Challenging Performance : Classical Music Performance Norms and How to Escape Them

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Preface

This is an eBook (also available as this PDF), a website, and a set of podcasts. It's addressed to performers of western classical music and it's about freeing performance from unnecessary rules and constraints and from much of the anxiety that comes with classical training and practice. The aim is to encourage performers to find many more ways (old and new) in which classical scores can make musical sense.

If you're a passionate believer in the status quo you may hate it. But it might still be worth reading because the questions it asks are reasonable ones and need much better answers. Having someone ask them may enable you (rather than me) to see what those better answers might be, enabling you to place normative performance practice on a more reasoned footing. There's also the possibility that you'll end up agreeing with much that's in here, but in either case a world of new possibilities for performing your repertoire may open up.

Be aware that this is a polemical piece rather than a scholarly tome. It's expressed strongly. It may annoy and unsettle, though I hope it will also reward.

I've written it and published it online, and it's free to use, because I want to reach performers, especially young professionals and conservatoire students. And also because it's good to be able to improve the text in response to reader suggestions and as better ways of thinking become clear.

Please let me know what you think, either using the feedback boxes beneath each page of the online version (https://challengingperformance.com/the-book/ -- comments are moderated) or by emailing me at daniel.leech-wilkinson@kcl.ac.uk. Please let others know at @ChalPerformance and anywhere that classical musicians follow.

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Acknowledgements
About the author

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PART 1: Performance style and what follows

1 Introduction and examples

Do an online search for performances of the Hallelujah chorus from Handel's *Messiah* and listen to a few (try to avoid the ones you expect to like). There are performances with a semi-virtual choir of 2360; or with four soloists (accompanied by mandolins); performances by organ and brass; community choir, steel band and dancers; gospel choir; electronic organ and flash mob; and even some with small choirs and baroque orchestras that claim to be like Handel's own. All of these, the full range (to judge by the comments added by listeners on sites like YouTube), inspire and move people intensely. And yet, in conservatoire and in the classical music business, only the tip of one end of this very broad spectrum is cultivated. For students of classical music, the only proper performance of this score is one that sounds just as Handel's first performances are supposed to have sounded. According to this ideology, the job for which the classical musician is being prepared is to do history in sound. Anything else is wrong.

How musicians, critics and other 'gatekeepers'—and knowledgeable listeners—respond to classical music performances depends to a large extent on beliefs about their propriety. If a performance is improper, in the sense that it is wrong as judged by history or tradition, then however lively, committed, engaging, fluent or technically brilliant the performance may be, the knowledgeable tend, at best, to disapprove, more often to dislike it strongly.

An aim of this book, however, is to show the danger of beliefs about what is 'proper' in classical music. While I do not address the huge field of current practices illustrated by this Handel example, I do want to broaden thinking around that tip of the spectrum currently occupied by respectable classical performance. I am going to suggest that there are many more possibilities there, and roundabout there, than we realise at the moment, and that musicians' lives would be much more rewarding were they freer to explore them. At the same time, we may become more tolerant of practices that range more widely.

A more detailed example: 'the Moonlight'

Under special circumstances, we do already allow a surprising diversity of approaches to certain kinds of scores. Mainly this applies where there are parallel traditions using modern and early instruments. Take the first movement of Beethoven's 'Moonlight' sonata. In a typical current performance on a modern piano, the tempo is around 48 beats per minute, maybe a little slower. The music is quiet, calm, still. Alternatively, if you are an early keyboardist you play it on (a copy of) a fortepiano of Beethoven's time. The timbres are very different: the fundamental is much weaker and the harmonics are much stronger and so the sound is brighter, more colourful, more dissonant in fact (because all those upper harmonics are very close together and clash in pitch). And the performance is usually somewhat faster, partly out of belief about Classical- and early Romantic-period speeds, partly because the sounds don't last as long on a fortepiano and a sense of flow is easier to create if the gaps between them are shorter.

These two performances create different sound worlds, and to that extent different 'Moonlight' sonatas. In some ways they are more different than any two performances on a modern piano or any two on a fortepiano, although the latter are more varied than the former because to an extent fortepianists are still experimenting, both with the pianos, which are very different from one another (much more so than are modern pianos), and also with ways of getting these favourite, near-sacred scores to work with such a different mechanism and sound. (Compare Lortie and Beghin.) Yet both are currently acceptable in polite musical society, albeit with substantially different fanbases and for the most part practised by different musicians (though as time passes, and fortepiano-enthusiasm has come to seem less eccentric, there is increasing overlap). So you could say that there are two different performance traditions here, practised simultaneously but by different musicians with different beliefs about what is musically good. Each seeks to persuade their audience that they have reached the heart of this piece, that their Moonlight best evokes Beethoven's. And indeed, whatever the differences among the performers, the same audience may very well be equally moved and interested by, and appreciative of both; though there, too, there will be those who think one more correct than the other.

As I say, this is a specialised situation; because, on the whole, most performances of classical music scores are as similar as almost any two Steinway performances of 'the Moonlight'. Certainly there will be small differences, nuances of timing, rubato, loudness, from moment to moment; crucially also (on the piano) differences of touch. And these habits will vary from one player to another, the variation either celebrated or denounced depending on one's target. (We shall look at critics' responses to varying performances in chapter 9.) But nonetheless, no two Steinway performances will ever sound or feel as different as a typical Steinway and almost any fortepiano performance feel from each other.

And so the simultaneous practice of these different traditions seems to break the rules that maintain consistency in modern performance practice. That is to say, if you believe it is right that Steinway performances are as consistent as they are, then you should not believe that both traditions can legitimately exist at once. Or to put it the other way round, if you believe that both are producing legitimate performances of Beethoven's sonata op. 27, no. 2, then you should also believe that performances can legitimately be this different within each tradition. But of course people do not believe that, and we shall need to examine why.

Older performances

Let's now add a third and fourth performance, both around a century old, played by pianists born around 1860, who developed their way of being Beethovenian in the 1870s and 80s, nearer to Beethoven than to us. Arthur Friedheim (born 1859) was a pupil first of Anton Rubinstein in St Petersburg and then (from 1880) of Franz Liszt. His 'Moonlight' is very different. (Frederick Lamond (b. 1868), another Liszt pupil, plays it at a similar speed.) The tempo changes a lot, speeding up to settle in the general area of 72 bpm, though with much flexibility. Ignaz Paderewski (b. 1860) plays the score more slowly, typically around 54 bpm (a modern fortepiano speed) but again with much flexibility, and he does something else that would horrify a modern piano teacher but that was absolutely normal and considered sensitively musical by Paderewski's contemporaries; he plays the left hand before the right, so each bass note anticipates the melody and inner notes written against it in the score. That one of the most famous pianists of all time should play in a way that could deny them a conservatoire place today shows just how relative ideas about musicality are. They change over time, and a thoughtful listener today is perfectly well able to

appreciate them equally. Bear in mind, too, that scores composed contemporaneously with this kind of pianism (Brahms, Debussy, to name but two) 'should', if one actually believes in performing the composer's intentions, be played like this today. So why is current practice so narrow? Why are historical models not followed in a tradition that purports to care about doing history in sound? And why is conformity to a much narrower agenda so rigidly policed?

A transgressive performance

Let us go further. It does not take a huge amount of imagination to conceive of a performance of this Beethoven movement that is as different from any of these norms as each is from the others. You could, for example, play this score much faster than anyone would consider proper at the moment. And that could produce a perfectly plausible musical result, where 'plausible' means simply that the sequence of harmonies and lines makes good musico-dramatic sense played with well-matched loudness envelopes, timbre and articulation. If you have a piano to hand, and play this piece, try it at 136 bpm, about twice as fast as the Liszt pupils, about three times the modern speed. (Or, to anticipate Part 3, you can listen to Ji Liu playing it in Chapter 23.1.) Depending on the rigidity of your beliefs about what is proper, you may find that the notes are not made a nonsense of by being played 'allegro', or even 'allegro' and 'fortissimo': the piece still works as a sound sequence with melodic and harmonic coherence and dynamic shape. And yet it's a reasonable bet than if you played the 'Moonlight' sonata like that in concert you would not be invited back. So what's gone wrong? Why is everybody so cross with you for playing it allegro? What has happened that is not 'musical' or that is simply… wrong? An obvious answer would be that Beethoven wrote in his score 'Adagio sostenuto' and 'delicatissimamente'. But given that he died in 1827, does he have a problem with our playing it allegro? Can he be hurt? (We shall look at the philosophical arguments surrounding faithfulness to the dead in chapter 11.)

We can get another angle on the normative thinking surrounding classical music performance by looking at a real example: real, in that a performer has dared to do it in a public concert (which at the time of writing is not quite the case for the 'Moonlight' as 'Storm', though I hope it soon will be).

Knowledge and belief

The violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja has recorded Beethoven's violin concerto with what on the face of it seems to be a very innovative first-movement cadenza. At this point in the score Beethoven has simply put a pause mark, and left it to the performer to improvise a cadenza of their own. Few (truth be told, probably none) take advantage of that today. There is a standard written-out cadenza by Fritz Kreisler and numerous alternatives by others. But Kopatchinskaja who, unlike her polite virtuoso colleagues, plays the violin as if her life depended on it, is soon joined by four cellos, and then by the timpani, then by the concert-master in a wild duet. It's thrilling, and different in a performance of this concerto.[1]

Watch and listen at https://youtu.be/DFm2oZAwG6c

[1] Other recordings (including those by Zehetmair, Kremer and Schneiderhan, and Tetzlaff) have used Beethoven's piano cadenza but with less creative scoring.

Listeners' reactions to this varied dramatically. For Andrew Macgregor, writing for the BBC's music website, the cadenza 'amplifies the sense of adventure and genuine re-discovery', in a performance whose 'soaring sound and improvisatory flair are compelling, and ultimately highly musical.'[2] (Note what different kinds of work that word 'musical' can do. We shall return to it in chapter 5.) Robert Braunmüller in the Munich Abendzeitung, sneering at her gender ('eine Dame mit ihrer Geige', a lady with her violin), is unashamedly hostile: 'Patricia Kopatchinskaja deconstructs Beethoven's violin concerto, as if it were Regietheater. Only, unfortunately, not as well.' The cadenza was 'a typical virtuoso insert including a duet with the concertmaster and four cellists'.[3] At 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'.[4]

Reading all the YouTube comments is, naturally, fairly depressing. The differences of opinion are as wide as it is possible to imagine, from Andrea Haubmann's 'Ich liebe Sie!!! Bin ein totaler Fan!!' to JeffPuha's 'This woman should dig a hole and crawl into it to hide her shame.'[5] But what's very clear is that many of the enthusiasts are aware that Kopatchinskaja is drawing on Beethoven's own cadenza written for his own arrangement of the score as a piano concerto. And many of the objectors are not. Similarly, Andrew Macgregor focuses his review on the alternative readings Kopatchinskaja has taken from Beethoven sources; Robert Braunmüller shows no sign of being aware of them, and I think we can assume that rondo1presto is not.[6] That the notes Kopatchinskaja is playing, 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 a fabulous musical experience, on the other it was shit. Yet the sounds in each case were exactly the same.

What does this tell us about the ability of people with musical knowledge to make musical judgements? The musically uneducated listener has no difficulty at all. The problem simply does not exist for them. For them the only question is, 'was that a thrilling experience?' If it was, it was a great performance. It is only the person with training who can hear a potentially thrilling performance and think it was shit because of what they believe to be a historical fact.

This is just as true of my hypothetical 'Moonlight' example. Once one knows that the score is marked 'Adagio sostenuto' and 'delicatissimamente', a performance 'allegro furioso', however thrilling it might be for an innocent listener, is shockingly wrong, a violation of deeply-held beliefs about faithful performance. The listener's innocence, needless to say, is innocence of the composer's instructions to the performer. And for most musicians, and most music philosophers and musicologists and music theorists and music lovers, the composer's instructions are non-negotiable: they must be obeyed. This is a key belief, perhaps the key belief, on which so much else depends. And so the substantial differences in sound and performance style for the Steinway and fortepiano versions of the 'Moonlight' count for far less than the fact that both obey Beethoven's instruction in the score.

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[2] See also BBC Music magazine's anonymous view: http://www.classical-music.com/review/beethoven-violin-concerto.

[3] 'Patricia Kopatchinskaja dekonstuiert Beethovens Violinkonzert wie Regietheater. Nur leider nicht wie gutes. … Die Kadenz blieb als wildes Allegro eine typische Virtuosen-Einlage samt Duett mit der Konzertmeisterin und vier Cellisten.'

[4] Other YouTube comments invoking shit as the measure of this performance include MJWang and Arsen Stephanyan11, both at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xr9KmgDFwMc .

[5] Both at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xr9KmgDFwMc

[6] I did email him/her to try to find out, but I got no reply.

By contrast, Kopatchinskaja's performance of the concerto, for all its extreme dynamics, tone, rubato, and its unusual cadenzas, is in its broad sound qualities probably more like any other violinist's at the moment than a fortepiano performance is like a Steinway version of 'the Moonlight', and we're willing to accept both of those as legitimate. Yet hers is completely beyond the pale if we believe that she is making up the cadenza. (Jassim Khalil on YouTube comments: 'You must be joking this is not Beethoven at all!!!'.) In each case we see that belief outweighs aesthetics. As long as beliefs are unchallenged, almost anything goes aesthetically: contrariwise, if beliefs are challenged, nothing does. (It's no coincidence that scholars have from time to time remarked in print that they'd rather hear a bad performance on the right instrument, or using the right edition, than a good one that doesn't.)[7]

Contradictions

We are beginning to see some fairly striking contradictions in these various responses to my examples. We can see that wide differences among performances are acceptable provided that all obey the composer's score; but that very little, perhaps no difference is tolerated when the score is contradicted. (When we look at reviewers' comments in chapter 9 we shall see just how unforgivingly that idea is enforced.) Yet clearly, if the score can validate both fortepiano and Steinway performances then there is something very wrong with using the score as a reference point, since the fortepiano performances and the Steinway performances we hear today cannot *both* sound any performance that Beethoven conceived (both may be very wide of the historical mark).

Yet it is not just the score that is regulatory for performance at the moment; it is also the 'composer's intentions', of which the notes in the score form only a part. Together with the notes he left (about which there is often argument) go his conception of the structure (to the extent that that concept even existed in Beethoven's time, which is open to question), and the way performers in 1801 touched the keyboard and moved from one note to another, that's to say their performance style (which cannot be known until recording begins almost a century later). But in that case, if one can overlook the fact that none of these surely essential things can ever be known (essential if one believes that the composer's intentions are regulatory), how could one ever allow a performance on a modern piano? And yet we not only allow them but find in them the some of the highest achievements of Beethoven performance (though not those, of course, with unsynchronised hands).

So clearly, when we want something to be acceptable we find a reason to allow it to be. In the case of the Steinway versions of Beethoven the usual idea is that Beethoven would have liked them if he had heard them. (Beethoven struggled against the limitations of his pianos and the Steinway would have been the answer to his prayers, etc.) But you cannot simultaneously believe that what happened in Vienna in 1801 is regulatory (i.e. you have to use a fortepiano) *and* that 'what would have happened if' is (or is even better). Or rather you can—people do—but it does not make sense to.

[7] See, for example, Malcolm Bilson, helpfully discussed in John Butt, *Playing with History: The Historical Approach to Musical Performance* (Cambridge University Press, 2002) 53–6.

Obedience

What is interesting, though, about the 'he would have if only' justification is its showing how essential it is to find an excuse in which the composer's approval figures. But there is not and cannot be Beethoven's approval for a modern, Steinway performance. It is simply convenient to allow it because it belongs within a practice that has developed up to this point and which we therefore pretend is traditional, justifying it (if pressed) through taste and through the pleasure given by the performances that are possible within it. In other words, by aesthetic, not historical criteria. And exactly the same goes for fortepiano performances. The piano may be contemporary with Beethoven, but the piano tells us much less than its players wish to believe about how it was played by Beethoven.

So what does Beethoven's approval have to do with anything today? For reasons I shall set out in chapter 6, it is helpful for the maintenance of classical norms for young performers to feel that in some way Beethoven is present and looking approvingly on as they play. Without the composer's approval it seems impossible for the classical music belief system—its ideology—to accept that a performance is legitimate, however exciting or convincing it might otherwise have seemed, or might currently seem to someone from outside the system whose response is only to the persuasiveness of its sounds. But where does Beethoven's approval come from? How does he give it me? How do I know I have it? I know I get shredded by the critics if they think I don't. But what happens to him? Is he himself harmed, now? How, exactly? The further we go, asking questions about these kinds of ideas and the contradictions they allow, the clearer it becomes that woven into classical music ideology is much wishful and muddled thinking and compromise and accepted contradiction and special pleading. And while a certain variety of thought is always welcome on any issue, the extent of these contradictions and (frankly) hypocrisies points to something profoundly disturbed about the ideology surrounding classical music.

The most evident consequence is that any kind of music-making that lies outside the narrow bounds of the ideology is, in effect, forbidden. If you play the first movement of the 'Moonlight' sonata 'allegro furioso', however well it may work with the notes, however fabulous your technique and your realisation of the idea, your reading of the score will be unacceptable within the culture. And so for Ernst Schliephake, what Kopatchinskaja does in the concerto (tame compared with playing 'the Moonlight' allegro) is simply 'verboten'.

