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Secure and Insecure Bases in the Performance of Western Classical Music

Daniel Leech-Wilkinson

[67:] In *The Modern Invention of Medieval Music* (Leech-Wilkinson 2002), I suggested that Kuhn's 1962 model of change in scientific thought applied effectively to changes in the musicology concerning the performance of medieval music. Across western classical performance itself, however, there has been only one Kuhnian revolution so far as we know, the development of historically informed performance (HIP) from the 1960s onwards. Nowadays that is generally seen, at any rate among scholars, as another modern invention, albeit artistically highly successful (Taruskin 1995, 2009). HIP performers still prefer to see it as historically well-grounded, for that provides the kind of justification for its practice that is absolutely required by the ideology underpinning performance of Western classical music (WCM). That ideology rests on the belief that the role of the performer is to reproduce the intentions of the composer. In fact, as has been comprehensively shown over the past thirty years (since Philip 1992), performance style changes constantly, with musicians insisting all the while that they have correctly translated the composer. According to the ideology, performance should always remain the same, and it is performers' and WCM gatekeepers' duty to ensure that it does; in practice it changes slowly, but over time very greatly. In a study drawing on Darwinian and post-Darwinian evolutionary theory (Leech-Wilkinson 2009), I argued that this process of change is correctly understood as effected by mutations that are too small to be noticed but that spread rapidly through unconscious copying by others, so that over large spans of time performance changes so much that what is considered "naturally musical" alters beyond recognition. This explains the horror with which modern performers

greet recordings made a century ago, where key modern values of musical performance are contradicted. These recordings include many (now unacceptable) performances by composers of their own scores (Slåttebrekk and Harrison 2010). Thus early recordings undermine the ideology itself (Leech-Wilkinson 2010, 2020a).

What this evidence also clarifies is the nature of musicality in a persuasive musical performance. This notion of what makes a performance "musical" is clearly not rooted in performance style—for example, in the use or abhorrence of rubato, portamento, and so on—but rather in the underlying dynamics (in the motion-dynamics sense) of a sequence of musical sounds (Leech-Wilkinson 2018). And consequently it is perfectly possible (as has evidently been the case) [68:]for performances in many radically different performance styles to be found ideally musical at particular places and times, so much so that all of them can, at the appropriate time, be imagined, by those brought up in WCM ideology, as perfect soundings of the composer's intentions.

Much of this clarifying work draws to a considerable extent on studies in music psychology that use a broadly scientific method. What I aim to do here is to look at what psychological science can tell us about the drivers that sustain the ideology itself over generations of WC musicians, despite its evident contradictions and fallacies. Perhaps the most curious feature of WCM is the willingness of all those involved in its production and consumption to accept that the aim of performance is to sound the wishes of the (usually long-dead) composer. Theatre is not constrained in that way, and as a result it generates a lively culture, expressed in productions that typically aim to shed fresh light on old texts, often with particular relevance for current concerns. Such an attitude is anathema in WCM, where practice is observantly policed by teachers, performers, audiences, producers, critics, and many others, aiming to ensure that performance remains faithful to its traditions, not responsive to current concerns. In another study, I have tried to enumerate some of the many

delusions on which this policing rests (Leech-Wilkinson 2020a, esp. chap. 6). Here, by contrast, I should like to consider some factors rooted in evolution and social practice that contribute to driving the need, among those working with musical sound, to conform to imagined traditions and to remain faithful to the imagined wishes of the long-dead composer.

Infantilization

I want to start at some distance from WCM, looking first at infant-carer vocalization, also known as infant-directed speech, or parentese, motherese, or baby talk (Trehub 2000). This kind of speech-song—using wide intervals and pitch swoops, elongated vowels, in a range higher than adult speech—is found in most cultures and has similar features everywhere (Trehub and Trainor 1998; Papoušek, Papoušek, and Symmes 1991). So it appears either to be genetically encoded or to have been a feature of culture before the migrations out of Africa around 125,000 years ago, a feature that works so well that it has continued be used in the same way across the world ever since. Current thinking is that it evolved around two million years ago, with homo ergaster or homo erectus, probably because, by helping carers and infants to communicate affection, it facilitated bonding—and therefore infant survival and development—through the much-increased period of infant care required by bipedalism and increasing brain size (Dissanayake 2000).

The musical qualities of infant-carer vocalization are obvious. Lullabies and play songs have been shown to be closely related to it in their cross-cultural melodic features (Unyk et al. 1992; Trehub, Unyk, and Trainor 1993). And all this has led Michel Imberty (1997), Ellen Dissanayake (2008), Joel Krueger (2013), and a fair number of others (Dissanayake 2008: 174) to suggest that adult music-making evolved out of it. This is not wholly implausible. Adult music is as universal as infant-carer vocalization but a lot more varied, deeply shaped by culture. It [69:]remains powerfully effective in fostering a sense of

belonging: it enhances cooperation between individuals in action, in ritual, in the formation and representation of identity, and in forming and maintaining loving relationships (Dissanayake 2008). So the similarities are not hard to see.

