critics it seems that even to notice a performer's musical thought is to be affronted by their presumption, their failure to know their place, again their moral failure.

It seems almost as if anything a performer does that one notices is, for that very reason, undesirable and to be identified in order to be discouraged; because the performer should, ideally, be invisible. This is part and parcel of a classist view of performer as tradesperson, providing goods as unobtrusively as possible; or as servant, becoming part of the furniture as the composer and his guests—his listeners—pass by.

...Steuermaier's ... spreading ... his chords, like a doorstep salesman laying out his wares, is mannered and irritating. (May 1988, 1578)

Except that here the ideal is not to be heard. The composer's music, 'the music', which is held to exist somewhere behind the score, is to be heard unmediated by any other voice (Cusick 1994). The ideal performer is therefore (rather curiously) inaudible.

... somehow one feels the presence of the interpreter whereas in the greatest performances there is no apparent intervention of another mind other than the composer's. (Aug 1980, 207)

Mannerisms, by contrast, get in the way of something, bring something that is out of place, or are uninvited: they do not belong (Table 5).

intrusive (17), obtrusive (3), meddling/some (2), conspicuous (1)
excessive (23), mere (6), gratuitous (5), arbitrary, misplaced, wilful/ly (4), superfluous, for no reason at all (2), extraneous, unbridled, unnecessary (1)
unconvincing (5), unwanted (4), unwelcome (1)
unauthorized, unwarranted (1)

Table 5: out-of-place mannerisms

tricks/y (10), antics, gimmicks (1)
capricious (4), wayward (2)
unspontaneous (15), artifice/ial (11), unnatural (8), contrived (4)

Table 6: Performers' tricks and artifices

... the excessively mannered pointing ... produces a soupy effect as though this was a product of Hollywood. (Jun 1961, 13)

...disconcerted by Rübsam's wayward and intrusive expressive mannerisms... (Dec 1994, 125)

...utterly void of gratuitous mannerisms or distracting shock tactics... (Jul 2003, 41)

Again, I share responsibility: 'Baroque music can take a great deal of mannerism ... but the treatment of 'dost thou lift thy hated head' ... would be excessive in any context.' (Leech-Wilkinson 1984, 265.)

Performers maliciously play with the score, introducing an artificiality into the composer's natural spontaneity of invention (Table 6).

...as one turns off the machine, one recalls, gratefully, the complete absence of fiddler's tricks and mannerisms. (Dec 1951, 152)

...artifice, excessive mannerisms and the like are seldom if ever in evidence. (Oct 1983, 505)

Enoch zu Guttenberg is the most disingenuous and contrived in 'period' mannerisms. (Apr 2004, 40)

idiosyncrasy (11), individual (7), personal (6), distinctive (1)
odd/ly (13), strange (7), curious (4), erratic (3), perverse, neurotic (1) quirks (3), grimaces, tics (1) eccentric/ities (6), weird (1)
disfigure/ing, distortions (3), dangerously, destructive (2), shock tactics (1)
exaggerated/ation (38), extreme (4), forced (3), gross, heavy-handed (2) over-deliberate (2), over-prepared, over-precise (1) over-refined, over-cultivated, over-pensive (1) over-interpreted (3), over-mature, overworked, overwrought (1) over-emphatic, overstated/ment (2), over-driven (1), overdone (1), aggressive (3) , lurching (2), leering (1)

Table 7: Performers' peculiarities

In the next five groups (Table 7) we move from individuality (for it is consistent with inaudibility that no performer should differ noticeably from another), through performers' personal deformities (grimaces, eccentricities and tics), through the disfiguring of 'the music', to exaggeration (especially common) and on, in the last line of Table 7, to aggression and harassment.

...idiosyncracies and mannerisms are exhibited... (Apr 1971, 1693)

...they are not performances that will irritate you with quirks and mannerisms. (Sep 1985, 391)

...at times startlingly aggressive mannerisms... (Aug 1995, 88)

...this time he seems to have made a conscious effort to avoid the leering mannerism ... that occasionally marred his reading before. (Oct 1967, 225)

'Mannerism' is also linked to images of pedantry and of staleness and repetition (Table 8).