It takes a moment to realise the full implications of that idea. In what kind of society is an artist forbidden certain kinds of artistic creativity? Is policing necessary to generate the joy and fulfilment we experience from a great performance? Does it keep musicians happy? Or is classical music a kind of cultural North Korea? Later in this book there will be more to say about classical music in terms of this rather strong, alarming concept. For now, suffice it to note that Peter Cook and Dudley Moore skewered the policing of classical performance with characteristic precision in a sketch from as long ago as 1971 entitled 'Prestissimo'.

> DUDLEY [at the piano, playing Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' increasingly fast, stopped by Cook dressed as a traffic cop and holding a trumpet-cum-breathalyzer]: Ah, good afternoon, officer.
>
> PETER: Good afternoon, sir. I've been listening to you for quite a while. You ignored two double bars, went straight through a coda sign and had a very nasty glissando when you were speeding up your fugato passage.

> DUDLEY: Are you suggesting that I've been … playing incautiously? According to my metronome, I've only been going andante molto moderato.
>
> PETER: Andante molto moderato? Very strange, sir. I had to go prestissimo possibile to keep up with you, sir.
>
> DUDLEY: Well, I might have gone allegro con fuoco for a couple of bars, but I'm sure I didn't get up to prestissimo.[8]

In the end, Dudley has to bribe Peter to let him off by buying fifty tickets and playing at the policemen's ball. They are, of course, absolutely correct in identifying policing as an everyday response to illegal musical interpretation. Had Dudley explained that he was interpreting the score in his own way, Peter would no doubt have replied that it was not his place to interpret the law, only to obey it. Which is exactly what any and every performer has been told at some point by their teacher. Moore had studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama as a pianist, violinist and organist, and then read music at Oxford. He knew what he was lampooning.

What kind of artistic practice is this, then, in which performers spend around twenty early years of their lives learning to do just what they are told? Is it worth the effort at all, if that extraordinarily demanding training leaves one as little more than a mechanism for the performance of norms? And if those norms are riddled with contradictions, muddled and wishful thinking, as we have already begun to see, then who has one been forced to become? What values, whose values, do we perform as we ostensibly play our deepest selves through these remarkably potent scores? The erroneously imagined values of the imagined composer? Why should we faithfully obey anything that fabricated and confused?

Empowering performers

Much of this book is concerned with how to refuse to be policed, and about the benefits that could result for musicians and audiences if that kind of oppression were to be thrown off. It goes without saying that in many quarters this will not be popular. Many jobs in classical music are conceived and practised as faithfully ensuring that the imagined composer's imagined wishes are performed as brilliantly and as persuasively as possible within the boundaries that define obedience. A lot of belief and self-belief is tied up in that process. Nothing threatens that as powerfully as a brilliant and persuasive performance of an alternative musical reading of a well-loved score, as Glenn Gould found with Bach, and Patricia Kopatchinskaja is finding at the time of writing with Tchaikovsky. The more powerful the alternative, the more hideously it threatens and the angrier the response.

This book aims to show the flaws in this kind of normative thinking, and to offer young professional musicians a way out of the straightjacket that norms attempt to impose, licensing much more varied performance in theory and offering models of how it can be achieved in practice. At the same time I shall argue that a more creative approach to playing canonical (and non-canonical) scores will bring benefits for musicians in well-being, prosperity and public esteem, and for audiences in fascination, revelation and pleasure. Most importantly, the book aims to empower performers and music lovers sufficiently for them

[8] Willliam Cook (ed.). 2004. Goodbye Again: *The Definitive Peter Cook and Dudley Moore*. London: Century, p. 182. Later in the sketch: 'Might I see your licence, please? … [Dudley hands Peter the score] Bit of trouble here, aren't you? Ludwig van Beethoven: this expired in 1827.'

to overcome the inevitable appalled hostility of gatekeepers to the profession (teachers, examiners, adjudicators, critics, managers, and the rest) who will have to face their demons at last, before sheer economic self-interest leads them to see classical music in a fresh light.

The consequences may well be hair-raising. Some of them were already set out quite a few years ago by Richard Taruskin in an essay that (perhaps not surprisingly) has been little cited thus far. His 2009 collection of essays, *The Danger of Music*, is perfect for dipping into, and that will have to do as my excuse for having reached its final essay only after several years of thinking and giving talks about the ideas set out now in this book. Taruskin argues there are no limits of principle that can be placed on the musical interpretation of a score, and that the worth of what a performer does with a score can only be judged by the listener (see also Chapters 6.19 and 19.2 here).[9] This may seem an insanely anarchic view to hold about classical music. But I hope as we work through the arguments that construct the case I make here, I may gradually persuade you that this is the only criterion that really counts. Or at any rate, if I fail at that, you may at least take away a more liberal view of what musicians are entitled to do when they use scores as a starting-point to make art with sound.

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[9] Taruskin, 'Setting Limits', 453–4. Taruskin also predates points I shall make below about obligations to the dead and living, about opera production, and in asking who benefits from repressing performer innovation.

2 The fabulous status quo

The drivers that make modern performance so effective, and the problems they bring.

Western classical music can—usually does—feel wonderful. Musicologists don't often say that—we're usually too busy being ironic, judiciously distanced, or just shy of being in love with this music[10]—but I think most people who work with it in any way do so, or began to do so, because it rewards them spiritually in ways that few experiences can equal. That it does so is thanks, in large part, to performers who, with astonishing reliability and skill, make inspiring and moving musical experiences starting from composers' scores.

To love these experiences in the first place, however, does require a certain degree of privilege. One has to feel that it is 'for people like me', and a great many people don't feel that. It excludes all too easily, for reasons that Christopher Small set out eloquently in one of the most salutary books on WCM (not WAM, other musics are also art), his 1998 *Musicking*.[11] It's not just that it happens in concert halls where middle-class people who can afford expensive tickets sit politely in silence for long periods of time, sometimes hours without moving or making a sound, while other middle-class people, in Edwardian costume, play expensive instruments brilliantly yet with as little movement or apparent emotional reaction as possible. (There's a stiff-upper-lipness about all that, a compulsory interiority, that is class-acquired.) On a deeper mental level, the kinds of prolonged intellectual and emotional journeys on which a listener allows themselves to be taken are themselves made possible through the education, experience and leisure that a background steeped in particular kinds of cultural and financial capital facilitates. WCM takes for granted ways of recognising, identifying with and responding to culture which can't be acquired in an instant, or at first exposure. To have the space to follow, one has to feel comfortable, entitled, and to an extent experienced. By experienced I do not mean educated in WCM. That's not necessary, and we'll look at the myth that it is later. But it does require exposure through repeated experiences of listening to such music, so that it becomes habitual and one starts to find ways of listening that allow one to make one's own sense of it at the same time as feeling that one belongs with it. The rituals that Small describes so vividly only make this harder. Widening the franchise for access to WCM is one of the potential benefits of the changes I'll be arguing for in this book.

When one has this financial, cultural and social access to WCM it's easy to feel that the experience of hearing this music can be remarkably powerful. It's customary to attribute this to those exceptional musicians we call 'the great composers': men (mostly, until very recently) with a particular skill at imagining wonderful music and writing down enough of what they imagined to enable a skilled performer to make that into sound that everybody else can hear and enjoy. We usually regard these sounds as the composers', and pay them and their heirs accordingly. But I and colleagues have argued, since around the turn of the century, that to see the composer as the only begetter is a mistake, a product of a far-reaching misunderstanding of what WCM is and does. Our case has been

[10] William Cheng makes exactly this point in *Loving Music Till It Hurts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 30.

[11] Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. 1st ed. (Middletown CT: Wesleyan). See also Bull, Anna. 2018. Class, Gender, and the "Imagined Futures" of Young Classical Musicians. In Dromey, Chris, and Julia Haferkorn. 2018. *The Classical Music Industry* (New York: Routledge), 79–95

that much of this communicative work is done by performers, who turn notes into sound with skill and expressive power that they alone provide and without which the notes are of limited interest. We'll look over the evidence for this in Chapters 3–6 below. Whether or not one agrees, there is little room for dispute about the level of skill shown by professional performers at the moment. And it's this that I really wish to emphasise in this chapter, not least because much of the rest of this book will ask challenging questions about the necessity for this particular approach to making music. But I hope never to lose sight of the extraordinary level of achievement that performers display every time they prepare, play or sing one of these scores.

Making music for a living, as we shall hear in Chapter 14, can be dispiriting, even damaging, psychologically as well as physically; but at its most rewarding, with the chance to choose what one plays, enough time to learn a score and to shape a performance, a comfortable environment and a responsive audience (and not all, perhaps none of these may be available), the experience of making music at a high level can also be deeply rewarding. In the best conditions one can enjoy the pleasure of mastering the notes together with experiencing the powerful feelings generated by the music one is creating with them. Add to this the intellectual fascination, felt simultaneously, of the structure and the historical and social context we believe is inscribed in it, associated by us with the sounds we make from it—all this from a repertoire that is interestingly varied because composition changes over time. In an ideal environment the physical, the intellectual and the emotional are all fully engaged, with music using more areas of the brain than almost anything else humans do.[12] The ability to play very well, and to concentrate as a listener (and, unless on auto-pilot, the performer is the closest listener), generates enormous pleasure and satisfaction, a sense that this is the way music should ideally be. This is particularly intense at the moment because from a technical perspective—meaning the ability to get around any number of notes elegantly at any speed—musicianship is so good, perhaps better than it has ever been. As Lisa McCormick has said, 'technical perfection has become so common that it is no longer considered a remarkable achievement.'[13]

What is it that makes performance so good at the moment? One key factor has been recording, which for a century has insisted on increasingly exact performances of scores (fearful that listeners would think anything else was a mistake) and at the same time has increased competition between performers, since each recorded version can be immediately compared with every other. (We shall look at the kinds of criticism this leads to in Chapter 9.) Similarly the business of music, of which recording is a major part, has become increasingly internationalised and thus homogenised. Competitions—in which, notoriously, the least controversial performance can often win[14]—are only the most obvious manifestation of this: it's felt also in the appearance of the same roster of artists wherever WCM is presented, a tendency to specialise in repertoire, widespread agreement on how each score should be performed which minimises the need for rehearsal and the payment of musicians that rehearsal entails. And so on. Recording and internationalisation cause each generation of performers to become even better than the last at producing exciting performances of the same realisations of the same scores. Characteristics of modern performance style therefore include reliability, blend, and synchronisation that nevertheless allows considerable expressivity

[12] Koelsch, Stefan. 2012. *Brain & Music* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell), x.
[13] McCormick, Lisa. 2015. *Performing Civility: International Competitions in Classical Music* (Cambridge University Press), 175.
[14] Ibid., 96. McCormick, Lisa. 2009. Higher, Faster, Louder: Representations of the International Music Competition. *Cultural Sociology* 3(1), 5–30, at 13–14.

because change (rubato, loudness) is agreed and precisely timed and graded, allowing ensembles to behave as one player, to the extent that orchestras (Spira Mirabilis, St Paul Chamber Orchestra, outstanding examples) can now operate highly effectively with no conductor.

So yes, standards are astonishingly high, but behind idealistic talk of artistry musicians must always strive, in the ruthless neo-liberalism that the music business so efficiently performs, to out-play their rivals in fluency, reliability, punctuality, collegiality, health, good looks, and musical affect, while being careful not to change the agreed character or meanings of a score.[15] Being able to play anything perfectly, fluently and safely within current performance style is simply a necessary starting-point before artistic virtuosity comes into play. And so the modern musician is required to be both human and superhuman, expressive and brilliant, moving and thrilling; no longer one at the expense of the other, but both on every occasion, if they are to rise above the graduate average and attract attention. How much stress does this induce? How many are made ill? How many drop out? Is virtuosity simply the market doing its ruthless business, selecting the strongest and weeding out difference, the absence of which only makes the task of differentiating oneself harder? Does the push-pull of virtuosity and conformity do more harm than it's artistically worth? Does anyone care, as long as it's financially productive for those who pay the bills? Is it reasonable to demand that performers feed our need to be astonished and at the same time persuade us that they are bringing us closer to the composer? Or does this simply intensify the cognitive dissonance which, as we shall see, lies at the heart of the classical music business, setting up an impossible conflict between an artistic belief system and a free-market economy? Whatever else it may be, modern musicianship involves political and ethical issues to which we shall need to return repeatedly as different aspects of the business bring us back to them.

Classical music, then, is bedevilled in training and practice by problems of conformity: conformity to the imagined wishes of the dead composer; conformity to current norms and to the need, if one wishes to be employable, to sound the values of the musical state more thrillingly and more persuasively than one's competitors. With this impossible demand come stress and other kinds of performance-related ill-health. The culprits are the belief-system and the financial model. Of these two, the belief-system is the easier to address. We need to do this. We owe it to performers to think about their lives, not just as professionals but also as children. What is the point of spending eighteen to twenty of the most difficult years of anyone's life learning to make performances that have already been made over and over before you? For the sake of children's health and mental wellbeing, quite apart from all the other considerations, it's imperative that we turn the education of classical musicians into something collaborative and creative, so that we can turn concert life into something less competitive, less predictable and less routine.

None of this is meant as a call for less brilliant performance, or not unless there are remarkable compensations in other musical respects. But a case may be made—and I'll try to make it—for performances that use the technical superabundance of current classical performers to more varied and imaginative musical ends. The past century has seen the consolidation and teaching of a way of playing notes that produces these pleasures reliably and repeatedly. But what else might it do? It's easy to see such a question as poised at the top of a steep slippery slope. When performance is this good it's easily mistaken for being ideal, the pinnacle of centuries of development. And it's easy to

[15] These next two paragraphs appeared first in Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2018. The Danger of Virtuosity. *Musicae Scientiae* 24 (4), 558-61 at 560. They are reused here with some small changes.

assume that this is how the scores need to go, because nothing else, we feel, could possibly be as good. And it is magnificent, let's be clear about that. Many buts will follow: nothing I say, however, is intended to exclude what we do now. And yet, there is a danger that such competence and unanimity (in ensemble and in belief) is taken as an absolute, as outside time, as permanently ideal. And the better it is, the more easily it's mistaken for that, and seen as the only option; and the more institutionalised it becomes, the more enshrined in teaching and assessment, the more legislated for and the more policed, the harder it is to envisage alternatives, and the harder it becomes to escape such policing and self-policing in order to explore alternatives.

New ways of reading these scores are possible, and the purpose of this book is to show what some might be like, and why we would all benefit from being able to go in search of them.

Continue to Chapter 3: 'Performance style changes over time'

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3 Performance changes over time

Classical musicians are brought up to believe that there is *broadly* one proper performance of any score, the performance its composer imagined; and that it is their job to produce that; and also that that is, as far as humanly possible, what they are doing. I say 'broadly' because musicians are also encouraged to believe that individuality in a performer is desirable, that they should each have something unique to offer in their reading of a score. But the constraints around that freedom of interpretation are very narrowly drawn. Go far from the norm, even in quite small details of timing (rubato) or emphasis,[16] and you will be criticised.

Performers know this all too well, for they've been pushed back at the boundaries of those norms—by teachers, conductors, examiners, adjudicators, critics: the gatekeepers to the profession—all their lives. The critic Joan Chissell in 1968 found even Jaqueline du Pré and Daniel Barenboim—whom one might imagine were about as safe from this kind of boundary-drawing as one could hope to get—'self-indulgent enough in rhythm and tempo to be un-Brahmsian' in the Brahms cello sonatas.[17] This is particularly ironic given Brahms's own preferences for far greater flexibility than this, as we shall see in a moment. Chissell's comment suggests that what seemed Brahmsian then is not what seems Brahmsian now. And it gives a vivid sense of the way in which any performer at any point in their career can be censured for stepping even slightly out of the narrowly-defined norms imagined as proper to each composer, sometimes even to each score. We must remember, too, that all the while musicians, reinforced by the rest of the gatekeeping community, are teaching the same beliefs about what is proper—albeit with silently shifting practices—to the next generation, aiming to ensure that strict norms are passed strictly on.

I say 'silently shifting practices' because of the awkward fact, that's become increasingly obvious thanks to easy availability of an abundance of recordings made over the past 120 years, that performance style is actually constantly changing.

Performers, and many listeners, are increasingly aware of that now; but not everyone has yet appreciated the huge implications of performance style change for WCM beliefs and practices. First of all, what we think is proper to a composer or a score is already slightly different from what our teachers' generation thought. And over a century, as recordings show, these differences accumulate to such an extent that musicianship becomes in some respects unrecognisable. (There'll be examples of this in a moment, and in Chapter 4.) Secondly, while there will certainly have been a manner of performance expected by the composer, and during their composition the notes will necessarily have been imagined with that in mind, it's clear that these scores we feel we know and love have been performed in many other ways, ways that if you go back far enough are radically other; and each generation has found these increasingly different manners to be perfectly suited to what they hear as the essential nature of the music. The notion of a style proper to a composer and a score

[16] '…any good young instrumentalist knows how each piece is expected to be played, right down to bowings, dynamic marks, and places to breathe.' Haynes, Bruce. 2007. *The End of Early Music: A Period Performer's History of Music for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press), 6.
[17] *The Gramophone*, December 1968, 854.

looks decidedly shaky when one takes this into account: it looks as if there must be many different ways in which these same scores can make convincing music.