A host of research has shown that even very young infants have sophisticated musical abilities. Malloch and Trevarthen's (2009) much-cited notion of "communicative musicality" summarizes the myriad ways in which the qualities of infant-carer vocalization, gesture, and touch enable a sense of communication and understanding to be shared intimately by infant and carer long before they can communicate through language. I argued in a previous study that the affective qualities of infant-carer vocalization still do powerful work for adults in the swoops of portamento which trigger an involuntary sense of loving intimacy and tenderness, to an extent that tends to make modern musicians uncomfortable although, until the middle of the last century, these associations were cherished as a crucial ingredient in musical expressivity (Leech-Wilkinson 2006). The links between infant-carer vocalization and adult music, however, go much further than portamento, which is hardly more than a symptom of the far-reaching formalization and development in adult music of infant-carer musical behavior.

Daniel Stern (2010) has emphasized the effectiveness of music as a model of the changing dynamics of human feeling states, arguing that infant-carer vocalization enables carer and infant to share feeling states by exchanging vocalizations that encode their dynamics. At the same time, through the *patterns* of vocalization, infants encounter repetition, variation, rhythm, contour, anticipation, and an understanding of the way in which tuning into another's vocalizations brings a sense of belonging, security, love, and understanding, in the absence of language. So for Trevarthen and for Stern it is not simply an analogy to find infant-carer vocalization musical. Rather, it points to an innate ability to communicate affectively through pitch, rhythm, repetition, and variation, the same ability

that, in a more sophisticated and more varied though still highly rule-bound way, underlies adult musical practices around the world.

Stern's work on the multimodal dynamics of infant-carer communication provides a plausible systemic basis for music's metaphorical power which plays such a large part in the generation of musical meaning and in the management and experience of expressivity in musical performance. The dynamics, or as musicians typically say, the shapes of performed musical lines model the shapes or dynamics of other kinds of experience—of motion, of drama, of feeling—and thereby afford particular kinds of meanings emergent from (real or imagined) performances (Leech-Wilkinson 2018). It is these kinds of shaped evocations of experiences, in which we model and learn about the experience and management of feeling states, that Stern finds already in infant-carer interaction through play and vocalization, engaging body and voice in shared expressivity.

Bringing all this work together, one can see a case emerging for linking adult music, including WCM, with both the qualities and the functions of infant-carer vocalization. If we accept this link as one stream, joining together with others, to drive the production and enjoyment of music, then we can quickly point to aspects [70:]of musical practice and reception that might draw on—by evoking—deep-rooted associations between musical sound and felt experience. First, human cultures seem to have a need for music, to find it pleasing, reassuring, comforting, to an extent that amounts to an addiction.[1] Secondly, music helps us entrain our bodies, both with one another's and with our dynamic feeling states; we synchronize (explicitly through music and dance, implicitly through internal mimesis [Cox 2016]) as an expression of agreement, understanding, and bonding. Thirdly, the extent to which music is bound up with feeling is easily understood as originating in the ways in which

[1] Hennion (1999) considers music as an addiction.

musical sound regulates infant experience. Fourthly, the sense that one becomes lost in music, becomes one with it, may reference a state of infant bonding in which one is less aware of the difference between oneself and another: one merges with the source of one's comfort and sustenance; one is conscious, as so often in musical life, of being, yet not of being separate or individual.[2] Fifthly, making music, engaging in musical dialogue (even in solo playing, engaging with oneself as listener), helps us feel that we are communicating and being communicated with. And sixthly, music is experienced as meaningful and yet without specific meaning: we seem to understand it and yet we can never specify what it means. This is exactly the infant's position in her exchanges with her carer. She feels she is attuned with her carer, despite understanding nothing of what the carer says, not knowing even that there is anything specific to be understood. Adult music recreates this situation for us, of understanding through feeling without knowing that there is anything to understand. Music theorists may tell us that there is, but as adults we don't need to know it to have the most profound and satisfying musical experience.

One cannot look at this catalogue of features without concluding that what infant-carer vocalization does for infants is powerfully present in what music does for adults, and that what music does for adults might depend deeply and extensively on what infant-carer vocalization did for us as infants. There's a lot pointing, then, to the idea that music is, among other things, grown-up infant-carer vocalization.

Related to this perspective is the growing research interest in music and empathy. As Clarke, DeNora, and Vuoskoski (2015: 68) have argued, the increasing evidence that listening to music activates the motor areas of the brain helps to explain the ubiquitous sense among listeners that they become one with the music, as their brains engage not just their

[2] Here I come closest to Hennion's (1999) conceptualization of attachment.

intellects and emotions but also their sense of the potential of their own bodies to be in music-related motion. Arnie Cox (2001, 2011, 2016) has published important work on "mimetic motor imagery," his recent book (2016) offering a far-reaching theory in which mimesis, particularly as imagined between individuals, is central to musical experience. Clarke et al. (2015) report (drawing on a variety of studies) that the better one is at identifying with another person, the more one identifies with music:

> Studies have shown that listeners who have a tendency to be more empathic seem to experience more intense emotions, especially in response to sad and tender music …; more sadness, wonder, and transcendence; and more motor and "visceral" entrainment while listening to music. (Clarke et al. 2015: 69–70)

[71:]Providing evidence from previous scholarship, they argue:

> Music is in this way both a *medium* for engagement with others … and an *environment* in which to explore and experiment with a range of more or less projected, fantasized and genuinely discovered subjectivities. (72)

And later:

> Listeners on occasion describe experiences in which they feel themselves to be the *object* of music's empathy—a reversal of the subject/object relationship between listener and musical material that is normally assumed to hold. This subject/object indeterminacy or fluidity is, however, entirely consistent with the type of "merged subjectivity" or "loss of self" that intense engagement through music can afford. (79)

In a music therapy context, they also report:

> Molnar-Szakacs, Assuied and Overy [2011] argue that music is heard not as abstract and disembodied sounds, but as the physical actions and gestures of another person. (Clarke et al. 2015: 80)

This recalls Watt and Ash's (1998) empirical demonstration, recently expanded in music analysis by Robert S. Hatten, that "loosely speaking, music creates a virtual person" (49).[3] This makes a new kind of sense of the old trope, beloved of presystematic music analysis, in which music presents ideas that are announced, converse, argue, and, through a process of musical development, are reconciled and finally resolved. Music, in this common model, is

[3] Parncutt and Kessler (2006) offer a lengthy discussion of both music and God as virtual people. Similar conclusions from very different disciplinary perspectives are offered by Cumming (2001) and Gallese (2017), among others.

clearly conceived of as a person engaged in thought, or as several people engaged in conversation or debate. And yet, it is not the everyday character of human interaction that music is modeling here, because in music, whatever the nature of the disagreements along the way, the argument is always resolved, either triumphantly or peaceably. In WCM, everything always turns out for the best.

In this light, we can take a step further in thinking about the modeling of feeling by music. Music theory has spent more than a century showing how compositions are made from carefully shaped melodic lines, harmonic progressions, phrases, sections, and formal plans, all emerging, developing, and closing in ideal ways. And certainly as adults we are aware of music, compared to our own feelings, as more competent, more organized, more coherent, more perfectly shaped, just as we perhaps felt as infants that our carers (through their musical sounds, their touch, look, movements, their handling of us, their feeding us) were not so much other than us but rather were everything there was that we desired, the source of all safety, security, comfort, warmth, nourishment, love.

[72:]Music for us as adults, then, offers a utopian model of ourselves as we would wish to be. It models a finer self than our own—grander, cleverer, its ideas all intricately interrelated, arranged in an always-coherent sequence, more sorted, more eloquent, better formed, better resolved, better presented, more beautiful, more desirable—with which we can coordinate our feeling states and identify, becoming like it, becoming it, for as long as it lasts. Alf Gabrielsson, in *Strong Experiences of Music* (2011), provides numerous documented examples of people having that kind of experience with music,[4] and we surely all have felt it ourselves through the most powerful performances. Relevant to this is Watt and Ash's further demonstration that "music is perceived as if it were a person making a disclosure" (1998: 47; see also Peters 2015). And so we can see music as almost like an idealized lover,

[4] See also the discussion of Gabrielsson in Parncutt and Kessler (2006).

or at any rate someone we are so close to that we cannot avoid being bound up in, and deeply affected by, everything they do. A surge of musical sound triggers in us, if we are listening with sympathy and engagement (and this if-condition is also so characteristic of the closest human relationships), a corresponding surge of feeling for the music. Our responses are a yearning attempt to reach out, align ourselves, and respond as we would to a lover. This helps to explain many of the deep feelings we have during and after a moving performance. What we are experiencing, when deeply engaged with the music, is akin, to a very considerable degree, to an experience of mutual loving understanding and sharing.[5]

One can easily see that being a creative adaptation of carer-infant interactions brings to the practice and experience of Western classical music (and potentially other musics) a deeply rooted positive emotional charge, driving and sustaining performers through the demands of training and career, and fueling the addiction to music characteristic of performers and audiences as participants in powerful group evocations of forgotten but deeply present (or if not, then deeply desired) loving and reassuring infant experience. But what I want to suggest now is that what sets our feelings about music apart from all other art forms is that *because* music uniquely draws on our earliest experiences of love and security expressed through musical sound, the composer in adult music-making takes the place of the loving carer in infancy. Just as our carers, all powerful, were the source of all safety, security, comfort, warmth, nourishment, and love, and communicated their faithfulness to us through musical sounds which we reciprocated, so we are trained to believe that the composer

[5] Wayne Koestenbaum's *The Queen's Throat* (1993) is substantially about this. "I'm a lemming, imprinted by the soprano, my existence an aftereffect of her crescendo. … Forceful displays of singing insist that the diva has a body and so do you because your heartbeat shifts in uncanny affinity with her ascent" (42). "The listener's inner body is illuminated, opened up: a singer doesn't expose her own throat, she exposes the listener's interior. Her voice enters me, makes me a 'me,' an interior, by virtue of the fact that I have been entered. The singer, through osmosis, passes through the self's porous membrane, and discredits the fiction that bodies are separate, boundaried packages. The singer destroys the division between her body and our own, for her sound enters our system.… She becomes part of my brain. And I begin to believe—sheer illusion!—that she spins out *my* self, not hers" (43). Joel Krueger (2013), quoting Schütz (1951), is also particularly good on this kind of identification in relation to infant musicality, esp. 179–80. More generally on music as a model of humanity, see, for example, Nørgård (1974) and Johnson (2002: chap. 6).

provides everything we could possibly want from music *in return for* the most faithful possible expression by us of the composer's intentions and their needs. We (and I mean now, performers) construct the composer as our carer, our parent, our beloved leader, our unreachable ideal; in a word, our god: by obeying and performing His wishes, we please Him and in return, through the ideal sounds that emerge, He loves and feeds us.[6] The dependence of adult music on infant-carer vocalization, in a word, infantilizes us. We lose the ability and the desire to do anything not sanctioned by the score or performance tradition,[7] for fear that if we do, music will lose its power to move and delight us, and not just its power but its wish to do these things for us; [73:]that if we don't perform the sounds of the composer's wishes He will somehow love us less, cease to care for us and to reward us with loving communicative experiences.