...but here ... he sounds mannered and finicky. (Dec 1959, 274)

...though neither account is devoid of fussy mannerisms. (May 2006, 79)

...both of whom are below the top class and both of whom have irritating and stereotyped mannerisms... (reader's letter: Apr 1929, 515)

fuss/y (17), point-making (8), finicky (6), studied (4), prim (1) rhetorical (2), special pleading (1)
inherited (3), cliché (2), traditional, stereotyped, generic, stilted, glib (1)

Table 8: Performers as pedantic and outmoded

bad habits (3) anachronistic, inappropriate (3), inauthentic, Victorian (1)
sentimental/ity (8), romantic (6), syrupy (3), cloying, salon (2), over-affectionate (1)
over/theatrical (4), melodrama/tic, vulgar/ity (3), deplorable (2), cheap, stage (1)
swellings (4), droopy/ing, emasculated/ory, effeminate/feminine (2)

Table 9: Performers as inappropriate, vulgar, and unmanly

The latter link up (Table 9) with accusations of playing in the wrong period style, one now abandoned and best forgotten: not so much a long-lost historical style—which might have been welcome—but rather the way people played relatively recently and should not have. These are ways of being musical that are inherited, clichéd, stilted, or anachronistic; worse still, Victorian. From there we move on to accusations of sentimentality, vulgarity, and unmanliness.

...a nasty mannerism of right hand before left, a reversal of bad habits of olden days...  
(Nov 1990, 1016)

There are too many romanticisms, too many mannerisms; too often is the musical line artificially stimulated when it needs no stimulation at all. (Nov 1953, 175)

...eschewing any suggestion of syrupy affectation or expressive mannerism... (July 2015, 26) [Note in 'eschew'—used 351 times in *Gramophone*—the moral rectitude of denying pleasures that are beneath one. The nineteenth-century origins of this way of thinking about classical music are explored in Bull 2019, ch. 2.]

...Dieskau's mannerism in 'Là ci darem la mano' ... makes Giovanni sound like an insinuating vulgar old man. (Feb 1964, 383) [And why not? one might ask.]

Nothing of an extraneous nature intrudes in terms of attitudes, of mannerisms, of conscious theatricals, of, in short, what might be described as an 'act'. (Nov 1959, 220)

...the only interpretative mannerism is an emasculatory *diminuendo* at most cadence points. (Dec 1989, 1223)

affected/ation (18) arch (6), twee (4), coy, mincing (2), camp, choral-scholar prettiness, prettifying, unnecessarily English (1)
coquetry/tish (2), prancing and pirouetting, unseemly (1) perfumed (1)
<i>Absence of mannerism is:</i> healthy, hygienic (1)
refreshing/ly (10) blessedly (1) <i>free from mannerism.</i>

Table 10: Performers camp or blessed

With this we seem to approach closer to the nub of the mannerism accusation, typified in the intuition that a performer allowing music to fade away is being effeminate, as if that were a failing. This in turn brings us via affectations (Table 10) to ‘arch’, ‘mincing’, ‘choral-scholar prettiness’, ‘prancing and pirouetting’, ‘coquettish’, ‘unseemly’. Which helps to explain the relief with which, for some critics, an absence of mannerism can seem so ‘healthy’ and ‘hygienic’.

...full of mannerisms, grimaces, prim affectations. (Dec 1991, 19)

...a little close to mannerism ... an almost mincing effect. (Jan 2004, 56) [A favourite of the founding editor, Compton Mackenzie, ‘mincing’ occurs 61 times in *Gramophone* (excluding ‘mincing words’ and mincing as in chopping up).]

...abounded with mannered *rubatos* and coy phrasings. (Mar 2015, 65)

For these men (until recently record critics were almost exclusively male), the performance that does not disturb is refreshing, even blessed:

Rubinstein's hygienic undertaking in Chopin (his removal of salon mannerisms...) (Jan 1991, 1367)

...there is a refreshing absence of mannered inflexion or gratuitous monumentalism... (Jul 1999, 85)

Faultless in matters of intonation and blessedly free of mannerism ... she can come across as something of a ‘Stepford wife’... (Apr 2013, 105)



Much of this is unpleasant to read; but it gives a measure of what can surface when we bring to our thinking about music a set of *a priori* beliefs about what it is right and wrong to do and to feel. Musical commentary and training is rife with illiberality of all sorts. ‘Ought’, ‘should’, ‘must’, often followed by ‘not’, figure prominently in music pedagogical discourse, driven ostensibly by the imperative to sound the imagined composer’s imagined wishes and actually by the imperative to conform. Here, that approach to thinking about performance reaches to a more detailed level on which beliefs about proper expressivity circulate through a period musical culture. I say ‘period’ because it is constantly, minutely shifting (Leech-Wilkinson 2009, 256-60): what is ‘proper’ now is not what was proper in 1960 or 1920. But the ways in which it is experienced and thus criticized as improper appear, judging by the rather stable language of *Gramophone*, to be relatively consistent.