In that case, what is all this gatekeeping for? Why are critics (not to mention teachers and all the others) damning performances as unsuited to the composer when clearly whole generations of musicians find them (or have found, or will find them) highly suitable? (We'll consider this in depth in Parts 2 and (from psychological perspectives) 4.) Only if you believe that there are ethical reasons for playing or singing exactly what the composer expected his performers to play and sing is your choice of performance style a matter on which gatekeepers have any business trying to rule, if many other styles work equally convincingly. That ethical case for strictly historical performance is hard to make (we'll look at it more closely in Chapters 6, 11 & 19), and if you don't accept it—which one hardly can and still believe in the value of current performances of any but the latest scores—then it's clear that musical meaning must be contingent on period culture.

Performance, in other words, inevitably changes in order for scores to continue make sense to new generations. Which is not to say that other generations' styles cannot still be appreciated. The enthusiastic market for early recorded performances proves that even styles very different from our own can make excellent sense to modern listeners, with a bit of exposure. In any case—and this is the third key conclusion from performance style change—whatever you believe about the special value of original performance, it's clear from the extent to which the character of scores has changed over time, with changes in performance style, that performers are always doing much more of the musical work, and the composer much less, than we've been led to believe.

To make all this more tangible let's listen to a genuine historical performance, Mary Garden singing Debussy's 'L'ombre des abres', recorded in 1904. https://youtu.be/LObpqz7JP_k

Debussy is playing the piano, accompanying one of his favourite singers in one of his own songs. You can't get much more historical than that. But who in our culture of historically informed performance today is singing Debussy in anything like this manner? You couldn't get a booking if you sang like this. So much for performing the composer's expectations! Whatever HIP enthusiasts may claim about the performance of Baroque and Classical scores, it seems that once we reach 20th-century repertoire, for which recordings actually survive and for the first time we really know how music sounded, suddenly no one wants to hear historically informed performance any more. Why not? Why does it suddenly become unacceptable the moment we can hear it?

Where shall I begin? The voices aren't synchronised, which is one of the most crass faults in any modern performance, chords are spread, there's wide rubato and portamento, none of it notated, which to us would seem to rule it out as intended. But there it is. These features that we now consider unmusical were essential to ideal musicianship a century ago. People make excuses for ignoring that evidence: the performers were old, they say, or the recording wasn't very good. But these excuses don't stand up when one looks more closely. The performers were often, as in this Debussy case, the best and most authoritative; the recordings are quite good and numerous and consistent enough to show that the rules of musical performance 100 years ago were simply different from today. You can make the same case for the singing of Verdi and Wagner. There is ample recorded evidence. But no one wants to copy it in the modern opera house.

Here is some Mozart playing that in one sense is closer to Mozart than anything else we shall ever know. https://youtu.be/ADxuDONsguY

Again, there is wide dislocation of left and right hands, with the bass notes well in advance of the melodic line. (In the YouTube video it's possible to see them punched separately near the right-hand edge of the roll.) Chords notated in the score are arpeggiated more often than not. In the melodic runs there is *inégalité* quite as strong as we expect to hear in a modern performance of French Baroque music, and there is also improvised melodic decoration, which is perhaps the least shocking feature to a period-instrument performer though still far from usual in modern pianism. All this in Mozart, for whom we think a very regular, even style is most appropriate.

The pianist, Carl Reinecke, was born in 1824, the year in which Beethoven's 9th symphony and Schubert's Death & the Maiden Quartet were first performed. It's hard to know which era Reinecke's pianism represents; but he became a mature artist in the 1840s, and as most players don't radically change the way they play to follow their younger contemporaries,[18] Reinecke's playing probably tells us something about pianism around the middle of the 19th century. And so if you want to believe that modern fortepiano playing has accurately recreated Mozartian, Beethovenian or Schubertian playing then you have to argue that there was an undocumented revolution in pianism between the 1820s and the 1840s; a revolution that takes you from nice, neat playing to this, all in twenty years. I don't think that's very likely. What does this imply for the historical playing of late Classical and early Romantic composers? That it was a lot more like Reinecke that we might wish it to be.[19]

Just how radically the character of a score, and of a composer, has changed over time is shown vividly by these next examples of Brahms playing. First listen to Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli (1920–95) in Brahms's Ballade Op. 10 No. 4 in B. https://youtu.be/KNqjr8Z_O2I

The video is particularly interesting because of the way Michelangeli prepares himself to play, raising his hands to the keyboard and then taking a further 13 seconds to put himself into the right frame of mind for a performance of this little piece that looks almost like a religious ritual, praying over the text before sounding it as deeply serious and profound. But listen now to a pianist, Ilona Eibenschütz (1872-1967) who knew Brahms, whom Brahms admired, to whom he first played one of his last sets of piano pieces, allowing her to give their first performance in London. He is reported to have said, "She is the pianist I best like to hear playing my works".[20] This is her performance of this B-major Ballade, made much later in life (in 1952); but, given that 'her 1962 recording of Brahms's Waltz, Op. 39 no. 15 is remarkably like her 1903 recording of the same piece',[21] it's reasonable to suppose that

[18] The case for this is made in Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2009b. Recordings and Histories of Performance Style. In ed. Nicholas Cook et al., *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music* (Cambridge University Press), 246-62.

[19] For an excellent and much more detailed discussion of another Reinecke recording, and of its implications now, see Peres Da Costa, Neal. 2019. Carl Reinecke's Performance of his Arrangement of the Second Movement from Mozart's Piano Concerto k. 488. Some Thoughts on Style and the Hidden Messages in Musical Notation. In ed. Thomas Gartmann & Daniel Allenbach, *Rund um Beethoven: Interpretationsforschung haute* (Schliengen: Argus), 114–49. www.hkb-interpretation.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Publikationen/Bd.14/HKB14_07_PeresDaCosta_114-149.pdf

[20] Allan Evans at http://arbiterrecords.org/catalog/brahms-behind-the-notes/

[21] Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2009a. *The Changing Sound of Music: approaches to the study of recorded musical performances* (London: CHARM), chapter 6, paragraph 18.

this performance of the B Major Ballade reflects the way she played to Brahms: https://youtu.be/mLGIRHCPqN4

It's hard to imagine any score having a more different character from the modern 'Brahmsian' reading reverentially presented by Michelangeli. It's much faster and lighter, almost salon music. That Brahms himself played with great flexibility is suggested by what can still be heard on the very damaged recording of him playing his Hungarian Dance No 1 in g minor that survives from 1889 and is confirmed by comments of his contemporaries.[22] Anna Scott has shown in great detail and beyond any doubt, that the modern Brahms sound characterised by control and gravitas is far away from the Brahms known to his contemporaries. And yet both seem to have been felt as entirely suited to the nature of his scores, as have intermediate approaches to Brahms in the intervening 130 years (Chissell's, du Pré's, and many others'). Once again we have to admit that what we think of as proper to a composer is a modern fabrication, and that other approaches have worked just as well, including, of course, the very different approach of the composer and his contemporaries. It seems implausible to argue (and very few modern Brahms performers would wish for a moment to argue) that the way Brahms was played in the 1890s is to be preferred. But nor does it make any sense to argue that it was worse, or misguided, unless we want to argue the same for the way we play our own contemporaries today. You could make that case, I suppose, and claim that it takes 100 years to find the ideal way to play a composer, or even that we get better and better all the time, in which case roll on 2100's view of Brahms. But I'm not sure that it's very helpful.

In any case, the enthusiastic CD and download market for early recordings has shown that, with exposure to the performances of earlier times, we can learn to love them, understanding their rhetoric, their habits of style and expressivity, and broadening our own sense of how scores can be made beautiful and meaningful. And that should by now be starting to spread respect for late-19th/early 20th-century performers and for the very different approaches to expressivity that they and their audiences loved. (There are many more examples and more discussion in my online book, *The Changing Sound of Music*.)

A couple of modern pianists have made thorough attempts to copy early recorded styles, Sigurd Slåttebrekk in Grieg and Anna Scott in Brahms.[23] Rather more have borrowed from early recorded styles without thoroughly changing their own. Copying exactly—which you might think would be essential for anyone who actually believes in Historically Informed Performance (HIP)—is hugely demanding: it involves giving up important aspects of one's own musicianship in order to embody another's. For it does have to be embodied, learned by one's own body so that it feels natural as one plays, in order to produce convincing performances. It's an act of self-denial and generosity, but one that allows us to hear performances of scores, as if by their contemporaries, that were never recorded at the time (both Slåttebrekk and Scott offer examples, and it's wonderful to have them.) Again it teaches us that it has been and still is possible to make persuasive music with radically different sets of assumptions about what is musical. And that therefore—and this is the point that

[22] Musgrave, Michael. 2003. Early Trends in the Performance of Brahms's Piano Music. In ed. Michael Musgrave and Bernard D. Sherman, *Performing Brahms: Early Evidence of Performance Style* (Cambridge University Press), 302-26.

[23] Scott, Anna. 2014. Romanticizing Brahms: Early Recordings and the Reconstruction of Brahmsian Identity (PhD thesis, University of Leiden), 135–43.

really matters for us—there must be many other sets of assumptions, radically different again, that we could use to make persuasive performances of these same scores today.

What you cannot do (though many teachers try), is to argue on the one hand that early recorded performances are worse than modern performances, and argue at the same time that being faithful to composers' intentions produces the best performances. You can't have it both ways. Either Debussy knew best how his music should sound, and we should be copying it, or he didn't, and we shouldn't. It's obvious that Debussy *expected* his scores to sound a certain way – something like we heard earlier, shaped by the performance style around him. But we also know, from 100 years of performance since then, that those same scores can work very well performed very differently. And this is obviously true for all music. It follows that Debussy's intentions or expectations would not necessarily produce better performances of his scores than any others. So it's not a question of which performance style you use, set in which historical period: what matters is how well you use that style – any performance style – to make music with a score. Each generation finds new ways of being musical, and there's nothing inherently better or worse about any of their solutions. In every generation superlative performers make superlative music with these same scores.

But, of course, as taste in performance and therefore performance style changes, so the character of the notes changes, and thus the meaning of the scores changes, and our sense of what the composers are like changes with them. That's the nature of classical music. It changes over time. It's not like a painting or sculpture, that looks the same but is understood differently. Music sounds different too, because it's made in performance, and only in performance.

With all this in mind, and taken seriously, there are simply no grounds, historical or ethical or musical, for disapproving of this:

Monteverdi, 'Zefiro torna', Paul Derenne and Hugues Cuénod (tenors), Nadia Boulanger (piano), unnamed (cello). Recorded, Paris 11th February 1937. HMV DB 5039 https://youtu.be/VyigIcK8bwk

The style of singing is unlike anything that a contemporary early music group would tolerate for a second. And then there's the piano accompaniment, in Monteverdi! And yet, it's very moving; or so I find it, and it's been continuously admired, and available in reissues, for over eighty years. A great performance of a score produces deeply rewarding experiences in unprejudiced listeners, regardless of when or how it is made.

So I think it's impossible to continue to delude oneself about what is right or wrong, or to allow a priori beliefs about right and wrong to inflect one's responses to performance, once one has thought carefully about the implications of early recordings.

Here is another example to which, I suggest, there are no good grounds to object. (Just listen to the miraculous triple layering of the sound, and the balancing act that's involved in keeping it steady.)

Bach/Siloti, Prelude in b minor (derived from Bach Prelude in e minor, WTC I, BWV 855a). Emil Gilels (piano). Recorded as part of a concert in Moscow, 1978. https://youtu.be/Yu06WnXlPCY

The temptation with Gilels' performance of Siloti's rescoring of Bach's notes (I'm choosing my words carefully here) is to call it an arrangement, and thereby try to put it in a safe place that doesn't threaten beliefs about right and wrong. But you'll recall that there are two different scorings of this piece by Bach. Are we supposed to believe that either of those is original, whereas any other is an

arrangement? And that each of those by Bach will somehow inevitably produce a more powerful listener experience than any other? I think it's very hard to argue that persuasively in the face of a performance like this. Was there ever a more riveting and moving performance of a score based around those notes?

Musicians don't spend twenty years training to do history; they make music, the most powerfully expressive music that they can. That's what music is for. To generate deeply engaging listener experiences. And, as we've seen, that can be done in an unknowable number of quite different ways, most of which we have not yet heard.

It's also becoming clearer from these examples how much of the creative work that's involved in making music is done by the performer, not the composer. We'll look at this in more depth in Chapter 5, but whatever this music *is* depends on how it sounds; how it sounds has changed over time, because it has so much more to do with the performance, and so much less is inherent in the notes and the relationships between them, than music theory and music teaching have been claiming since at least the rise of music analysis in the late 19th century.

It's tempting to suppose that a great composition is one whose score can give rise to innumerable radically different and deeply persuasive performances.[24] And in that case (in *any* case) musicians should be allowed to be much more interested than they are in making radically different but deeply persuasive performances from the scores we admire. Continuing to make basically the same performance over and over again, which is what performers are trained and paid to do now, tells us nothing more about the piece. We have enough typical performances now. More than enough. It's time to explore, to ask what else these scores can do.

I think we've heard enough, and I've said enough, to show that the way we think about what is proper in musical performance, and the way we train musicians to provide it, is seriously at odds with the evidence and with reason. It is simply wrong to train students to believe that there is a broadly correct way to perform these scores, or a best approach to being musical. In fact about the only thing that's true about current ideology in classical music training is that you'd better play the recommended way if you want work. And that itself shows the measure of control and coercion that infects the music business. That if you play or sing differently you won't get work is the sign of a ruthlessly policed state.

That being the case, it's time to take a fresh and sceptical look at a wider selection of the many delusions that help to maintain the belief-system, or ideology, that underpins our current teaching, practice and gatekeeping of WCM.

Continue to Chapter 4: 'Identity'

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Further reading

[24] So tempting that I said it myself in an earlier draft! On reflection I don't see the evidence yet: it's a nice idea, but a way of testing it needs to be worked out.

Da Costa, Neal Peres. 2012. *Off the Record: Performing Practices in Romantic Piano Playing* (New York: Oxford University Press).

Day, Timothy. 2000. *A Century of Recorded Music: Listening to Musical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

Hamilton, Kenneth. 2008. *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press).

Kennaway, George. 2014. *Playing the Cello, 1780-1930* (Farnham: Ashgate).

Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2009a. *The Changing Sound of Music: approaches to the study of recorded musical performances* (London: CHARM).

Philip, Robert. 1992. *Early Recordings and Musical Style: Changing Tastes in Instrumental Performance, 1900–1950* (Cambridge University Press).

4 Performing identity

As performance style changes over decades, so score and composer *identity* change.

Before we start to look at some of the specific delusions on which WCM ideology rests (Chapters 5 and 6) it will be helpful to consider for a moment the identity of music at the level of a piece and a composer. I'm using 'identity' here to mean one's sense of who one is, or tries to be, the values one holds and performs, and the tastes and behaviours and interests that both reflect who one is and signal it to others. Most of the research on identity in this sense concerns (typically, living) people, but it's useful to apply a similar notion to (typically, dead) composers and their scores to the extent that it reflects who they seem to be, and to the extent that each composer and each score seems to have an identity of their own. In this latter sense, identity is close to character in the descriptive (more than moral) sense. In all these senses, identity is inextricably bound up with performance. One performs one's own identity and recognises others' through their performances of themselves. And so it's quite easy, even unavoidable, to experience composers and specific pieces as having recognisably different identities which one perceives through performances. The fact that music is made by performers introduces another partner into the process, and so the identity of the performer can in theory play a significant role in forming the identity of a piece and, through it (and other performances), of its composer. This is what WCM ideology seeks to control, pursuing the fantasy that performance can be transparent, leaving the listener in direct communication with the composer. There will be much more to say about this later.

In a helpful study of the performer's experience of musical identity, John Rink discusses Edward Cone's notion of 'the musical persona', which is somewhat similar to what I have in mind here in that he sees each composition as having a unique persona.[25] His view is that the performer must (i.e. has an obligation to) recognise this persona and perform it. My view, however, is that, since it cannot be found save through (real or imagined) performance, it is constructed by performances in the first place, from the first performance onwards, and can equally be changed by them, and over time inevitably is. I think the history of changing performance style bears that out. Cone of course recognises that the performer contributes, but has to argue that that contribution must be restricted to the personification of the music's own persona, put there by the composer. I argue during this book that the process is much more collaborative; that the size and shape of the field of possibilities for the affordances of any score cannot (at the moment, perhaps ever) be known; and that performers may always, if they wish, be explorers at and beyond the known boundaries of that field. They have much more to show us about the identity of a piece, indeed about the variety of identities it may sound, than has been recognised. The identity imagined, even performed, by the composer, each time they imagine or perform that piece, is just one of those.