Of course, in the case of composers from before recordings, their wishes cannot possibly be known, which just emphasizes the extent and absurdity of this self-delusion. Performance style in adult music is *not* selected for. It changes gradually all the time (Philip 1992; Leech-Wilkinson 2009a, 2009b) and no one, so far as one can tell, is any the less moved by music as its performance style changes. Adult music's power to move us does not depend at all on faithfulness to anyone. That gut feeling that it must is simply a by-product of the strong similarities between music and infant-carer vocalization. Adult music moves us by its dynamic properties, which relate to our bodies and the dynamics of our feelings (Leech-Wilkinson 2018). It will do that whether we perform a score the usual way or a quite different way. And so it's neither here nor there whether we play the first movement of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata *adagio pianissimo*. All that matters for a powerful emotional experience,

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[6] Parncutt and Kessler (2006) offer numerous routes that might underpin a relationship between infant care, the adult experience of music, and the religious instinct.
[7] Similarly, Dissanayake (2008: 180) has suggested that music developed in connection with ritual, helping "to instill the 'conformist' behavior necessary for human cooperation."

unless we allow belief to intervene,[8] is that the dynamic properties of the sounds move us, and they can do that *allegro fortissimo* entirely convincingly, as a recent recording has demonstrated.[9]

Attachment

We can gain some insight into the advantages that nonetheless accrue from seeing WCM performance as an act of quasi-religious faithfulness to the wishes of a greater power, to follow whom brings us love and security, by turning to attachment and particularly religious attachment theory.

Similarities between thinking about WCM and thinking about religion (especially Western Christianity) have often been noted. Kingsbury (1988: 19) saw conservatory training as the "inculcation of devotion"; Nettl (1995: 15), also observing conservatoire culture, saw composers there as "deities beyond criticism." Small (1998: 89) viewed "the composer as a kind of prophet, the score as his sacred text, and the conductor as his priest."[10] When one considers the character of musical training from childhood, and the strictness with which its texts are interpreted throughout the musician's life, it is not hard to see WCM as one of the world's more successful religious practices in which as a performer you worship, obey, and practice rituals of extraordinary complexity, requiring unrivaled dexterity, which must be perfectly performed in order to be acceptable and efficacious. In line with this is the central importance for musicology, and for performance teaching and assessment, of fixing the divine text, packaged nowadays as the Urtext edition. For this, both the notion and the editorial technique are borrowed from biblical criticism (Grier 1995).

[8] See especially the discussion of reactions to the playing of Patricia Kopatchinskaja in Leech-Wilkinson (2019–), chap. 1: https://challengingperformance.com/the-book-1/.
[9] https://challengingperformance.com/the-book-23-1/
[10] "Musicians … often perceive themselves, and are perceived, as having a kind of priestly function, as the bearers of something sacred and eternal" (Small 1998: 66).

In all these cases we see a process of training and preparation in which musicians learn to imagine composers as both perfect and present, perfect in their judgment of the ideal notes and the effects they will (must) produce, and also still here with us, not only in their music—which it is our job to remake faithfully and [74:]perfectly—but also more literally as a supernatural presence to whom we offer our work as performers in the hope that it captures the essence of their *continuing* wishes.[11] The present composer acts as a constraint upon creativity, for to be creative in WCM would be to intrude into a domain—the composer's—in which one has no place. Composers' complete ownership of creativity (enshrined also in copyright law, which shows how universally this belief is held by the legislating class) gives them rights that performers must not have. To introduce an idea of one's own, as a WCM performer, is to attempt to reach beyond one's rightful place as a servant to the composer's needs and wishes. In another study, I have shown how the language of performance criticism draws upon images of the master-servant relationship, of intrusion, vanity, and other deadly sins (Leech-Wilkinson 2020b). By contrast, performers who rise to the top do so not by reading scores differently, but simply by performing normative readings more persuasively than their competitors (Leech-Wilkinson 2020a). These are the performers who tend to be treated as priests of the composers in whose work they specialize—one thinks of Schnabel and Beethoven, Hewitt and Bach (ironically on the piano, which shows how easily principles are stretched when it suits the congregation), Fischer-Dieskau and Schubert, du Pré and

[11] "They are not seen as ordinary humans who accomplished something and died, but as living beings still. Thus, teachers occasionally refer to the presumed desires of a composer by saying such things as, 'Here is how Bach wants this'" (Nettl 1995: 23–24). "Performers as they play feel the critical presence of the composer beside them and frequently feel greater responsibility to the works and to their composers then they do to the audience that has paid to hear them" (Small 1998: 119).