Within that consistency, it is striking how much of this imagery around ‘mannerism’ reproduces the themes of structural prejudices, most obviously—given the many associations of mannerism with affectation and display—misogyny and homophobia. For it is specifically the feminizing features perceived in unwelcome forms of performance expressivity that critics seem to find so threatening; and this in turn helps to explain the unpleasantness of some of the criticism we have been seeing. Bearing in mind the traditional view of music-making as a sign of femininity (McClary 1991, Law 2004), it is easier to understand why the sounding of emotion might elicit imagery evoking structural prejudice in writing that is, after all, gatekeeping on behalf of institutional norms. That tendency can only be exacerbated by a belief system that positions performers as subservient, members of lower (musicians imagined as servants or tradespeople) or other groups (musicians imagined as ideally transparent intermediaries). Where performers who diverge from straight norms are seen as deviant and in need of public correction, outing and shaming can hardly be unexpected.

Cook 1999 observed how the idea ‘that a performance should function as a transparent medium’ was ‘as [Judith] Butler might point out, uncomfortably reminiscent of nineteenth-century conceptions regarding the natural role of women’ (244). And indeed, the performer as docile spouse who knows her place (Cusick 1994, 92) fits comfortably into the idealised world in which this kind of comment (on Martha Argerich) seems at home:

‘Thank goodness there is nothing ladylike ...’ ... abundant signs of femininity ... wonderfully delicate, clear passage-work ... most elegant phrasing ... but ... nothing of a mannered or “ladylike” approach (Feb 1968, 431).

What I am characterising as misogynistic, however, goes further than generic sexism: hearing and objecting to the feminine is, as we have seen, widespread in the criticism of male performers. This tendency to turn repeatedly to metaphors evocative of homophobia bears out Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s claim that the homo/heterosexual distinction is a structural issue, the source for many other kinds of

enforced binaries (Sedgwick [1990]/2008). In our case it is the binary between proper and deviant performance, where almost nothing is proper and almost everything deviant, but where the specialist population is so thoroughly indoctrinated in normative thinking that it is hard to imagine what a deviant performance might be like (for examples see the radically transgressive performances at <https://challengingperformance.com>). The minuscule differences that provoke critics—the lengthening or softening of a note here or there—are tiny because performers are under so much pressure not to stray from the straight and narrow to begin with. The rapid increase in the mannerism accusation from the mid 1950s—with the normalisation of a new post-war manner characterized by straight performance with minimal deviation from regularity in time, loudness and pitch—was hardly out of step with general public attitudes to queer thought or activity. Alternative performance still closets itself for reasons of economic security, knowing that to come out would invite condemnation. Similarly, the erasure of noticeable individuality in performances and its dismissal as egocentric, self-serving, narcissistic, and so on, which the mannerism accusation aims to achieve, is characteristic of the way in which the manifold differences between individuals are minimized in the homo/hetero binary as a strategy to preserve the normativity of straight behaviour.

To the norm police, performance itself is dangerous because it is always on the verge of becoming deviant (Taruskin 1995, 13; the extent to which criticism of deviant musicking is infused with desire for the other is discussed in relation to nineteenth-century music by Kramer 1995). Those performers—surely most—who wish, even long to contribute something to a performance and thereby to experience that performance as authentically theirs, are necessarily pushing at the closet door; and the further it opens, the more noticeable the performer becomes and the more they threaten. At the same time, the claim that a performance that transgresses norms is all about the performer (self-promoting, self-serving, and preening) can be no more true than for normative performance. Normative performance is also imposing a reading on a score: the approved reading. In contrast, transgressive performance is, among other things, finding new meanings in scores, previously unforeseen potential in their notes, finding out what else those notes can do. The idea that a new reading is brought by the performer, whereas a normative reading is not, simply falls into the trap of treating the normative as natural. It is just another example of what Philip Brett (2006, 10) memorably called ‘the straight world’s tendency to project itself onto everything it encounters and to assimilate everything to its own idea of itself’.