So what I mean by the identity of a piece involves the character of music normally arising from performances of its score. The identity of the composer, in this sense, lies in the character of that

[25] Rink, John. 2017. Impersonating the Music in Performance. In Raymond MacDonald, David J. Hargreaves and Dorothy Miell (eds.), *Handbook of Musical Identities* (New York: Oxford University Press), 345–63 at 357.

composer's music as perceived through performances of their scores.[26] Character is obviously a complex amalgam and sequence of effects that change from moment to moment throughout a performance, and so I am using the word here in a more amorphous sense that refers to an overall impression left in the listener's memory by performances of a score. That is likely to change over a lifetime, and change very much over longer periods. Focusing at the level of composer, one wouldn't think of the identity of Wagner's music in the same way if one stopped after Lohengrin; and the impression left by even that slice of his work is unlikely to be very similar to that left on Wagner's contemporaries in 1850, or musicians in 1950, and so on. But whatever one thought about his musical identity it would be inevitably and substantially determined by the way his scores have been performed recently; the way one is used to hearing them. Similarly, what we're used to hearing in performances of 'L'ombre des arbres' or 'Zefiro torna' (Chapter 3 above) powerfully shapes our sense of the identity of those scores and everything we think and write about it. I've looked at this in more depth in a study of changing performances of Schubert and Boulez.[27]

Comparing recordings of Boulez's own *Pli selon Pli*, made in 1969, 1981 and 2001, shows very clearly how he increasingly used the orchestra to link together adjacent events in the score that had previously been separate, paralleling radical changes in his work as a composer from pointillist to harmonic and linear thought; and also how the sounds he generated through digital synthesis at IRCAM begin to appear in his balancing of orchestral colours in the 2001 recording. It seems that his conducting and composition style developed together, performing that changing identity in both domains. Of course, at the same time he was changing the character of other scores he conducted, mostly by other composers covering an increasingly wide period of musical history, getting them to reflect his new priorities. No one in 1969—least of all Boulez who had more than enough intellect, and was always ready, to explain his current view as unavoidably right—could have anticipated the Boulez of 2001; and it is unrealistic, when these musical worlds are so different, to assume that there are not equally different other identities that this score can persuasively adopt, just as we know there are for everything else he conducted. The article went on to show that the way Boulez performed in turn influenced the way commentators wrote about his music, and that both reflected more general shifts in musical thought.

The Schubert case is similar. Looking at how performance changed on either side of the Second War it's easy to see how writing about Schubert song followed on behind, turning an innocent songster into the victim and chronicler of psycho-sexual trauma. This is another huge change, spread over half a century, in which the identity of a composer and his music has shifted by an unimaginable distance. Both were entirely convincing in their different music-cultural contexts; both can be entirely convincing to listeners now provided that their expectations are not fixed by ideology or by taste that is too narrowly period-bound.

I've written elsewhere about Barber's Adagio for strings, once merely 'serious', now used as a performance of deepest national grief.[28] And Anna Scott has written with great insight about identity

[26] The sense that a composer's personal (autobiographical) character is expressed in their compositions is something else. On the 19th-century construction of this idea see: Bonds, Mark Evan. 2020. *The Beethoven Syndrome: Hearing Music as Autobiography* (New York: Oxford University Press).

[27] Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2009c. Musicology and performance. In ed. Zdravko Blazekovic, *Music's Intellectual History: Founders, Followers & Fads* (New York: RILM), 791-804.

[28] Warren (2014), 72, reports that Barber's Adagio 'has been rated 'world's saddest sounding classical music' (BBC 2004; Higgins 2006).' But compare Desmond Shawe-Taylor responding in 1945 to the first recording and

in Brahms, on the basis of the changing character of performances of his late piano music.[29] Modern Brahmsian identity, she argues, is characterised by control (as opposed to Romantic, in other words Wagnerian, disorder), health (as opposed to Romantic sickness), restraint (as opposed to Romantic excess), leading

> to performances of his works that are described as intellectual, serious, profound, restrained, structural, stoic and spiritual; while his corporeal control is communicated by performances described as robust, solid, healthy, German, modest, masculine, athletic, robust, vital, vigorous and powerful. (Scott 2014, 60)

Few of these adjectives can sensibly be claimed—at any rate not by a modern listener—for the performances by the pianists, particularly Ilona Eibenschütz and Etelka Freund, whom he is said to have admired in his music, or for his own recording in so far as one can make it out.[30] The scores haven't changed. What's changed are the ways they are imagined and sounded by performers and thus imagined and understood by listeners. And along with them inevitably there must have been change also in the kind of imaginative musician Brahms seemed to be. Eibenschütz's and Freund's are not the only Brahmses from that period. There seem to have been other, more regular identities for Brahms made by other, more regular players, who may have included Clara Schumann (Scott 2014). But we have Brahms's apparent approval of these two, and that may give them, at any rate for his final years, special status if we are interested in the composer's wishes. As Scott says,

> All of this leads even the most ethically inclined pianists to shape the detail and structure of Brahms's works in temporally, tonally, expressively and technically controlled ways that likely never occurred to the composer, while still believing in the historical gravitas of their performances. … This impulse to protect Brahms's identity and through it our own however, informs a fundamental absurdity in modern Brahmsian thought: namely, that if inner and outer restraint are the most essential indicators of historically-valid Brahms style, then the composer and his own pupils could be considered to be the most *un*Brahmsian pianists of all. (Scott 2014, ix-x)

But at least as interesting, in fact more so for the purposes of this book, is the coexistence of substantially different approaches during Brahms's lifetime. Their age seems to have been more tolerant of diversity, when it comes to composer and score identities, than we are. There may be a lesson for us there too.

One can see in these examples, and their relationship to their admirers and contexts, an interpenetration of many different aspects of identity:

- personal identity, the sense of oneself

finding that Barber had 'a charming, serious simplicity': Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2012. Compositions, scores, performances, meanings, *Music Theory Online* 18(1), para 3.10. Warren, Jeff. 2014. *Music and Ethical Responsibility* (Cambridge University Press).

[29] Scott, Anna. 2014. Romanticizing Brahms: Early Recordings and the Reconstruction of Brahmsian Identity (PhD thesis, University of Leiden).

[30] On the CD accompanying Musgrave, Michael. 2003. Early Trends in the Performance of Brahms's Piano Music. In ed. Michael Musgrave and Bernard D. Sherman, *Performing Brahms: Early Evidence of Performance Style* (Cambridge University Press), 302-26.

- the sense of the music with which one engages as a reflection of oneself[31]
- the sense in which experiencing music changes one[32]
- and therefore the sense in which a changed performance feels as if it is attempting to change one's self, to force oneself into alignment with the score's changed identity
- or even in which a performance may challenge one's sense of self by seeming to switch allegiances to some other person more like it

Both the last two points may tend to lead one to blame the performer, because these are changes that go deep into our selves. When one performance may confirm that all is well with the world, another may seem to turn it upside down. Music is a serious business, then, requiring us to attend seriously to difference. One has to decide whether to resist or listen, with listening's potential to change oneself. We'll see later just how much intolerance even small differences in performance can trigger, and how institutionalised such resistance to change has become (chapter 9). Why these reactions are so strong we shall return to near the end (chapters 29–32). But even now, you can see how dangerous musical performance can be to any view of the world in which we are supposed to know how all these scores must sound.

Continue to Chapter 5: 'The actual music, the music itself, musical'

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[31] Influentially discussed in DeNora, Tia. 2000. *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge University Press); and DeNora, Tia. 2017. Music-Ecology and Everyday Action: Creating, Changing, and Contesting Identities. In Raymond MacDonald, David J. Hargreaves and Dorothy Miell (eds.), *Handbook of Musical Identities* (New York: Oxford University Press), 46–62.

[32] Musicians' experience in relation to identity during performance is well-discussed in Rink 2017 (note 1 above).

5 The (actual) music, the music itself, musical

What do these phrases really mean? What kind of work do they try to do? What weaknesses in thinking about the nature of classical music do they hide?

Let's begin our exploration of the delusions that underpin WCM ideology by looking at some clichés of musical discourse.

1. **'The actual music' and 'the music itself'**

'The actual music' or 'the music itself' is a concept that I find constantly cropping up in discussions with students, usually because we are discussing performance-made meaning, the things scores seem to suggest in varied performances. What people want in such talk is a way of excluding performance variation in order to deal only with something people feel must lie behind it, something more than simply the score, something that includes form and meaning, yet precedes performance. Although one never gets a convincing answer to the questions, 'What is the actual music in this case? Where is it?', people still tend to believe that somewhere this level must exist. And it's not hard to understand why. If you're brought up as a musician to believe that every score encodes the music its composer imagined, and that a good performance recreates that, then you are bound to feel that 'the actual music'—some underlying core—is there somewhere behind the score; and the thought that it might not be is quite frightening: it seems to deny everything one's been taught to believe about both the nature of what one is dealing with and one's mission as a performer.

'The music itself' is a powerful concept with a strong tendency to exercise its power over interpretation. Once you're persuaded that there is an unchanging core that contains the essential identity of a piece of music then you have to accept, when you perform that piece, that you must at the very least fully perform all of that core. Or if you don't you must expect people to complain that something vital is missing. But what is it? What does it consist of? In practice, no one knows. If it's just the notes in the score then the concept has no purpose. And so it's an idea that's available to be used by anyone (but typically a teacher, a critic or a music analyst) who wishes to claim that something they feel is essential really is a key ingredient and must always be experienced in any performance. It's coercive, in other words: it aims to force others to conform to one's own understanding. It's a way of turning a feeling about a piece into a directive that claims an objective, authoritative basis.

Suzanne Cusick objects to talk of 'the music itself' on several grounds linked to ways in which musical discourse is normatively masculine and patriarchal.[33] She cites Marcia Citron's analysis of the gendered nature of the almost equally coercive concept 'absolute music' to argue that 'the music itself' 'has always been both a gendered and a political entity.'(493) I don't disagree (except with the word 'entity': more of that in due course); and although I'm going to come to normativity and

[33] Cusick, Suzanne G. 1999. Gender, Musicology, and Feminism. In Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (eds), *Rethinking Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 471–98.

patriarchy later in another context where they are especially obvious I don't discount the insidious way in which 'the music itself', in functioning as an authority beyond question or individual interpretation, takes on, and draws power from, characteristics of patriarchy. In Cusick's closely argued conclusion, 'immersion in and identification with 'the music itself' provide us with a sonic experience of the middle-class self…, a sonic model of the middle-class's image of god.'(495) This helps to deepen and substantiate Christopher Small's view of WCM as sounding the values of white, middle-class westerners.[34] We shall come back to it in Chapters 30 and 32 when we look at ways in which WCM is understood in terms of religious belief and attachment.

Richard Taruskin, a few years earlier, described 'the music itself' as 'a *cordon sanitaire*, a quarantine staking out a decontaminated space within which music can be composed, performed and listened to in a cultural and historical vacuum, this is, in perfect sterility.'[35] This aspect of the notion concerns the way in which it seeks to protect a space—a favourite space for music theorists—in which the notes talk to each other, according to 'purely' musical rules, without concern or need to consider anything those notes might evoke or resemble: abstract or 'absolute' music, uncontaminated by imagination or performance. We shall look at another of these quarantines later when we come back to 'arrangements'; but this one is even more insidious because it does so much political work in disempowering performance or even imagined sound in the making of musical identity (as if there could be music without at least imagined sound). Taruskin observes how this kind of work is done in the case of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, 'of all things'. It is indeed hard to think of any piece less sensibly separated from the impressions it produces in listeners' imaginations. But that itself goes to show how ruthlessly the notion of 'the music itself' operates: if it can appropriate *The Rite of Spring* without raising a critical eyebrow, what can't it do?

Henry Kingsbury, in his classic 1988 book on conservatoire culture, noticed that there were several different ways in which staff and students used the notion of 'music',

> and yet each sense of the word is characteristically used with a particularly charged intensity (as though affirming a sacred or quasisacred belief) or as an implicitly accepted *terra firma* reality. When one asks what it is that conservatory students and teachers are talking about when they refer to music, the music itself, or the actual music, one answer is that to a considerable extent they're talking about *each other*… they are talking about intercontextualized, configured social relationships.[36]

What he means here is partly that the same word has different meanings in different kinds of discussion, and that everyone knows immediately which is meant because they have all learned to make the same assumptions as they have learned to act as musicians. So 'the music' in one context means 'the score', which is a very curious mapping, unusually strong in English. French does not confuse to a similar extent 'la partition' with 'la musique'; nor Italian 'la partitura' with 'la musica'; nor German 'die Partitur' with 'die Musik'; but you can see how easy it is to accept that confusion once you believe, and everyone agrees (because it's constantly discussed) that there is 'music itself'

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[34] Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. 1st ed. (Middletown CT: Wesleyan), especially his ch. 12.

[35] Taruskin, Richard. 1995. A Myth of the Twentieth Century: The Rite of Spring, the Tradition of the New, and "The Music Itself", *Modernism/modernity* 2(1), 5–6.

[36] Kingsbury, Henry. 1998. *Music, Talent, and Performance: a Conservatory Cultural System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 158.

independent of and preceding performance. ‘The music’ in this sense is not the score, but something more complex and meaningful yet at the same time pure and essential, transmitted by the score and yet somehow independent of sound, created, unchanging, eternal. Once a culture agrees this it is talking, in effect, about something godlike. That’s what Kingsbury means by ‘affirming a sacred or quasisacred belief’. So in coming down to reality, and asking what this actual music consists of, and where it is to be found, one is already close to blaspheming. That is how the concept is protected from scrutiny. It’s so well-embedded through repetition during training, and so sanctified through mystical valuation and suggestion, that it is almost safe from challenge. But not quite.

For what this kind of talk really concerns is whether people are agreeing that what they hear is what they ought to hear. Has the performer made the music in such a way as to reach and reveal the music itself? What that music itself really is is something on which musicians believe they agree at a particular place and time, even though they can’t tell you what it is. Still less can they tell whether musicians at other places and times would have agreed; yet that question never arises because it’s assumed to be something that never changes. What we’re dealing with here is another way of talking about what is agreed to be the proper character for a score. It’s a way of sanctifying what’s proper at the moment. Kingsbury (1988, 162–3) illustrated this using a criticism of Horowitz compared to Cortot, identifying three components of ‘the pure presence of the music itself’: 1) ‘A proper relationship of respect from the artistic performer for revered composer’, 2) ‘a perceived affinity of the performer’s style with currently prevalent norms of performance,’ and 3) ‘a shared understanding of interpretive style between the performer and the critic’ [or indeed, I would add, the teacher or any musically trained interlocutor who shares this kind of specialist upbringing]. Essentially, you know that someone has got down to the music itself when you hear it. In other words, it has everything to do with performance. It’s just that performance norms are so inaudible because they are norms—the way everyone makes music at the moment—that one can’t hear the performance in the norm.

The very fact that we need these phrases, ‘the actual music’ and ‘the music itself’, is a consequence of the fact that performance changes the identity of scores, minutely from performance to performance, and more radically as performance style changes over time. We need them, to provide spurious reassurance, *precisely because* there is no actual music or music itself. There are simply many different performances of the same (or similar) scores. Everything we’ve been trained to believe about the composer as the ultimate authority and the score as their law requires that there be unchanging meaning—that’s how states control behaviour—and therefore we have devised a form or words that reassures us that nothing changes. Having a notion of the music itself gives us a powerful tool with which we can criticise and exclude a performance that disrupts conventional understanding of the identity of a piece, that’s to say the character of music normally arising from performances of a score. We’ve already seen in Chapters 3 and 4 that the composer contributes less to this identity, and the performer more, than WCM ideology claims. And now it’s easier to see why that claim is made so strongly and insistently. If there is no music itself, but only music that arises out of performances, then WCM loses most of its claims to sacred status at a stroke. It becomes a practice of scores and of performances that take scores as their starting-points to make music. And we have to begin instead to see the performer as the music-maker, the everyday creator, and the composer as someone who helps, providing some notes with (one hopes) potential to sound good. Sacrilege indeed.

This is not to say that there is nothing in scores that contributes meaning or value to music in performance. Far from it. It is perfectly obvious that the composer contributes greatly, and that some scores give rise again and again to overwhelmingly powerful musical experiences when performed, whatever the performance style. Of course. Compositions are highly suggestive. But exactly what they suggest cannot be pinned down, or if it can then there will be few interesting performances. Just how far scores are from being definitive we've already seen in the Brahms Ballade in Chapter 3. In an earlier study I looked at three recordings of Schubert's song, 'Die junge Nonne', leading to three quite different understandings of what is going on in the poem (religious fervour, fear, dying).[37] What is the actual music there? The notion is always contingent upon performance.[38]

Rather than draw boundaries around what must not be changed, it's much more interesting, and more useful as a tool to test the concept, to try to find out what *can* be changed. Can we get a score to work convincingly, for example, by getting it to do the opposite of what it normally does? I attempted this, together with the pianist Mine Doğantan-Dack and soprano Diana Gilchrist, in a workshop in 2013, when we exchanged characters of the first movement of Beethoven's 'Moonlight' sonata and Schubert's song 'Erlkönig', whose meters and rhythmic profiles are similar but whose traditional characters are opposite. I outlined what this requires for the Moonlight back in chapter 1.[39] In the workshop we did this principally by swapping their conventional tempi, taking 'Erlkönig' to dotted crotchet=ca 56 and the Moonlight to ca 120; but of course when you do that you change a lot more than just speed: the very different mood that the speed suggests also requires different articulation, loudnesses (dynamics in conventional musical parlance, but I want to reserve that word for something else that we'll discuss later), vibrato (for the singer) and timbre. The Moonlight works remarkably well as a storm (you can listen to Ji Liu playing it that way in Chapter 23.1), and 'Erlkönig' recovers the full horror of a song about child abduction that we've lost in nicely-behaved Lieder recitals. Given that both make plausible musical and emotional experiences in themselves, where now is the actual music or the music itself? If the answer is only that it lies in the composers' intentions, then it adds nothing and we have no need for it. I think it tries to do more than that, and fails. There is no 'actual' music or music 'itself'. There are scores, and there are (real or imagined) performances starting from them that create musical experiences. Whatever sense one has of a musical composition emerges from, and may later be a residue of, those experiences.[40]

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[37] Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2007. Sound and Meaning in Recordings of Schubert's "Die junge Nonne", *Musicae Scientiae* 11(2), 209–36.