Elgar, Mackerras and Janáček, and other popular pairings. As Gaines (1991) noted, "competition for success is in reality a competition for consecration."[12]

For Tomlinson (2015: 275), the connection between music and religion is "a kind of default setting of human behavior." And certainly WCM draws heavily and continuously on religious attitudes. Essential to WCM ideology is the belief that the long-dead composer's intentions can be known, that realizing them will necessarily produce a better result (whether ethically or aesthetically), that there is a narrow band (the narrowest that can be enforced) within which all plausible performances must lie. As noted above, all these beliefs are easily shown to be mistaken simply from the evidence of performance style-change preserved since the invention of sound recording. The huge developments that have taken place in the performance of WCM scores over the past 140 years since that invention show clearly that composers' intentions a century ago were quite other than we now assume, and that therefore there must be many very different approaches to making music from these same scores that can produce profoundly satisfying results (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 2020a). Music's rich use of delusion—continuing to insist that the composer's vision is (can be) known and that it is eternally true—is in these respects very much like that of religion: by believing the impossible, musicians affirm their faith in the ideology. The unanimity of ensemble required of all current performances—which is wholly opposed to the values of performance a century ago—models unanimity of belief and worship. You play perfectly as one because you all believe in the agreed contemporary construction of the composer's understanding of the

[12] The whole passage is pertinent: "What is frequently described as competition for success is in reality a competition for **consecration** waged in an intellectual world dominated by the competition between the authorities which claim the monopoly of cultural legitimacy and the right to withhold and confer this consecration in the name of fundamentally opposed principles: the personal authority called for by the creator and the institutional authority favoured by the teacher" (Gaines 1991: 110, bold in original).

score.[13]

A mechanism through which these connections between WCM and religious thinking can be understood is provided by the psychology of religious attachment. The factors set out in Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2013) apply with considerable [75:]precision to WCM ideology. Summarizing previous work by Bowlby (1982) and Ainsworth (1985), they explain:

> The attachment figure accomplishes two important functions for the attached person: (a) provides a safe haven in times of threat or stress and (b) serves as a secure base from which to explore the environment and develop new mental and physical skills. (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick 2013: 140)

They are, of course, talking about infants, but note how closely this describes the high-stress situation of the WCM performer, subject—from one's earliest lessons through to the close of one's professional career—to constant scrutiny by critics, managers, and many others to ensure standards and conformity. ("In Bowlby's view … the attachment system is active from cradle to grave" [Granqvist and Kirkpatrick 2013: 140].) It is important not to lose sight, when admiring the superlative achievements of professional performers, of the extreme pressures and loneliness of the training and lifestyle that supports achievement at this level; and it may be that in this sense, too, the presence of the supernatural composer in one's work and imagination provides attachment-related comfort:

> Children who experience low levels of psychological well-being and difficulties with peer acceptance are especially prone to turn to imaginary companions (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick 2013: 140, citing Hoff 2005).

> The attachment figure is, at least implicitly, viewed as stronger and wiser by the attached person (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick 2013: 140).

And thus:

> As a central tenet of the religion-as-attachment model, we argue that God (and other divine figures) function like symbolic attachment figures to whom believers actively

[13] Hennion's comments (Hennion 2017: 118) about the rewards of re-experiencing the same performance are pertinent here. Rightly emphasising the element of *re*-creation involved, he perhaps underplays the importance of having expectations met and reaffirmed simply through having the same experience once again, without the need or desire to create anything new. In this way, within a highly constrained performance practice, exposing oneself to music is not so much a risk (Hennion 1999: 222) as a reassurance that the world is as it should be.

> strive to obtain or maintain a sense of being connected. (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick 2013: 141)

WCM sees the composer as the object of worship, whom musicians wish to serve and to please.

> The perceived bond between believer and God, as in other attachment relationships, has "love" as its dominant emotional theme; thus, this is a strongly affectional bond. (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick 2013: 141)

[76:]We love the great composers, and the joy that comes from persuasively performing their scores is our reward for faithful performance of their wishes, confirming their love and care for us.

> In addition, believers strive to establish and maintain a sense of proximity or closeness to God. (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick 2013: 141)

We believe that faithful performance brings us into communion with the mind of the composer.

> God is generally believed to be available always (i.e., eternal and omnipresent). (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick 2013: 141–42)

We believe that the composer lives on in accurate and faithful performances of His scores.

> That God is viewed as stronger and wiser by believers goes without saying; after all, this particular attachment figure is held to be omnipotent and omniscient (142).

And so we believe that the composer always knows best. No one can improve on the composer's text or his intended performance of it. Nothing can reward us more fully.

The composer-god is thus experienced as a "secure base" (Bowlby 1982), an attachment figure providing comfort and security in an environment in which missteps are (to judge by the viciousness and omnipresence of WCM gatekeeping [Leech-Wilkinson 2020b]) a constant threat. And crucially, the same belief system that leads performers to be routinely criticized and to feel guilt for failing to discover the ideal performance of the composer-god's intentions also offers them comfort in their distress, thereby reinforcing its necessity and authority.