Normative performance values of the sort illustrated here, naturalized through training and all kinds of talk about music, are inevitably to be found throughout the classical music business (Cusick 1994, 87). They in turn have a basis in a discourse of binaries that owes much to musicology (Kramer 1995, esp. 37-9), binaries in which one term is dominant through having moral superiority, being more correct or higher-status than the other, always the term which is more associated with masculinity (capitalized here): Score/interpretation, Composer/performer, Structure/expression, Technique/expression, Composition/improvisation, Instrumental/vocal, Modernist/romantic, Structural/rhetorical performance and, fundamentally,

as highlighted by Suzanne Cusick (1994, n. 19), *The Music/an* interpretation, a distinction dependent in turn on the 'master' distinction Work/performance. This notion of the Work has been much questioned in music academia over the past quarter century (since Goehr 1992), though that has made scant difference to academics' talk of 'works' when they come to discuss pieces. Little wonder, then, that assumptions about Composers and Works (the capitals now marking their regulatory status) still bedevil thinking about the performance, experience, and commerce of music. The Work dominates classical music ideology because that ideology still rests on the belief, naturalized over the past two centuries, that music is an object created by a Composer, rather than being an experience created in the minds of listeners by the activity of performers using composer's notes as a starting-point for (literally) music making (Cook 2001; 2013). In these binaries, down to this deep level, we find classical music discourse still riddled with patriarchal and hetero-normative thinking that has consequences in the puritanically constrained creative space allowed to performers and, it hardly needs adding, the monotonously and unnecessarily limited range of readings offered to listeners.

Should it trouble us that musical behaviour, in what is supposed to be a supreme achievement of western culture, is policed as if it were a matter of public morality in a narrowly patriarchal and hetero-normative society? I think it does trouble many musicians, their concern experienced if not consciously then as cognitive dissonance generated by continual conflict between, on the one hand, faithfulness to composer and tradition, and, on the other, the belief that a performer should be personally creative. This cognitive dissonance is exacerbated by the impossibility of reconciling those two beliefs except on the micro level, through tiny individualities of timing and loudness that (with luck) stay just beneath the radar of the gatekeepers. The dissonance leads to feelings of anxiety, fear of censure, fear of falling into error, fear of being condemned as deviant and unfit to practice, fears which have been found to be more widespread and intense among classical musicians than those working in other traditions (Papageorgi et al. 2013; Dobson 2010; Altenmüller and Jasusch 2010). Because, let us remember, non-conformity is punished by denial of work. This is not just a question of taste: for performers it is a matter of being allowed to make a living.

I argue in another study (Leech-Wilkinson, in progress) that, if classical music culture is to have anything to do with the way we live and think now, we need an accepting musical practice that welcomes difference. The distance to that state from where we are now is so great that it may be hard to imagine how to get there. But in western society which in many ways seems to be going backwards towards more oppression and repression, it would be unconscionable for musical practice to benefit from its exclusionary ideology becoming still more politically welcome; for music to provide still more comfort for the already very comfortable (Leech-Wilkinson 2016); or for music in such an environment to say still more cravenly, 'this is who we are' (Small 1998).

Change has to involve, I think, a fresh look at our imaginative relationship with dead composers, challenging the beliefs that we know their wishes, that they (or indeed anyone) are harmed by performances that present readings they could not

have imagined (Taruskin 1995, 24); and a fresh look also at the sounding evidence of musical practices, which show far wider variation across the past hundred years than we have become willing to accept for performances of repertoire spanning a thousand. Change also requires that we recognize the rolling naturalization of current practice, and resist it; and recognize too the enabling intolerance that characterizes performance policing, and challenge it. This is a lot to ask of performers who hope to continue to work; and therefore a special responsibility lies with those who are paid to write about music, especially well-established writers in secure positions, to speak up for artistic freedom in classical music on the same terms as in the other arts.

What could be the affordances and dangers of non-normative, sometimes even counter-normative musical performance? It is clear, both from early recordings and from recent experiments, that these same scores can be starting-points for a much wider variety of persuasive performances than has been imagined to date. To the extent that we see music as an artistic and not a historic or worship practice—and performers as artists rather than historians (recreating the sounded past) or priests of the composer (reperforming His wishes)—exploring and experiencing this wider variety of readings must be both legitimate and desirable. Evaluation of performance, if at this level of excellence it is sensible (which perhaps needs to be demonstrated afresh), need be no harder than it has always been: performances are made to engage, to stimulate, to excite, to fascinate, to challenge, as ever. That is what music is for. How persuasively they do that is the measure of their success.

In the more varied and provocative performance and listening culture envisaged here, music might sometimes, perhaps often, be radically other. And why not? Why should classical music not ask new questions of us, offer new connections with current concerns, new realisations of notes that no one has imagined before? Why should we not be able to buy a ticket to hear canonical scores performed without knowing how they are going to sound and what they are going to mean, on exactly the same terms (recalling Cook 2001) on which one buys a ticket to experience a new production of *Hamlet*? What is lost, given the already overwhelming availability of past performances (and, to be realistic, the still forthcoming multiplicity of performances) that lie within the narrowest enforceable spectrum?

## Note

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