[38] For more on this see Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2012. Compositions, scores, performances, meanings, *Music Theory Online* 18(1), paras 3.2–3.6. Also Cook, Nicholas. 2014. Between Art and Science: Music as Performance, *Journal of the British Academy* 2, 1–25 at 7 (reflecting many of his earlier publications): 'While… texts do not determine performances or the meanings they embody, they create a potential for the generation of certain meanings or kinds of meaning. These meanings emerge in the act of performance, and crucially, it is through performance that we come to know what meanings a given dramatic text or musical score may afford.'

[39] I've previously described this in Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2013. The Emotional Power of Musical Performance. In Tom Cochrane, Bernardino Fantini and Klaus R. Scherer (eds), *The Emotional Power of Music: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Musical Arousal, Expression and Social Control* (New York: Oxford University Press), 41–54 at 51–2.

[40] I say more about this in Leech-Wilkinson (2012).

Listen to Schubert, 'Erlkönig': Diana Gilchrist (sop.), Shelley Katz (piano) — a new performance rec. 2019. https://soundcloud.com/user-741379440-742582982/schubert-erlkonig-diana-gilchrist-sop-shelley-katz-piano

2. 'Musical'

We've seen how 'the music itself' is used as a tool for policing performance and talk about compositions. A related form of policing is the notion of being 'musical'. As Kingsbury wrote,

> The value of playing (or singing) "musically" is a genuinely sacred value in the conservatory, quite possibly the ultimate value… (1988, 51) [For] it is commonly held among conservatory musicians … that a person either is or isn't "musical," and on such matters there is little that can be done to change things one way or the other. The statements that Johanna was "unmusical" were parallel in their thrust with saying that she was untalented. The voice faculty's judgement of Johanna was in effect a statement of doom. (1988, 65)

'Musical' is thus the stamp of approval on your musical identity card: if you've got it you're allowed to seek work, if you haven't you're not. The musicianship it accepts and the identities it permits are, of course, those that are currently normative. You may be accused of being unmusical either for not using the expressive resources of normative style (for sounding dull, in other words), or for using non-normative expressivity (for being unconventional); and a norm-constrained imagination in your listener may be unable to tell the difference, another factor that makes unconventional performance risky. In both cases you are failing to play by the rules, although obviously the second case is much more intriguing. Musicality in the first sense, of being interesting, can be taught; it is not a natural gift, god-given, in your genes, there or not. A good teacher usually has little difficulty in showing a student with adequate technique how to be musically interesting. (There's a nice example of this in Bach playing, facilitated by András Schiff in a masterclass in Gstaad.).

Musicality in the second sense we have already seen constantly changing over time. One of my favourite examples is provided by the Slåttebrekk and Harrison website on Grieg's playing of his own scores, mentioned in Chapter 3. Grieg's musicality is quite unlike that of the modern Grieg 'specialists' they offer as counter-examples: the sound clips they provide are well worth listening to. Any number of early recordings of singers and violinists make the same point: their ensemble (or seeming lack of it, although in fact it may be carefully calculated for expressive purposes we now don't even hear),[41] their very different vibrato, and above all—because we find it so horrifying today—their portamento, are all liable to be condemned as hopelessly unmusical now. And yet these were the superlative performers of their day. What is musical changes. That is why it's easy to use as a license to work: it guarantees adherence to current norms. But it is not an absolute value, and it is wide open to abuse in the interests of preventing experimentation and the development of new ways of being musical.

And so again, this is a coercive word, used not because it rests in any objectively-demonstrable facts about musical ability but simply as another tool for constraining difference. If we weren't so afraid of

[41] This is a finding of an important PhD thesis by Christopher Terepin at King's College London.

unconventional playing there would be no need for it. But we are, and it serves all too useful a purpose in performance policing. What is wrong with difference given that music can be made from one and the same score in so many different ways? If WCM training and practice are infected by delusions as gross and yet as powerful as these, on what other delusions does it rest?

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6 Further Western Classical Music delusions

Continue to 6.1 'Naturalised beliefs'

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6.1 Introduction: naturalised beliefs

WCM is a powerful culture. Some of that power comes from the social and financial resources of those who run its institutions, who overlap to a considerable extent with the wealthiest (culturally and financially) of those who consume it. But much of it is a product of the uniformity and extent of the belief system that provides WCM's ideology. (On ideology and naturalised belief see also Chapter 10.) At the heart of that ideology is the figure of the great composer, the direct equivalent of a deity in a pantheistic religion. Composers, like gods, have superhuman powers and so appear as the ultimate authorities in a complex system of beliefs. I say 'appear as' because, as we look more closely at these beliefs through this chapter, we shall see increasingly clearly that they rest not on divine but on institutional needs, and that composers' deification benefits only the system itself. As in religion, we worship the composers, we obey their laws, we strive to enact their wishes; and in return they reward us (when, and only when we achieve these aims most faithfully) with intense experiences of deep quasi-spiritual feeling. We'll look at this analogy in more detail, from the perspectives of the psychology of caring and religion, towards the end of the book. What we need to do now is to examine some of these beliefs more closely, looking at what they achieve and asking how necessary they are.

As in most religions, WCM is hedged about by rules of behaviour, generally expressed in the directives Must, Should and Ought (Not), which seek to control what performers do with composers' scores. These exist only because in typical WCM today there have to be specialist performers mediating between the (usually dead) composer and the consumer. Historically, it's the composers and listeners who came last to the party. Music in some cultures still works very well as a performance practice only, with everyone involved in any way involved as a performer. Composers in the West emerged first to provide materials with which everyone else could more regularly worship God, with listeners emerging only as the rich began to employ composers to celebrate themselves and the values of their culture. But whether aiming to please the most powerful in heaven or on earth, music is always a practice constrained by rules, rules that define what performers will do in order to avoid anarchy. During the 20th century we finally began to explore the artistic possibilities of musical anarchy, but without much impact on the everyday practice of classical music.

In what follows it's not my purpose to suggest that WCM needs no rules. Perhaps we need not think of them as rules, but one can easily see from the richness and diversity of musical cultures across the globe that selecting certain ways of working musically together provides useful languages within which, or at least around which, imaginative musicians can generate the kinds of effects in us for which we value music so highly: bonding, sharing, synchronising, exciting, calming, in each case functioning more effectively together with others. Having some broadly agreed ways to do this is itself part of this process of enhancing social cohesion. In the West, though, we find ourselves in a more complex situation. On the one hand we want music to do all these things outstandingly well; on the other we believe in freedom of expression, and have cultivated music as an art in which composers are encouraged, even required to be constantly innovating, displaying their creativity as a sign of a healthy imaginative culture. At the same time, though, in order to elevate the composer so

high, performers have been confined to the servants' quarters, paid (not well) to cater to the composer's every whim. As with any society in which a majority serves a minority, the willingness of the majority to put up with their low status and lack of opportunity depends crucially on their believing that there is something ideal about the arrangement. Composer-worship is the principal driver of performers' willingness to subordinate their own creative freedom to enhance composers'. As always in these kinds of political systems, the beliefs that sustain hierarchies are delusory, and have to be enforced as well as inculcated; and there is also a tendency for them to proliferate simply in order to reassure the system that it is safe from challenge. WCM is one of the most hierarchical musical systems, and therefore produces more of these constraining beliefs than most, and many more than it needs in order to do the affective work for which we value it. Many of its underlying beliefs are thus unnecessary, prohibiting behaviours that no one would find problematic if they'd not been brought up to believe they should, and limiting the possible experiences that performances of scores could generate.

The depth of these beliefs within WCM culture, and thus within classical musicians, owes (ironically) much to the development of democracy, as a result of which beliefs that were once enforced from above become internalised in individuals and enforced from within. As Anna Bull has observed,

> Within an emerging democratic class society, there was a shift in the 'very concept of power' from coercion to hegemony (which Eagleton aligns with Gramsci's notion of hegemony, p. 107), so that 'political power must implant itself in subjectivity itself' (p. 115); within this changing society people's consent to the new social order could then be ensured. … According to Eagleton, the new bourgeois subject internalises structures of power as structures of feeling (p. 78). But these structures of feeling are experienced by the subject as 'something I just happen to feel' (Eagleton 1988, 333). They are not experienced as a political power acting on oneself, but one feels as though they are coming from the depths of one's own soul in responding to the beauty of the universal aesthetic: the point where 'subjective and universal coalesce'. (Bull 2014, 33–4)[42]

Part of this process for WCM involved the definition of musical principles in 19th-century criticism. Lydia Goehr (1992) has shown how E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776–1802) was a key figure in sanctifying the musical Work; Richard Taruskin (2018) has pointed to the importance of Franz Brendel (1811–68) in valorising compositional technique.[43] And so on. These beliefs go back into the early Romantic period at least, and relate to much wider trends in white western thought. This isn't the place to explore that history. Suffice it to say that they go deep in our (white) culture as well as in ourselves. But that is not to say that they are beyond challenge, or that there are no benefits in modifying them now. We can see from this context, though, how far they have been naturalised, have come to feel natural to us. As Kingsbury put it,

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[42] Bull, Anna. 2014. The Musical Body: How Gender and Class Are Reproduced Among Young People Playing Classical Music in England (PhD thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London). Eagleton, Terry. 1988. The Ideology of the Aesthetic. *Poetics Today* 9 (2): 327–38.

[43] Goehr, Lydia. 1992. *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press). Taruskin, Richard. 2018. Liszt's Problems, Bartók's Problems, My Problems. Keynote paper at the 46th Baltic Musicological Conference, Vilnius, 23–26 October 2018 (unpublished).

> The essence of music as a cultural system is both that it is *not* an *a priori* phenomenon of the natural world and also that *it is experienced as though it were*, as though nothing could be more concrete, natural, or phenomenal.[44]

Resisting naturalised beliefs about music may seem unnatural at first. But that's not to say that it will not bring benefits when we can take a wider view of what could be musical. But first we have to clear some space to allow it. So let's begin this selection of unnecessary, often false beliefs with some satellites and gradually spiral inwards towards the master delusion whose gravity sucks everything else towards it: the musical Work.

Continue to 6.2 'You need to know about music to appreciate it'

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[44] Kingsbury, Henry. 1998. *Music, Talent, and Performance: a Conservatory Cultural System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 181.

6.2 You need to know about music to appreciate it

This belief works well for musicology, needless to say. If you need knowledge to appreciate music then, given that music is valued right across the planet, the people who can tell you about it are going to seem quite important. If in practice they don't seem that important (and surely they don't) then the maxim looks a little shaky. It should also mean that the most knowledgeable have the most intense musical experiences. I've known a lot of musicologists and music theorists, and I have to say that I've not noticed this seeming to be so. If anything, I hear more passionate enthusiasm about musical experiences from people who know rather little but love to listen. One can get a sense of this from reading Alf Gabrielsson's book, *Strong Experiences with Music*, which collects testimony from almost 1000 individuals who were asked to describe occasions on which they had had particularly memorable musical experiences. It is an amazing collection, endlessly inspiring in reminding one of the overwhelming power of all kinds of music over humans' emotional states. Gabrielsson concludes that

> On the whole, there are no major differences between musicians and non-musicians in their descriptions of SEM other than that musicians sometimes use technical music terms and that their own experiences of performance can shine through. On the other hand, several musicians maintain than on the occasion of their SEM, they totally forgot any thought of technique and performance and 'just listened to the music' like any ordinary listener.[45]

While there is evidence of some structural differences in the brains of those who have had intensive musical training (related to the parts of the body and brain used intensively and repeatedly in particular musical activities),[46] there are good reasons to think that musical responses are not fundamentally different in those with and without musical training.[47] Tonal music, whether WCM or from other Western genres, is ubiquitous in everyday life, and statistical learning—learning simply from exposure—seems likely to play a major role in making any tonal music easily comprehensible. Similarly, there is good evidence that listeners can quickly learn to make useful sense of musics from other cultures,[48] and this may help to explain the relative ease with which listeners to early WCM recordings have come to appreciate very different approaches to performing classical scores. When you get used to them, they sound just fine.

In sum, you do not need musical training to have powerful experiences as a listener; you simply need exposure.[49] While it's obvious that you need training to be a performer, whether it's formal training in WCM or the learning through copying that plays such a powerful role in popular music in the West

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[45] Gabrielsson, Alf. 2011. *Strong Experiences with Music: Music is Much More Than Just Music* (Oxford University Press), 398.

[46] e.g. Saloni Krishnan, César F Lima, Samuel Evans, Sinead Chen, Stella Guldner, Harry Yeff, Tom Manly, Sophie K Scott. 2018. Beatboxers and Guitarists Engage Sensorimotor Regions Selectively When Listening to the Instruments They can Play, *Cerebral Cortex* 28(11), 4063–79.

[47] e.g. Bigand, E and Poulin-Charronnat, B. 2006. Are We "Experienced Listeners"? A Review of the Musical Capacities That Do Not Depend on Formal Musical Training. *Cognition* 100(1), 100–30.

[48] Patrick C. M. Wong, Anil K. Roy, Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis. Bimusicalism: The Implicit Dual Enculturation of Cognitive and Affective Systems. *Music Perception* 27(2), 81–8.

[49] 'It is picked up, like language, from exposure and reproduction, which eventually lead to internalization.' Taruskin, Richard. 2009. *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 349.

and in most other musical traditions around the world,[50] it's far from clear what is gained, as measured by the intensity of musical experiences, by knowing historical facts about WCM or by training in theory and analysis. One could argue that the intensity of listener experience is not the most important measure of music appreciation, I suppose; but I would not. On the whole, what matters most about a musical experience, it seems to me, is the extent to which it occupies one's whole consciousness to the point where thought is replaced by feeling. Not everyone will wish to agree; and that's fine: it's nobody's business legislating for how anyone else should listen.

None of this is meant to question or devalue the fascination of studying music in depth. Precisely because music is so powerful an experience, it's one of the most fascinating subjects there is to try to understand. One of the reasons for its power is that it engages so many aspects of our life and being; and to study it properly, therefore, involves drawing on a very large number of academic disciplines, covering social, cultural, physical, psychological, neurological aspects of our lives, all of which take us way beyond musicology. Looking across the home disciplines of speakers at a conference on (just) music perception and cognition,[51] one sees scholars based in Anthropology, Behavioural science, Biology, Computer science, Education, Electronic engineering, Ethnomusicology, Geriatrics, Infant development, Information and media studies, Linguistics, Mathematics, Mechanical engineering, Mental health, Neuroscience, Pediatrics, Physics, Psychiatry, Psychology, Rehabilitation, Zoology, as well as Music. And to these, looking for other areas where music is studied, one could easily add Archaeology, Business Studies, Digital Humanities, Economics, Evolutionary Biology, History of Art, Informatics, Law, Modern Languages, Philosophy, Sports Science and Theology. In all these areas, and more, music is being researched for the light it sheds on their own central concerns. One could see music, in fact, as the hub at the centre of one of the largest networks of research subjects that could be mapped, exceeded only, in all probability, by topics more explicitly focussed on the human brain. Music uses a remarkably wide range of brain regions, structures and processes; and if we want to understand music deeply we might do best, in the long run, to look for it there.[52]

Continue to 6.3 'You must play structure'

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[50] e.g. Berliner, Paul F. 1994. *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press). Green, Lucy. 2002. *How Popular Musicians Learn: A Way Ahead for Music Education* (Aldershot: Ashgate).

[51] 9th International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition; 6th Triennial Conference of the European Society for the Cognitive Sciences of Music; University of Bologna, August 22 – 26, 2006. https://www.escom.org/proceedings/ICMPC9_ESCOM6_Bologna_2006-Abstracts.pdf

[52] A suggestive study is Alluri, Vinoo, Petri Toiviainen, Iiro P. Jääskeläinen, Enrico Glerean, Mikko Sams and Elvira Brattico. 2012. Large-Scale Brain Networks Emerge from Dynamic Processing of Musical Timbre, Key and Rhythm. *NeuroImage* 59, 3677–89.

6.3 You must play structure

A fine study of musicology's difficult relationship with performance is Nicholas Cook's *Beyond the Score* (2013), whose second chapter is largely concerned with the belief, shared by most musicologists and performers, that it is essential to identify a piece's 'structure' and then in some way or other to perform it.[53] 'Structure' can cover a lot: the way a piece is made using melodic, harmonic or formal 'ideas' (usually recurring patterns of pitches), which may either be 'constructed' by the composer deliberately or unintentionally but either way (musicians are taught) through a combination of technique and genius; or larger-scale formal planning which applies patterning to longer passages or even whole movements; or anything that the composer can be argued to have done that a commentator thinks important. In every case, the commentator sees the performer as being tasked with sounding whatever they think is important about the composer's structural working. Exactly how one might do that is another matter, a matter on which performers, teachers and critics are never likely to agree; fortunately perhaps, as it remains one area that norms have failed to conquer thoroughly. Does one emphasise the theme when it returns; does one stress the flattened supertonic because it's a feature of the piece's threatening character; does one under- or over-play the false recapitulation? And so on. But there are some assumptions that are currently shared across the board, outstandingly that compositional phrases are to be marked by separating them in performance, typically getting quieter and a little slower towards their ends, and making a slight break before the start of the next, as if one were reading phrases and sentences from a book. Put like that it seems so obvious as to be beyond question. But, for all its similarities and despite the attraction of the grammatical metaphor, music is not words: it makes sense less precisely (non-semantically) and therefore more flexibly and variously. No specific meaning is being transmitted; and so the way in which one element relates to the next is not constrained by a need to mean one thing rather than another. Moreover, as Cook has shown by comparing music and speech recordings from people born during the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century (2013, 71–7), the way speech is nuanced to enhance meaning has changed, so that what we think is natural in speaking is not what was natural when the earliest recordings were made. We should not be so surprised, then, that when we listen to the oldest recorded musicians we do not hear musical phrasing, or other structural features, being sounded in the way we regard as natural at the moment.