The musical state and mental health

It should by now be apparent that there are two forces operating on the professional musician that are in theory supposed to be in alignment but that in practice are often not, namely the imagined composer and the musical state. The state comprises all those actors who maintain WCM practice in such a way that it appears to be coherent and unchanging, a machine for the faithful reproduction of composers' supposed artistic visions in sound. A simplified model is offered at https://challengingperformance.com/the-book-7-1/, and it shows how those who teach, maintain, and disseminate performance (all gatekeepers of one sort or another) "police" performers. At the same time, it shows how these gatekeepers and their policing have in turn been created by performers in their other role [77:]as teachers. Thus, artist managers, record companies (especially their artist and repertoire managers and their producers), concert planners, critics, broadcasters, writers, and scholars, among others, ensure that the performers selected for work are those who will most effectively promote the musical values attributed to the composers whose scores they play. Yet the large majority of those gatekeepers are in the music business because they were trained earlier in their lives in these same values by performers acting as their teachers. The whole system is self-reinforcing, then, aiming to ensure the continuation, inspired by ideas of worship, of the imagined composer's imagined wishes.

The model does not show composers, who are simply the imaginary friends it constructs and the fictions it maintains. For while the state purports to disseminate and enforce composers' values, it inevitably has its own agenda, which is to ensure its own profitable survival and reproduction. In this, the composer who must be obeyed in the interests of generating moving artistic experiences is a useful fiction disguising the state and its immediate needs, which are to identify, guard, and promote those performers who will

most persuasively sound its values at the least possible financial cost. Inevitably, the most important driver for the system is economic power. The industry is most profitable, the costs lowest, when there is the least paid rehearsal. Rehearsal is as far as possible squeezed into unpaid hours, at home alone, so that when musicians have to be paid they are reproducing a known performance in front of a paying audience. Conformity is simply the most profitable model for the employer. The stunning trick that has been pulled off is to have persuaded the worker to believe that this is both morally (we might now say religiously) and artistically ideal—and, in addition, to get them to compete with one another, at their own expense, until only a handful (relatively speaking) are left doing all the best work.

What makes this bearable for the performers—who, let us not forget, have spent much of their childhood and young adulthood striving, to the exclusion of a normal life and education, to succeed in this business—is that they have been induced by the ideology absorbed alongside the technique to find comfort in the musical results of doing what they are told. Comfort comes from believing that they are doing what the composer wants (note the present tense) and are thereby worshiping Him and receiving in return the blessings of His godlike imagination.[14]

In such a ruthless and competitive environment, however, the relationship between belief and experience is fragile. Problems, psychological and physical, can arise for performers from criticism or overwork, but also, more damagingly, from doubts that can increasingly arise after many years of producing essentially the same (state-sanctioned) performance of each score. Monia Brizzi, a counselor specializing in treating musicians, has described the problem to me as follows:

> I see performers that have left themselves behind …; so when they engage with [audiences], who can these people see? There is nobody there to see. They need to find a way to reach out to the person they left behind and bring it to the art and on stage with them.… Yet … they get censored and penalised for doing so. If they can't be themselves, who are they now? … Blanking out one [78:]aspect of their life so often results in

[14] "Without faith … the student will not sacrifice these precious years" (Wagner, 2015: 216).

> blanking everything out and so they become like machines but without a heart. Unfortunately all their achievements seldom give them what they want, and they are still empty, dissatisfied and miserable. They, and the world, respond only to what they do rather than to them…. It is sad that many performers can regain a sense of freedom only when they choose to leave the profession, or, when they develop disabling physical and psychological symptoms and being unable to play an instrument or losing their voice is often the way they have found to evade these conflicts. (Monia Brizzi, email to the author, August 27, 2018; my thanks to her for permission to quote)

Such mental health problems often stem from the conflict between the need to conform to performance norms and the expectation (encouraged in theory, though hugely restricted in practice) that performers will all show individuality in their readings of composers' scores. When you have played your reading on stage often enough, who is it who is playing: you, the composer, the system, an automaton? Who now, where now, are you? In this situation, the imagined relationship with the composer-god seems to break down, as doubts arise as to whether either the system or the individual is being sounded and whether either of those is really close to or in touch with the composer. If the composer becomes replaced by the system, as the artistic magic ceases to work, then a serious attachment deficit is experienced. The secure base, with its special beauty for Western classical musicians, is lost, and it is exceptionally hard for a therapist to remake that bond.

Costly Signaling

How is there such strong institutional buy-in to this closed, circular model—enforcing just one set of practices—in a capitalistic system in which competition would normally be encouraged in order to generate a variety of products and consumer choice? Class identity might offer one answer, in line with Small's (1998: 43, 134) proposal that in WCM the middle class says "This is who we are": certainly this would moderate the force of competition. But given that product variety has become native to Western culture, even allowing for identity security, there seems remarkably little performance variety in WCM.

What there is (as little as performers can be socialized to believe makes them all individuals) seems to be held in check by something more powerful. I suggest that that overriding process is one of costly signaling.

Costly signaling theory proposes that humans (and other animals) make themselves more desirable and trustworthy by devoting themselves to a behavior or display that costs them so much effort or resource as to be otherwise disadvantageous to their survival. The higher the cost of the signal, the more honest it is perceived to be. The peacock's tail is the classic example, but the same could apply equally to the performance of WCM.