Cook offers a sophisticated and revealing example in his chapter 3 (2013, 56–90), which compares Heinrich Schenker's analysis of the G-flat Schubert impromptu (Op. 90 no. 3) with the recorded performance of a pianist he admired, Eugen d'Albert (1864–1932; cf Schenker 1868–1935). While d'Albert's performance is close in several details to Schenker's advice to performers of this score, it is very far away from Schenker's structural analysis which, as Cook shows, has much more in common with the more regular performances of younger pianists. Schenker's theoretical ideas changed, in other words, while his conscious sense of how pieces ought to be performed remained the same (even if he may unconsciously have been influenced by new approaches). It was a younger generation of theorists, reading Schenker and listening to younger musicians, who were the first to feel that formal structure and performance fitted naturally together, because by then they did.

[53] Cook, Nicholas. 2013. *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press), 33–55.

What's so delightful about this example is the extent of the mismatch between theory and taste in one individual musical thinker: what works perfectly in Schenker's theory is simply not what works perfectly for him in practice. It's hard to think of anything that could show more clearly just how separate ideas about music can be from experiences of it; or of why it's so important not to allow performance, and beliefs about what is 'proper' in performance, to be dictated by ideology.

There are further examples of this kind of 'rhetorical' playing (Cook's useful descriptor)—including playing straight through the composed and notated phrase-breaks (which Schenker specifically recommends (Cook 2013, 72))—in recordings by Grieg of his own scores, these offering a particularly telling example given that the composer is supposed to know best. These Grieg performances are well discussed and illustrated on the website made by the pianist Sigurd Slåttebrekk and producer Tony Harrison at www.chasingthebutterfly.no, who comment that 'Grieg in his own performances contradicts almost everything his own written page seems to reinforce.' And there are further examples in Anna Scott's work on Brahms as performed by pupils of Clara Schumann.[54] Our assumption that phrasing must be sounded were not theirs: 'structuralist performance … should be seen as a historical style' (Cook 2013, 87), not a fact of nature. If the challenge for performers at the moment is how to play structure without overdoing it, without making it crudely obvious, does the fact that one *can* easily overdo simply reflect the fact that it's peripheral to music cognition in the first place? In Cook's words (87), 'it is not even obvious that it makes sense to think of structure as something that compositions 'have', as opposed to affordances for the creation of structural and other meanings in performance.' In other words, it's just an option; and so the question for the inquisitive performer becomes 'what (other) kinds of senses can these notes make?'

Part of the problem with the idea of structure in performance lies in the tendency to think of it as physical form, as something that's there because the piece exists and—like all things that exist—has structure. On this rests the plethora of metaphors for music that draw on architecture or landscape. Goethe may or may not have called architecture 'frozen music' but it's an idea that has resonated with many.[55] Sometimes it's useful (if a little bizarre) to take a metaphor literally and see what it would mean, as a way of testing what kind of plausibility it can hold. If we start with a classical revival building, as in this photo of Holkham Hall in Norfolk, UK, we can think metaphorically of various qualities it might share with music.

[54] Slåttebrekk, Sigurd and Tony Harrison. 2010. *Chasing the Butterfly: Recreating Grieg's 1903 Recordings and Beyond…* http://www.chasingthebutterfly.no/?page_id=87. Scott, Anna. 2014. Romanticizing Brahms: Early Recordings and the Reconstruction of Brahmsian Identity (PhD thesis, University of Leiden).

[55] The possible origins of the phrase are traced by Grey, Thomas. 1992. Metaphorical Modes in Nineteenth-Century Music Criticism: Image, Narrative, and Idea. In ed. Steven Paul Scher, *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries* (Cambridge University Press), 93–117 at 95–6.

Rhythm is clear in the columns and regular windows, whose spacing implies equal time taken to move from one to another. Harmony could be claimed a very loose sense, that the ‘composition’ is ‘harmonious’, meaning that elements combine into larger simultaneities. Counterpoint might be claimed in the layers of windows were it not definitive of musical counterpoint that the same material combines at a distance, not simultaneously. And as for form; is there plausible musical form here? One could try to see it as a musical ABA form, but the principal unit here is in the centre, which in musical ABA is subservient, as here:

However well this works musically it makes little sense for living unless you’re identical twins or spouses who don’t get on. Charles Rosen sees the sonata principle as key to the classical style, so here is Holkham Hall in sonata form.

The problem that’s crudely exposed here is now obvious. Spatial and temporal perception work quite differently. The building exists, it has form, it can be appreciated as a whole, none of which is perceptually true of music, despite the 200-year tradition of seeing music as an object, a ‘work’.

Music is an experience: it happens, it doesn't exist; and as something that happens, through responses to sounds heard over time, it makes quite different perceptual sense to anything that has physical structure. Ways have occasionally been found to relate the two, as in the architect-composer Iannis Xenakis's scores that share their outlines with his architectural drawings, pitches on the page following curves of surfaces in the drawings. But that is not what happens in most WCM. In music as perceived you are always experiencing the present moment, never observing the whole. You can only observe the whole by converting it into space via a technology (such as score or waveform) for visualizing it: but that observation is not an ecological musical experience; it is only pattern recognition.

That musical form is not perceived as a whole is well-confirmed by research in music psychology that showed listeners unbothered by reordering sections of a musical composition. I discussed this in Leech-Wilkinson (2012):

> As Gabrielsson and Lindström report (2010, 383),
>
> > Konečni and his co-workers . . . demonstrated that changing the order of movements in Beethoven sonatas and string quartets, randomizing the order of variations in Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, or rearranging the order of different parts in sonata form as in the first movement of Mozart's Symphony in G minor K. 550, had little or no effects on university students' ratings on various hedonic (e.g., beautiful, pleasing) or emotion- related (e.g., exciting, emotional) scales.
>
> Tillman and Bigand (1996) chunked three pieces by Bach, Mozart, and Schoenberg into (musically adequate) segments of about six seconds, and then played these either in original or in backward order to university students, who rated them on emotion-related scales. There were significant differences among the *pieces* in all scales but only two significant differences between the two *versions* (original vs. backward) of each piece. They concluded that for these subjects, musical expressiveness was mainly influenced by local structures within the chunks, not by global musical structure.
>
> Cook (1987) recomposed the endings of six significant piano compositions by canonical composers and found that university music students' preference for the modified versions increased in proportion to the length of the piece. The further the end from the beginning the less problematic (indeed, the more desirable) was a non-tonic ending. This only emphasizes the extent to which musical response operates locally, as the oldest performers a century ago assumed. Performers seem to outline structures, and feel that they are, but in fact all they are doing is working from moment to moment while keeping a sense of longer-term intensity modulation: a little more here, a little less there, and so on. If there is more direct control exercised over the whole it has yet to be shown.[56]

[56] Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2012. Compositions, scores, performances, meanings, *Music Theory Online* 18(1), paras 4.8–4.9. Gabrielsson, Alf, and Erik Lindström. 2010. The Role of Structure in the Musical Expression of Emotions. In Juslin, Patrik N., and John A. Sloboda, eds. 2010. *Handbook of Music and Emotion: Theory, Research, Application* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 367–400. Tillman, Barbara, and Emmanuel Bigand. 1996. Does Formal Musical Structure Affect Perception of Musical Expressiveness? *Psychology of Music* 24, 3–17. Cook, Nicholas. 1987. The Perception of Large-Scale Tonal Closure. *Music Perception* 5, 197–205.

All of this confirms Levinson's intuition (1998) and Lamont & Dibben's (2001) demonstration that structure is less important to listeners than the musical surface.[57] And so,

> We really have little choice but to conclude that music is made (sounded) and perceived locally, through those details of the musical surface that performers are able most precisely to modify and of which listeners are most aware. All this indicates what in all honesty we know very well, that music is controlled and perceived from moment to moment: long-term structures are theoretical, useful for composers, an invitation from analysts to imagine music in a particular way, but apparently not perceptible (save in the vaguest outline via memory). (Leech-Wilkinson (2012), 4.10)

The landscape metaphor is more interesting because it allows the notion that music is a journey, something that happens in relation to objects but does so over time. Steven Isserlis aims to capture the interaction of local perception with a view of the whole when he maintains that

> a performer who understands the structure of a work will be blessed with the freedom of a bird flying above [a] forest, perceiving each detail in all its exquisite clarity, but able at all times to make out the overall direction of the path. Foreknowledge of the form—the story—must inform the interpretation from the outset.[58]

But is that really so? It's not as if one has much choice about where to go as one plays a score: (with a few twentieth-century exceptions) there aren't alternative paths through the score; it's not really possible to get lost. What Isserlis means is that a sense of a goal enables a performer to judge more persuasively the sounding of each step along the way, to move purposely rather than haphazardly from note to note. This may be so, if not actually then at least in increasing the performer's confidence that their decisions about how to shape each moment are not arbitrary but have some larger rationale. In such a heavily policed environment that reassurance is worth having. Equally, in a less condemnatory and anxious environment, we might gain a valuable interpretative and psychological freedom by abandoning the illusion of perceptible long-term structures; because, in line with the research just summarised, it's very possible—perhaps likely—that shaping well the local moves (step by step) inevitably leaves listeners at the end feeling that the whole has been well-formed too. How could that feeling not emerge from the persuasive performance of each moment? Might it then be that WCM ideology emphasises structure for reasons of its own? One might be (following Cook 2013) that structure became a concern as an aspect of the take-over of musical thought by the values of twentieth-century modernism in which making structure visible was virtuous. It's easy to relate to this the notion that the composer is a genius in construction, supporting the narrative in which the composer-god can be presented as supremely organised and far-sighted, while at the same time offering a way of imagining oneself as sounding the composer-god's plan.

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[57] Levinson, Jerrold. 1998. *Music in the Moment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press). Lamont, Alexandra, and Nicola Dibben. 2001. Motivic Structure and the Perception of Similarity. *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 18(3), 245–274 at 263-4.

[58] Isserlis, Steven. 2018. Reflection. In Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel, and Helen M. Prior (eds). *Music and Shape* (New York: Oxford University Press), 127–8 at 128.

WCM behaves more like a story, given that the characters' fate is unknown at the start: one has to read the whole in order to find out what happens. Isserlis offers this analogy, too, but still with the claim that

> Music, like fiction, needs form and shape in order to be believable or moving. Needless to say, musical forms can be infinitely varied—and perhaps the word 'story' is confining it too closely, when so much music might as easily be perceived as a poem, a fantasy, a reverie; but whatever its nature, a composition needs the discipline of a preordained structure in order to attain the inevitability of satisfying art. (Isserlis 2018, 127)

WCM ideology needs this to be true. But there is ample evidence that it isn't in the work of all those writers who begin with no idea of how they are going to end (Charles Dickens a particularly telling example). Being in the same position as the reader simply admits that a story, and indeed a piece, can go anywhere so long as each moment follows interestingly from the last and provided that at the end there is a sense of completion. In other words, it's a matter of how the experience feels, not of how it's constructed (or not). A composer may have put multiple layers of structure into a piece, because composers have been brought up within the same ideology or (for composers before the nineteenth century when it became explicitly promoted) because it's a convenient way of generating extended music from modest materials. But that does not mean that that structure must be sounded in performance, particularly since it seems not to be doing the perceptual work that the ideology claims for it. In sum, as performers well understood before the advent of architectural modernism, you don't have to play structure: all you have to do is take the listener convincingly from one moment to the next. Everything else is optional, which is not to say that it is without value or purpose if it helps the performer perform.

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6.4 Current performances offer the best solutions

This is self-evidently taken for granted, and the profession organised around it, because 'the best for us' (which is perfectly reasonable: current performance should reflect current values) is unthinkingly assumed to be equivalent to 'the best' *tout court*. Most generations have probably thought that their own performances were better than those of their predecessors or their younger followers. Performance style changes, and so the past always seems a little quaint and the younger generation misguided. It's just that now that we have recordings and know how much style changes it's become unreasonable not to be aware of those tendencies and not to be more modest in claims for one's own generation's correctness. The confusion is assisted by the belief, which may have some truth in it, that current standards of technique are, in general, higher than they have ever been. If that's true we have recording to thank for it. The ability of every player to hear the work of every other online is only an extreme form of a tendency that's been intensifying since commercial recording began. You can't expect to get work if you don't play as accurately as the others that potential employers can easily hear: dissemination through recording forces competition on those who wish to make careers; and so there is inflation.

One might expect that along with this would go competition to be more interesting and thus for performances to diversify. But that seems not to happen, or only within such narrow limits that it hardly amounts to diversification. The reasons why are many, but in brief one could list pressure to do what teachers, exams, competitions, and potential employers expect, not to challenge the identities that have been constructed around standard readings of scores lest one be accused of ignorance or deviance ("that isn't Brahms"); in other words, the sorts of things we've begun to look at and will examine more closely and critically as we go along. Above all, because all this belongs within a self-replicating system (which we'll model in Chapter 7), performers are forced to sound the values of the musical State, with the most successful being those who do it most persuasively. Current performance thus has to be believed to be the best possible performance, because the State is the best possible state.

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6.5 Learning to perform is learning natural musicianship

All this is sold as natural musicianship. That's what is meant by calling someone 'musical'. We've looked at this belief already in Chapter 5, and I return to it here only in order to emphasise how conveniently it works for the previous belief in disallowing any possible doubt that the State might be otherwise than as it is. Believing this may be the only way of making bearable the pain involved in learning to be a good cheerleader for the State. Why else would one put oneself through so many years of relentless practice and obedience, striving to achieve exactly the effects one's teacher requires however physically awkward? We have to believe that this is the only way music can possibly be.

But in that case, why is it so hard? Would we have to discipline our bodies so strictly if it were indeed natural to be musical in just this way and no other? Wouldn't it come more… naturally? Although 'musical' in Chapter 5's sense was really about musicianship that feels aesthetically natural, I've begun here by speaking about the physically natural because it's so deliberately overlooked, as if the unnaturalness of playing had nothing to do with the naturalness of musicality. The point, of course, is that the musicality is no more natural than the technique, less in fact: they are both forcing the body (including the brain) into patterns of behaviour and response that could be different. But there are many other ways of being musical (sounding notes persuasively) and only some other ways of playing scales at speed. There might be much to gain, though, from exploring kinds of musicality that were less physically contortionate. Attempts have been made. Dorothy Taubmann, for example, offered a much less damaging way of playing the piano, leading to less pain and injury, yet her work is widely condemned by piano pedagogues. Katharine Liley has written a fascinating study of this issue, showing just how much of conventional piano pedagogy rests on beliefs about strength that are simply not consistent with the anatomical facts. And she's shown how values such as finger strength, and the ways in which they are valorised by language, in turn call on gender prejudice and a particularly Protestant ethic in which pain is necessary for gain.[59] We can see in this example how much what is sold as natural depends on particular cultural assumptions, including assumptions that we are trying hard to remove from other aspects of our lives. In classical music they live on unchallenged, in fact are enforced.

Later (Chapter 10) we'll look in greater depth at the notion of normativity and how it calls on gender prejudices, including misogyny and homophobia, as it forces musicians to be conventional and obedient. That mapping of norm to nature, as normativity becomes naturalisation, is one of the most insidious processes involved in coercing musicians into musicking as they are told. That it is also engaging powerful prejudices tells us much about the sickness of the WCM world.

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[59] Liley, Katharine. 2019. The Feeble Fingers of Every Unregenerate Son of Adam: Cultural Values in Pianists' Health and Skill-Development' (PhD thesis, Royal College of Music, London).

6.6 Performers and performances today are very unalike

Another key belief fostered in order to make the exceptionally arduous training seem worthwhile is that each performer is developing a unique and personal approach to using their instrument and interpreting their repertoire. In a literal sense it must be true that no one is quite the same as anyone else. But how different are they? Different enough for the claim to mean something? Different enough to shed significantly fresh light on these scores? And how different can you be when your job is to realise the composer's intentions encoded already in the Work? WCM is hugely conflicted over this question, and nowhere is that more obvious than in competitions. As Lisa McCormick (2015) has shown in her broadly sympathetic study of competitions, and Izabela Wagner (2015) in her more damning testimony,[60] on the one hand for jurors 'there was no greater delight than to hear competitors find something new in a piece'; on the other 'Unorthodox interpretations that stray too far from what the composer wrote and from stylistic convention not only are inaccurate; they also cause offence. To complicate matters further, stylistic convention is not strictly defined and is often bitterly debated.' (McCormick, 173–4) The space for individuality is small when, as we shall see with the greatest clarity when we look at the work of record critics, difference is so readily and strongly condemned.