> Smith and Bird (2000) have described the four qualities that a behavior must have to qualify as a costly signal. First, the behavior must be easily [79:]observable by others. Second, it must be costly to the actor in resources, energy, or some other significant domain. Third, the signal must be a reliable indicator of some trait or characteristic of the signaler, such as health, intelligence, or access to resources. Finally, the behavior in question must lead to some advantage for the signaler. (McAndrew 2019: 2)

That there is a high cost to WCM training could not be clearer, for it occupies many hours per day of training and self-training from a young age until a career's end (totaling sixty thousand at one estimate [Chaffin and Lemieux 2004]). All this is apparently altruistic in the intention of giving pleasure to others, but of course one also seeks praise and reward. Possibly an even stronger driver in many is the belief and expectation that, with this huge investment of effort, one's own performances, once one has reached the highest level, will bring oneself at least the same deep satisfaction that one intends to give others. In this sense the motivation may not be quite as simple as the classical categories of reciprocal and competitive altruism, but may also involve sharing in the gift. How honest is the honest signal may be another question, however. The expression of high-quality sentiment through musical performance appears to the listener to be genuine in the most successful performances, and is accepted publicly as such, but is usually learned by the performer as a skill rather than genuinely felt in

each reperformance.[15] Indeed it is partly the lack of internal reward after many repeat performances that musicians can come to find psychologically debilitating (as we saw in the quote from Monia Brizzi above). Performance criticism is thus often of the genuineness of expressivity, which critics are often willing to denounce as contrived, narcissistic, or even mendacious (Leech-Wilkinson, forthcoming: tables 2–7, esp. 3).

Another feature attributed to costly signaling is its deleterious effect on an individual's standing among those to whom it is not directed.

> Behaviors or behavioral restrictions are thus costly if they stigmatize members or entail individual sacrifice. (Sosis and Bresseler 2003: 219)

The social pariah status of young classical musicians beyond their colleagues, which they bear even though it is one of the heaviest of all costs for a teenager, is well-known. Moreover, the amount of time that has to be devoted to learning inevitably damages the young musician's performance in other subjects and skills (Wagner 2015: 32, 70). When all its disadvantages are considered, it's hard not to conclude that WCM could be one of the most costly signaling systems in all humanity. After all that investment of often physically painful, boring, and (not infrequently) bullied work (Wagner 2015), it may be understandable that performers wish to limit as far as possible rival experiences to those they themselves have learned to produce from scores. The position of performer-teachers at the center of the closed system discussed above (Leech-Wilkinson 2020a: chap. 7.1) [80:]helps to explain how this drives cultural/institutional acceptance of this apparently anticompetitive approach to performance. It is simply not in performer-teachers' interests to make out of their pupils musicians who differ from them. A set of beliefs, norms, and constraints that prevent difference is thus inculcated as part-and-parcel of the technical training they enforce:

[15] A striking example of the extent of this simulation is offered in Leech-Wilkinson (2011), discussing repeat performances by the famously expressive pianist Alfred Cortot, performances that sound improvised but prove to be so similar that the recordings can be played simultaneously without diverging significantly until near the end.

> You enter the camp as if it is a religious order. You belong to your teacher and you must adhere to his technique and interpretation. (Wagner 2015: 127)

Religion has been seen as a particularly clear example of costly signaling for reasons that, as we might expect now, are very close to those that would apply to WCM performance. It is hard to fake all the ritual and commitments you have to perform within a religion. And thus it is a good indicator of commitment to a group and to its values "and a signal that one is likely to be a reliable, cooperative group member" (McAndrew 2019: 6). "Commitment signals are not limited to behaviors but also include behavioral restrictions such as taboos" (Sosis and Bresseler 2003: 219), and thus all these constraints that we find so strictly inculcated and then enforced in WCM function too as forms of costly signaling. Due to all the constraints and tests it imposes, WCM seems to (and believes that it does) survive intact, although in fact, as noted above, it is constantly subject to imperceptible style-change (Leech-Wilkinson 2009b) and thus over time changes very much.

Sosis and Bresseler (2003) draw on the notion of costly signaling to offer a telling comparison of the longevity of religious and secular communes, hypothesizing that "Communes that impose greater costly requirements on their members will have higher survivorship rates than communes that impose requirements that are less costly" (215). Their findings emphasize the extent to which WCM draws strength from behaving like a religion.

> It is clear that costly constraints positively impact religious commune longevity, suggesting that increases in the level of sacrifice imposed on members enhance group commitment. However, it is equally apparent that costly signaling has no effect on secular commune longevity. (Sosis and Bressler 2003: 225)
>
> Secular rituals (by definition) lack reference to a supernatural entity. We believe that this difference between secular and religious rituals is critical and may explain why secular rituals are less successful at promoting long-term trust and cooperation than religious rituals (228).[16]

[16] This passage in Sosis and Bressler (2003) is followed (228–29) by a useful summary of the long-lasting neural changes that follow a religious experience, which could well be relevant to many of the experiences documented by Gabrielsson (2011) in response to music.

Sosis and Bressler identify a key role for unfalsifiable propositions. The composer's intentions clearly fall into the same category. And the crucial importance of those intentions remaining unfalsifiable is only emphasized by the extent to which [81:]performers, since the widespread dissemination of early recordings over recent decades, have tried to ignore the inconvenient evidence they preserve to the effect that composers' intentions (as noted above) were quite different.