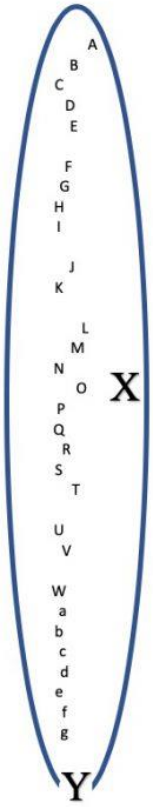
Listening to the work of conductors and superstar soloists it's not hard for musicians to hear differences. Comparing Fischer-Dieskau and Bostridge in Schubert, Hahn and Mutter in Brahms, Rattle and Barenboim in Beethoven or Mahler reveals many divergences in their performances of the same scores; and to hear their individual reading is the main reason for a musician to go to another's concert. I'm not aware that the research has been done, but I assume for now that if one were to compare the impressions of those with and without musical training (or great familiarity), those without would be less aware of differences from one performance to another. (The situation is complicated, from a perceptual point of view, by the difficulty of remembering a particular performance while listening to another. This was vividly illustrated by the notoriously positive reviews of the pianist Joyce Hatto, most of whose recordings turned out to be recordings by other pianists lightly edited and repackaged by her husband. In the end, the hoax was uncovered by technology (in fact simultaneously by two different technologies), not by human listening.[61] To an extent, this difficulty of comparing performances other than by switching between recordings, allows performers not to be particularly individual, so long as each performance is persuasive in itself.)

How large these differences are depends very much, then, on one's perspective. It may be helpful to model this. The following diagram offers a representation of the space within which performances of a WCM score can be acceptably normative. Each letter can represent a different performance of the same canonical score. Imagining the list in chronological order I've arranged the letters to suggest that performances have become more similar over time, but that's not necessary for the model: they could have any positions within the space. Much more important is the shape of the space and

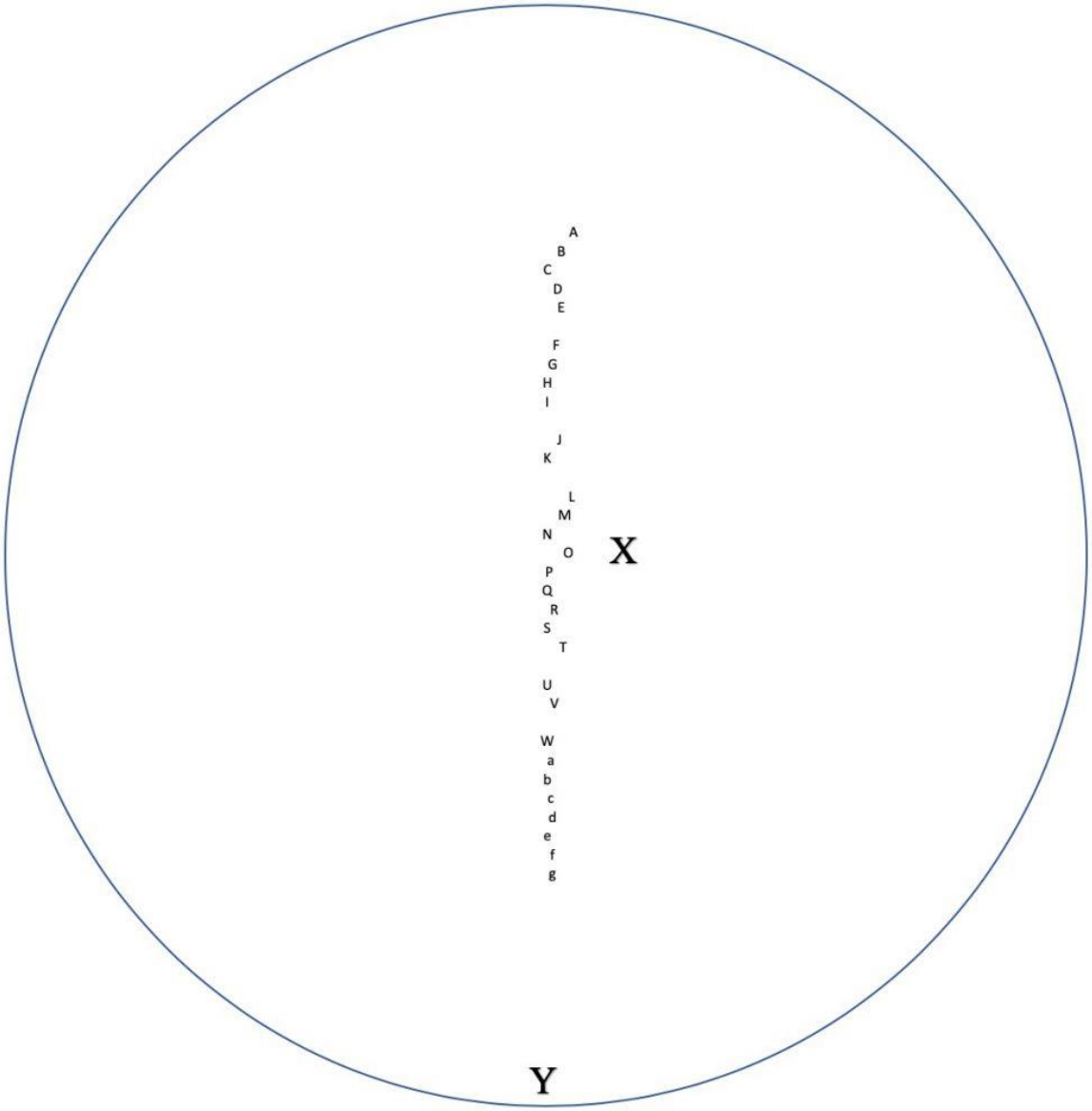
[60] McCormick, Lisa. 2015. *Performing Civility: International Competitions in Classical Music* (Cambridge University Press). Wagner, Izabela. 2015. *Producing Excellence: The Making of Virtuosos* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press).

[61] Cook, Nicholas and Craig Sapp. 2009. Purely coincidental? Joyce Hatto and Chopin's Mazurkas (London: CHARM).

the position of the observer. X marks the normative observer, who could be anyone trained or simply experienced in hearing performances of WCM. To them, these performances all seem very different. Y marks my position for the sake of the argument set out in this book, though it could also be the position of anyone who has not learned to expect, or who has managed to stand outside, a particular kind of normativity. To me, when I listen from this perspective, they all sound very alike. X or Y could, of course, observe from anywhere their preconceptions allowed them to be.



In the next diagram we see these same performances and observer positions within the much larger space, that I am suggesting exists, within which musically persuasive performances are possible.



Or better still, without boundaries, since we have no idea where they may be. After all, what makes a boundary? Only a point beyond which any performance would be psychologically (probably neurologically) nonsensical whatever one's cultural tastes and beliefs.

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My case is that the differences celebrated by the profession are tiny compared to what's possible and plausible (for a first attempt at discussing what's plausible see Chapter 22). Differences that are currently acceptable (as we shall see in Chapter 9) are tiny compared even to the differences between Sir George Henschel (1850-1934) and Ian Bostridge (b. 1964), between Hilary Hahn (b. 1979) and Joseph Joachim (1831-1907), Sir Simon Rattle (b. 1955) and Willem Mengelberg (1871-1951), or Ignacy Paderewski (1860-1941) and Angela Hewitt (b. 1958): and that's within just 100 years of recorded music-making. We're trained, and train ourselves, to notice and discuss these tiny differences, and to imagine them as huge, because—however narrow—this is the only space within which WCM norms, supported by the ideology of performer obligations to the composer's imagined wishes, allow us to imagine these scores. Working minutely within a confined space can be rewarding and bring wonderful insights. Musicians do of course produce marvels within this world, and never less than expert, highly accurate and professional performances. But that's not a justification for preventing exploration. Over time critical thinking increasingly is reduced to connoisseurship, the refined observation of minute variation. But we can do better than that, I think.

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6.7 Music makes better sense performed 'historically'

This is unlike the other beliefs discussed in this chapter, in that it's optional within the ideology: you can believe it and get work as a 'historical' performer, or you can disbelieve it and still get work as a 'modern' performer. Before the 1960s the historical view was heretical; but its commercial success, which by the 80s had become very great, made it respectable. One might think this shows that change in the ideology is possible provided that the result finds an audience and earns well for promoters and record companies, and in a sense that's true. But the audience was only found in this case, and the practice was only accepted within enough of the profession to overcome the objections of the rest, because historical performance could plausibly claim to be not just in line with a core belief of the ideology—namely that the composer knew best—but actually more concordant with it than modern performance. Hence Frans Brüggen's notorious 1970 claim that 'Every note of Mozart and Beethoven that the Concertgebouw Orchestra plays is, musically speaking, a lie.'[62] This didn't endear him to the Concertgebouw, but it was a very effective way of publicising the notion that his belief in the ideology was purer than theirs.

Brüggen's case was fundamentalist: everything but the original is false. Aesthetically that's evidently ridiculous, given the wonderful musical experiences that people have had with performances that for Brüggen are simply wrong. For fundamentalists being right is what matters, and then one does one's best to make art with that. Although I have sympathy with this to the extent that artistic practice needs an ethical basis, it seems to me that to believe that great art can only emerge when you do history properly is both a category error and evidently untrue. But then, whereas for Brüggen, being historically accurate is (to be fair, was in 1970) the ultimate value,[63] for me producing a wonderful experience is, and I don't mind how contingent that is, how much it depends on opinion or how much it changes over time, as long as there is debate, variety, and no one is seriously harmed. That our initial assumptions are incompatible simply emphasises the extent to which WCM values always depend on belief.

While the flaws in HIP ideology have been well worked-over, especially by Richard Taruskin in many (entertaining and influential) essays, so have the benefits that have come in the fresh performance styles that have emerged. These have been emphasised also by John Butt and Bruce Haynes, all well worth reading on this topic.[64] And while most performers in this (let's accept it, modern) tradition do not make claims for historical accuracy anything like as extreme as those knocked down in this debate, nonetheless the ideology of HIP pervades teaching and practice within that world in the

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[62] Rubinoff, Kailan R. 2009. Cracking the Dutch Early Music Movement: the Repercussions of the 1969 *Notenkrakersactie*, *Twentieth-Century Music* 6(1), 3–22 at 7.

[63] And it's still going on. See Searching for the True Beethoven. I rather like the 'true' notes; but remember that they were previously lies and the lies truths, and they all afforded great performances.

[64] Taruskin, Richard. 1995. *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). Taruskin, Richard. 2009. *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press). Taruskin, Richard. 2020. *Cursed Questions: On Music and its Social Practices* (Oakland: University of California Press). Butt, John. 2002. *Playing with History: The Historical Approach to Musical Performance* (Cambridge University Press). Haynes, Bruce. 2007. *The End of Early Music: A Period Performer's History of Music for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press). See also Cook (2013), 26–9, for a good summary of the pressure exerted by positivistic musicological thought on HIP.

more insidious form of tacit knowledge. Notions of what is or is not 'stylish' are particularly coercive here, as that measure is used to police 'historical' performance style so as to exclude anything that is not generally accepted as normatively HIP.[65] This is the environment in which you won't get booked again if your ornamentation or your articulation, or another aspect of style supposed to be characteristic of earlier practice, steps beyond an imaginary boundary that has emerged through a widespread consensus defining what is and is not done. There can never be historical evidence for the placing of these boundaries: as usual with performance norms, they are commercially convenient in minimising rehearsal and psychologically supportive in providing reassurance. Indeed, all these rules and beliefs could be seen as strategies for limiting the vast range of possibilities for performance interpretation, whose variety I suspect musicians subconsciously recognise and, because of the extent and viciousness of performance policing, are terrified by.

Nothing makes this clearer than the horror of vibrato, and still worse portamento, among most HIP performers. The absurd situation in which a well-known conductor of original-instrument performances of late nineteenth-century repertoire refuses to countenance vibrato and portamento, despite the irrefutable recorded evidence for both (especially portamento) in late nineteenth-century performances, perfectly illustrates the hypocrisy of HIP. As we saw with the Debussy example in Chapter 3, once recordings are available suddenly no one wants to know about the composer's expectations: they're simply too unlike current performance values to be borne. So we take the bits we like (faster speeds for late-nineteenth century repertoire and *less* vibrato than was normal in the twentieth century) and leave the bits we hate (portamento). But it's not HIP; and we clearly do not believe in the professed values of HIP when it comes to the uncomfortable truth of previous performance styles.

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[65] The key importance of imagined historical stylishness is clear from: Schubert, Emery and Dorottya Fabian. 2006. The Dimensions of Baroque Music Performance: A Semantic Differential Study. *Psychology of Music*, 34, 573–87. Fabian, Dorottya and Emery Schubert. 2009. Baroque Expressiveness and Stylishness in Three Recordings of the D minor Sarabanda for Solo Violin. *Music Performance Research*, 3, 36–56. Fabian, Dorottya, Emery Schubert and Richard Pulley. 2010. A Baroque Traumerei: The Performance and Perception of Two Violin Renditions. *Musicology Australia*, 32, 27–44.

6.8 Texts document sounds

We've already seen that early recordings can be an embarrassment for HIP, partly because the last thing anyone wants at the moment is to have to copy them. It's immensely demanding as a process of learning. As Slåttebrekk and Scott both found,[66] you have to copy at first mind-numbingly slowly and repetitively; and then as you begin to embody the whole approach to performance style, so that it becomes part of the way your body makes music, you at the same time inevitably give up much of the musicality you've spent so many years building up for yourself. It's generous, self-effacing, and psychologically challenging, potentially even damaging unless you're wholly convinced that you have gained as a musician. That's one obstacle. Then there's a question of period taste. It's one thing to listen to early recordings, even to experience them sympathetically, enjoying the (for us) extreme rubato and portamento and non-synchronicity of lines. It's quite another to go on stage and play and sing canonical scores like that. Yes, these awkward facts challenge the whole morality of HIP with its claims to value a period approach above any other: they show how flimsy that morality is when confronted with real sounding evidence. But still, few HIP performers will go as far as properly adopting late 19th-century performance styles until it's clear that there really is a large audience willing to pay to hear them.

And so we can begin to see just how convenient it is that recordings start so late, only right at the end of the 19th century, leaving us entirely reliant on written texts and surviving instruments and pictures for evidence of how people made music before then. At least that allows performers to make styles that make sense to us today, and allows HIP to change over the decades as tastes change: and it has changed, hugely, despite apparently being faithful to the same evidence all along. The reason there's so much more latitude before recordings is simply that, as the latitude itself shows, words are seriously insufficient to describe performance styles. We can confirm this with a thought experiment. (It could be a real experiment, but it's hard to imagine any performer being willing, or sufficiently well-funded, to undertake it. Prove me wrong, please!) Take a late-19th or early-20th century textbook on how to play your instrument: do your utmost to adopt the techniques it describes (this will take some years); and then perform some of its canonical repertoire for us and let us compare your performances with those recorded by the textbook's author, which you've been strict with yourself in never having listened to! Let's see if you arrive at a musicality that's anything like theirs. Leopold Auer's (1921) or Carl Flesch's (1924) books on violin playing would be possibilities, or better still Lilli Lehmann's *How to Sing* (1902) which (as its title suggests) is exceptionally detailed in its physical information and refers to a performance style even further from our own.[67] Is there any chance that after all this detailed work with the most detailed text you would end up sounding anything like this? (Wonderful if so!) :

Listen to Lilli Lehmann, Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, extract from Isolde's Liebestod, from "Mild und leise wie er lächelt". https://youtu.be/1GuqXbJMtlA

[66] Slåttebrekk and Harrison (2010). Scott (2014).

[67] Auer, Leopold. 1921. *Violin Playing as I Teach It* (London: Duckworth). Flesch, Carl. 1924. *The Art of Violin Playing* (Boston: Fischer). Lehmann, Lilli. 1902. *How to Sing* [Meine Gesangkunst], transl. Richard Aldrich (New York: Macmillan): audiobook with electronic(!) examples at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAy5liMJVlY.

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6.9 Everything is in the score

The idea that through the score the composer communicates something quite specific, which the performer needs to grasp correctly and communicate accurately in turn, is a core ingredient in WCM. We need the notation to provide the answers, because otherwise what are we to do to realise the composer's intentions? If notation isn't adequate to the task… but the prospect is too awful to contemplate: of course the answers are there; we just have to know enough about the composer and their period to interpret the symbols correctly… If nothing else, this wishful thought does at least recognise the performer's key role, even while allowing them no agency: their job is to know what's required and to provide it, ideally with nothing of their own mixed in. Except, of course, when composers wanted performers to mix something in. Then suddenly it's fine. So when Liszt, in his own book, *The Gypsy in Music*… justifies the virtuoso creatively reinterpreting composers' scores in performance he was certainly including his own.[68] We can get a sense of how radically he intended this licence to be used from the recording of his 12th Hungarian Rhapsody by his pupil, Bernhard Stavenhagen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKW594elPSs

https://open.spotify.com/track/42jQYfz1P5fVB7CNh9oEmD?si=tfp1u_L7SWm60wl5yBObjA

which you may enjoy comparing with the score at IMSLP.

In this case very far from everything is in the score. And we know very well that that's so for a great deal of music from at least Caccini to Rossini, where performers were always expected to contribute virtuoso material of their own. In fact, it's only core canonical repertoire in the Germanic tradition from the nineteenth century, and then increasingly more score-based music of the twentieth, that attempts to notate as much as the composer could. Even in core repertoire, as Kenneth Hamilton has shown, 'If we … adhere strictly to the letter of the score, as usually defined nowadays, we may in fact end up with a performance rather different from any a nineteenth-century composer could have imagined.'[69] Which is only a problem if you insist on the composer's expectations. Clearly, although we say we do, we don't.