> Religious rituals … are directed toward a supernatural being [in WCM the composer], regardless of the individual with whom trust will ultimately be promoted [the audience]. Trust emerges because participants direct their ritual efforts toward the same deity or spirit.… By directing rituals' referents toward the unfalsifiable, religions attach themselves to ultimate beliefs that are unverifiable and hence potentially eternally true. These ultimate sacred postulates … are beyond examination, making them much stabler referents than those employed by secular rituals. (230)
>
> Furthermore, religious rituals directed toward a supernatural being create a sense of numinosity that is not experienced by performers of secular rituals.… Those who experience this numinous sensation perceive the incident to be undeniably true. (232)

This may help to explain why so much of WCM's ideological work is directed towards making the intensely engaging (at best numinous) experiences it provides for listeners seem religious rather than secular, the result of communing with a composer-god rather than of creatively reading a score. The godlike qualities of the great composer seem to be proved by the power of listeners' experiences, given a performance that can be seen to meet all the ideological requirements of WCM and at the same time be powerfully moving. The possibility that a quite different performance might be just as powerful is not entertained; indeed, it cannot be allowed, for if it were to be experienced that itself would undermine the entire edifice.[17]

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[17] Sosis and Bressler (2003: 232) argue that "because secular rituals do not generate this feeling of numinosity, and the ideology that provides meaning to secular rituals can be evaluated through experience, the ability of these rituals to promote trust and cooperation is ephemeral." But that is not true of WCM. Here the religiosity is only borrowed. Powerful performances are just as possible without it, as early recordings, and indeed the radically alternative readings of well-known scores at https://challengingperformance.com/, clearly suggest.

Cost is relevant in a simpler sense as well. Because WCM is an exceptionally expensive form of signaling, it is also appealing as a marker of wealth and class-based identity.[18] So what a performance does to that identity matters enough for it to be closely monitored. Mechanisms for monitoring include criticism, quasi-religious thinking about music, and the policing of performance for rectitude at all stages of training and career. Opera can be a particularly sensitive site, probably because of the wealth of those present and the cost of running it: opera is wealth-defined identity on stage (including in this sense audience display) and in sound. So, though other political considerations of course apply as well, it may be less surprising that there have been prosecutions in Russia recently of progressive productions. This only emphasizes how closely music and music-theatre are expected to perform the values of a state, mirroring the musical state on a national scale.[19]

In the West, the frequent conflict between theatre values in opera direction, which generate often radical innovation on stage, and WCM values in an opera's musical performance which enforce convention is the most obvious site for [82:]challenge to this more literal form of costly signaling. Both theatre and music traditions are recognized as performing middle-class values—innovation (middle classness as the economic freedom to explore) and preservation (middle classness as the urge to preserve)—but in opera those two traditions of performance are hard to reconcile: one simply has to attend to them separately, splitting one's attention in two, to let the music do its normative reproductive work while the

[18] Nelissen and Meijers (2011) report that the signaling effected by conspicuous consumption generates social benefits.

[19] Shaun Walker, "Zurich Opera Show Goes On Despite Director's Moscow House Arrest," *The Guardian*, October 8, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/08/zurich-opera-show-goes-on-despite-director-kirill-serebrennikov-moscow-house-arrest; Howard Amos, "Angry Protests as Russian Court Puts Theatre Director under House Arrest," *The Guardian*, August 23, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/23/russian-court-puts-theatre-director-under-house-arrest-kirill-serebrennikov; "Opera Director Charged by Russian Authorities with Offendnig Christians," February 24, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/25/opera-director-charged-by-russian-authorities-with-offending-christians.

staging performs its normative creativity. One has to experience these two domains separately in order to have any kind of satisfying experience, or focus on one and try to ignore the other (as musician-listeners often do). What is never considered are the possible benefits that might accrue from trying to align approaches on stage and in the pit. Conventionally, musicians expect that to be achieved by re-creating historical staging, and the results are often fascinating. But it would also be just as possible to go the other way, to allow the musical reading to adapt to reflect the stage production. An early (perhaps first) example of this is Helios Collective's 2016 production of the Purcell "Dido and Aeneas" score as "Dido & Belinda," in which Purcell's notes and Tate's words were subject to the same rereading.[20] The example points in a direction that could allow WCM to be far more relevant to current values, and to allow performers to escape the policing and conflicts generated by the confused and damaging ideology of WCM.

As Kuhn observed, a smooth transition from old to new approaches is impossible: the assumptions underlying one's view of how the world works—or in our case, of how performance emerges from a reading of composers' scores—are so different that it is not possible to hold both sets of assumptions at once, nor to move seamlessly from one to the other. Either one believes in faithfully reproducing normative performances or one sees scores as starting-points for creativity. Only a radical change of perspective can offer the revolution in performance creativity and public estimation that canonical WCM needs in order to survive as a business and as a living practice. First of all, as Kuhn showed, a new paradigm has to be available, offering better answers than the old paradigm to the questions that now seem most urgent.[21] This is why examples of new practice are essential. In this

[20] Helios Collective: "Dido & Belinda" (2016). https://challengingperformance.com/dido-belinda/ .
[21] "The decision to reject one paradigm is always simultaneously the decision to accept another, and the judgement leading to that decision involves the comparison of both paradigms with nature *and* with each other" (Kuhn, 1966: 77).

process, “Dido & Belinda” and the other performances at challengingperformance.com are only a beginning. For new performances to emerge that are more convincing than the old a new way of thinking about WCM will have to emerge alongside, with equally radical implications for the way people talk and write about music.[22] That process, too, has only just begun.

[22] See especially Kuhn (1966), 150–52 and 167.

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