Looking at this more realistically one must recognise that composers differ in the precision and conviction of their intentions; and also that notation is far too sketchy to communicate them, however precise they may have been. Part of the problem here is that notation persuades us that what it includes is what matters most, rather than what is easily notatable. As Trevor Wishart said, 'the priorities of notation do not merely reflect musical priorities—they actually create them.'[70] We simply assume that because pitch and duration are there precisely (over-precisely in the case of duration, which is always more flexible in a communicative performance, as is often pitch too) they must be the most important aspects of music. Music analysis is largely built upon this assumption.

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[68] Liszt, Franz. [1926.] *The Gipsy in Music: The Result of the Author's Life-Long Experiences and Investigations of The Gipsies and their Music*. Tr. Edwin Evans. (London: William Reeves), vol. 2, 265.
[69] Hamilton, Kenneth. 2008. *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press), 286. There's a revealing and engaging lecture by Hamilton, with many examples from unpublished Liszt sources, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaU-T8ZAHkc : well worth watching.
[70] Wishart, Trevor. 1996. *On Sonic Art* (Abingdon: Routledge), 11.

But perceptual experiments have suggested that pitch and duration actually do less communicative work than aspects that are left to performers to fix:

> Gabrielsson and Lindström find that across the studies they surveyed the "most clear-cut" effects of emotional expression come through "effects of tempo/speed, intensity/loudness, and timbre/spectrum," all matters in which performance crucially determines effect (Gabrielsson and Lindström 2010, 392–93). "Results regarding pitch seem more ambiguous": the effect of pitches and harmonies seem to be easily inflected by tempo and loudness. Moreover experiments by several groups have been highly successful in showing that different manners of performance of the same musical material can trigger very different (and accurate) assessments by listeners of the intended emotional expression (Juslin and Timmers 2010).[71]

This is precisely why WCM is so concerned to control performer behaviour, as far as possible to subject it to imagined composer intention. The very fact that what performers do makes so much difference is the motivation for its policing: because otherwise it contradicts the most precious belief, that the composer knows best and can be accurately obeyed. To sustain that belief it's necessary also to believe that the notation is sufficient, provided that performers are correctly educated: again, that someone else knows best and has taught them what's required. In every way, performers are subjugated to authorities. How else can the fallacy of these beliefs be hidden? It is the insecurity that every performer senses behind these beliefs, and in their relationship with a score they're preparing for public performance and criticism, that drives so many to what Lisa McCormick (2015, 132) has called 'A near-fanatical obsession with faithfulness to the score', that sense that there must be a justification for every nuance traceable back to the composer's intention. It's a major ingredient in the anxiety that characterises so much WCM performance.

And it's so unnecessary. We have only to accept, realistically, that notation is woefully—or perhaps happily—inadequate to specify musical performance to realise that not only are performers doing much of the communicative work that turns a score into a persuasive musical experience, but there's no good reason not to recognise and celebrate that. And the celebration can legitimately—since performance changes anyway over time and meanings with it, created by changing contexts and cultures—embrace, and encourage performers to contribute their own, potentially new and highly creative readings of these same notes (if not also others; but we'll come back to that possibility later). 'Music's function is', as Mark Johnson has said, the 'presentation and enactment of felt experience.'[72] And that experience is the performer's every bit as much as the composer's, indeed more so in that the performer is doing the performing and it's their felt experience that is being enacted, albeit it using materials provided by the composer, whose felt experience can only be guessed at.

Composition is in the end in most cases the notating of an imagined performance. But it doesn't and can't encode the experience the composer has and imagines others having. It can't even notate the performance style with and within which the imagined performance works. The extent to which it's collaborative may also have been exaggerated in the case of dead composers, not just because

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[71] Leech-Wilkinson (2012), para 3.2. Juslin, Patrik N., and Renee Timmers. 2010. Expression and Communication of Emotion in Music Performance. In Juslin and Sloboda 2010, 453–89.

[72] Johnson, Mark. 2007. *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 238.

they’re absent in person but because their assumptions about the relationship between notation, style and sound are no longer shared by performers and other listeners.

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6.10 A work is greater than any performance of it

> There is an absolutely correct interpretation, or at least a limited selection of correct interpretations, but it is an *idea*: it cannot even be recognized in its pure state, let alone realized. The measure of an interpretation is the height of its failure. … something is *always* wrong.[73]

Not many performers, surely, will welcome Adorno's characteristically trenchant view that all performance is failure. As we shall see in Part 2, there is far too much damning of classical performers already. A more sympathetic view of this oft-stated belief (that the work is always greater) sees a work as a field of possibilities, for whose richness in potential we have to thank the composer. Many fine performances can be made within it, but it will never be possible to realise all that potential in just one of those. The work is thus defined by that theoretical totality.[74] This is an attractive way of thinking about scores (NB scores) and performances, even when (perhaps especially when) we dissolve the work concept. It comes under strain, though, as soon as we look at pieces that were never conceived by their composer in the kind of depth we like to attribute to the masters of the high classical music, which in its purest form (as Janet Levy pointed out in the 1980s) means Germanic composition of the 18th to early 20th centuries.[75] Christopher Small (1998) points to 19th-century Italian and French opera for examples of pieces that acquire full value only in superlatively virtuosic performances, the value brought by a performer to a relatively sketchy score.[76] The same applies, of course, to most popular song which may never have had a score in the first place, hence the endless series of court cases in which performers in rock bands attempt to gain some continuing rights for their contribution to what the courts still insist on seeing as works created by just one of them, the imaginary composer. It's not coincidence that the law depends on the work concept: it was written by people who saw classical music as proper music and the rest as merely debased derivatives.

With classical music, however under-determined (to borrow analytic philosophy's useful view of score),[77] we seem to be able to ask, 'what remains when you take away the performance?', expecting the answer, 'enough to constitute something in which that performance and the experiences it generated were already implicit or in some idealist sense existing'. But does any of it exist? Only in some shared assumptions about how notes sound, assumptions that, as we've seen, change greatly over time. Even if one agreed—which musicians have by no means always believed—that those notes could not be changed, what is there of this artefact, in the score or anywhere else, that is more powerful ('greater') than a performance of them or separable from one?

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[73] Adorno, Theodor W. 2006. *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction: Notes, a Draft and Two Schemata*. Ed. Henri Lonitz, tr. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity), 92.
[74] Benson, Bruce Ellis. 2003. *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music* (Cambridge University Press), 147–54.
[75] Levy, Janet M. 1987. Covert and Casual Values in Recent Writings about Music. *The Journal of Musicology* 5(1), 3–27.
[76] Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. 1st ed. (Middletown CT: Wesleyan), 6–7.
[77] E.g. Godlovich, Stan. 1998. *Musical Performance: A Philosophical Study* (London: Routledge), 82, 86–8.

It's the fact that a score can give rise, given fine performers, to so many enriching musical experiences that makes us want to imagine something lying behind them that contains all that greatness. But actually, just as in popular music, it is the performers who are doing the work, making the experiences. That they are working from notes in a score doesn't make their contribution any less vital. So what is the composer's role? There can be no doubt that some scores repeatedly give rise to far greater experiences than others. But it's also all too possible to murder a score, as we all know from listening to school concerts. Performance always makes a major contribution, of whatever kind. And so we need to get more used to thinking of classical music as a game with several players, a composer, a performer, a listener, a culture of composition, a culture of performance and a culture of response, as a minimum.[78] And we need also to temper the tendency to see the composer as the single point of origin for the process by understanding composition not just as a cultural practice but also as imagined performance. Performance and the experience of performance are always there, contributing vitally to whatever else is involved in the making of music. One may think of composition as a process of organising some of the materials in advance.

Overall, then, classical music becomes less a matter of construction and more a matter of expression than we're generally taught; and this is entirely consistent with what we saw in discussing the performance of form: an imagined whole, a work, a field of possibilities, is not as pertinent to the nature of music as the experience of each moment as it happens.

Continue to 6.11 'Scores have limited interpretative possibilities'

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[78] Born, Georgina. 2010. For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn. *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 135, 205–43. Cook, Nicholas. Musical Encounters: Studies in Relational Musicology. IMR Distinguished Lecture Series 2016. https://vimeo.com/173467067; https://vimeo.com/174331931; https://vimeo.com/176142250; https://vimeo.com/178029806.

6.11 Scores have limited interpretative possibilities

I'm (fairly) sure no believes that there is one ideal performance of a classical score, but certainly whenever we play we are all striving to produce it. This is curious. Of course one is trying to make something wonderful. But it's unrealistic to suppose that there are not many other ways of making equally persuasive performances of the same score. To strive for the ideal performance seems admirable (on stage perhaps necessary) as a goal, but it misses a vital point about performance expressivity. As performance styles change new kinds of expressivity (and therefore new experiences) become possible, but at the same time old kinds become impossible because one is now using different dimensions of sound as expressive means. What you could do as a string quartet in 1905, with independent lines, you could no longer do in 2005 with precise synchronisation; but things could be done with synchronisation that could not be done when parts were allowed some autonomy. You can't have every possible expressive means available to you all at once. Performance styles are always selections of expressive means, and performance style change always involves gains and losses. Another style will afford other insights that couldn't have been had in a previous one, even the one the composer knew.

What can be expressive is hard to assess with only 120 years of recorded evidence. And therefore how limited are the possibilities for 'interpreting' scores remains to be seen. Have we heard sufficiently varied performances to come to any kind of judgement about it? Recordings offer astonishing differences, especially from musicians born before around 1870 whose practices to us seem bizarrely free. Performance became more homogenous once recordings became widespread, promoting norms; and our sense of what's possible is very much influenced by the results. On the one hand we have access to far more performances than ever before, leading us to suppose we've heard everything now; on the other, they're more and more alike. So I don't think current experience is any kind of guide to what might be possible with these same scores.

That's the practical case. The theoretical case depends, as usual, on the work concept. The work is by definition something with integrity, designed, created, separate from other works. There must be things it cannot be, which is why analytical philosophers have spent so much ink on the imaginary case (such a thing doesn't exist in this homogenous performance culture, obviously) of a performance that is so different that it's no longer of the work but of something else: though for Nelson Goodman all that takes is a single changed note.[79] But without the work concept (and I think we're beginning to see why we must do without it) we'll find that we can get by very well without this sort of unrealistic boundary-drawing around whatever it is that someone with authority wants the work to be.[80]

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[79] Goodman, Nelson. 1976. *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (2nd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett), 186.

[80] As Mine Doğantan-Dack writes, 'there is no structurally-grounded, pre-determined expressive meaning waiting to be discovered, as an ontological component, in any piece of music.' The whole essay is well worth reading in this context. Doğantan-Dack, Mine. (forthcoming 2021). Aesthetics meets the performing body: Re-thinking Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto. In ed. Garrett Michaelsen and Chris Stover, *Making Music Together: Analytical Perspectives on Musical Interaction*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

That leaves just the PR—and in some cases the legal—issue of how to label a performance that may start from a classical score but result in a musical event that's quite unlike a typical performance of it. It seems to me that this, too, can be a practical rather than a philosophical question (unless you're an analytical philosopher). If I'm putting on a performance that's resulted from my work with the Moonlight sonata score but that doesn't sound much like it usually sounds, I have to decide whether to warn the audience; and that may depend on the kind of people I expect to come. Are they expecting something radical, or not? Do I want to shock them, or not? Shall I give it a new name: Storm Sonata, for example? Shall I pretend I've discovered the score in a previously closed archive in Tbilisi? Or shall I just say that no one has the right to outlaw an innovative reading of a classical score by an out-of-copyright composer? Maybe I want to know how far a performance can go and still generate a persuasive musical experience, in which case this could be a rather productive experiment, especially if many in the audience don't recognise the Moonlight in the Storm.

Now we have the evidence, from old recordings and modern experimental performances, that there are many radically different persuasive readings that can start from the same score (more on what's persuasive, and on 'starting from a score', later), what do we do with this knowledge? The answer might partly depend on whether we think classical music is in an ideal state at the moment. Is it healthy? Is it right that performers should be brought up believing that there is only a very narrow range of correct approaches to each score? Is it right that the very tight limits on performer innovation or creativity are policed so closely throughout their careers, by teachers, examiners, adjudicators, fixers, agents, critics, and the rest? Is it right that difference is so strongly criticised, to the extent that to be different is to be unable to work? Is this an attitude to difference that we would tolerate more widely in society? Are performers happy with their lot, as servants to the imagined composer's wishes? Are they content to do what they're told, rather than to explore new possibilities? Are young audiences flocking to concerts? Is classical music really thriving? Can the business, in the long run, continue? Is it artistically exciting? Is it ethically justifiable?

These are important questions in principle. And there are many others. But on the whole, none of these has been thought to be especially important to the music business. There the only question about musicians' fitness is whether they are mentally and physically tough enough to survive in the profession, to put in the hours and to do as they're told. Those who can, succeed, given some luck and good contacts; those who can't, give up. And so a key qualification is obedience. One believes and one obeys. Or if necessary, one just obeys. But belief is a powerful motive, and instilling belief is therefore an essential part of musical training. We *believe* that our job is to follow the composer's wishes. We believe that we know what those are. We believe that we are sounding them in the way we play now. We believe that there is no other proper way to play. Because…

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6.12 The composer knows best

Anna Bull, studying British youth ensembles, found that 'A belief in the superiority of the composer's creative vision was formative for the music-making in my research sites…' (Bull 2014, 33), reflecting how strongly this is inculcated in young classical musicians. Small, in his chapter on 'summoning up the dead composer', compares our attitude to that towards 'mythological heroes from Achilles to Abraham Lincoln, from Moses to Che Guevara.' (Small 1998, 89) Later we'll look at obligations to the dead and think about how that effects our attitude to composers' intentions. It's relevant here, but it's such an important angle that it's getting a separate chapter (Chapter 11).

It's far too easy, as Small implies, to allow ourselves to become enthralled by the preferences of people who died a very long time ago: composers' preferences are interesting, of course, but how sensible is it to make them regulatory? If this question makes you uncomfortable then no wonder. '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) And that's because the belief in composers' sanctity, their judgement being beyond human criticism, is so deeply embedded since first lessons that it feels blasphemous to question it. But they were people, musicians like us interested in creating musical experiences, and particularly in imagining new ones—that yearning that's so consistently suppressed in modern performers.

Does the composer as a living musician know what's best for all time, even for the notes they've imagined? One does occasionally encounter a composer who is absolutely certain of exactly how they want their score to sound, and insistent that it must sound that way and that way alone. It's rare. (Kurtág springs to mind.) Should they have the right to control that (even if – Chapter 15 – under the law they may)? Don't we accept that there is a collaborative relationship between composer and performer, in practice even if not in the ideal master-servant relationship in which we're led to believe? Some composers are able to play their own scores well enough to show exactly what they make of them as performers. But even then, is that the same as they imagined as composers? Most composers, by contrast, are happy to hear what performers make of their scores and to accept that that may differ from what they expected. (Benson (2003, 71) quotes Elliott Carter: 'whichever [performance] I'm hearing always seems the best'.) When a score is new everyone is working within broadly the same performance style, so the difference is limited provided that the notation is detailed enough, which it usually is these days. When a score is centuries old that's very far from being the case. One response, the HIP response, is to insist on changing the performer and the listener to match the dead composer's long-gone environment (though of course they don't really know how that sounded and can't recover it with enough certainty to justify the effort: it justifies itself only through the contemporary musical results, which can be wonderful but that's because the musicians are wonderful, not because the performance is historically accurate). Another has been to aim for the impact that (we now imagine) the music had when new,[81] which allows for such miracles as Eugene Goosens' reorchestration of *Messiah*. (If you've not heard the Halleluja chorus with cymbals, triangle and trombones you've not lived.)

[81] E.g. Kivy, Peter. 1995. *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 9–46: chapter 2, 'Authenticity as intention'. Benson (2003), 104–6.

Another way to question the composer's omniscience has been to ask whether they even knew best as composers, seeking mistakes, errors of judgement, and so on. Composers do make mistakes, most of which get sorted out in pre-premiere rehearsal. (Though a few slip through, maybe.) And there may be the odd moment even in the most perfect composer's score where one might wonder whether a different note might sound even better. But the issue here is about the everlasting superiority of their taste in performance. The assumption seems to be that whatever they imagined needs to be preserved as a whole, notes and performance; that those belong together so perfectly that the combination must produce a better musical experience than any other. There's been much argument over this to do with instruments, phrasing and so on; and it never leads anywhere that hasn't already been reached by the assumptions of the people involved in the argument. I suggest we don't go over all that ground yet again. But it does seem reasonable to suppose that a great performance is about more than reproduction. I think we know that it is about a lot more than that. And that's because the way music works is not wholly invented by composers. Composers and performers are drawing at least equally (performers more so, in all probability) on processes that are deeply rooted in brain function. A successful musical experience has much to do with how well the sounds that have been made (by the performer plus composer) stimulate a complex interaction of evolved, inherited, learned, and unexpected responses that are at least as much to do with the changing dynamics of sound and other kinds of dynamically shaped experiences (above all emotions and motion in space) as with a priori beliefs brought to the experience from an ideology. (More on this in Chapters 12.2 & 22.)[82] Many of these responses may change over time as cultures change,[83] and of course they differ between individuals, while also containing ingredients that are much longer-term, in some cases as long-term as having evolved through natural selection. They are also operating at quite a deep level with the possibility, therefore, of being realised in something as variable and culture-dependent as musical sound in many different ways. The idea that any one person can know better than any other how to make something as under-determined as a WCM score into the best experience for everyone is… implausible.

So what we're left with is a question of ethics. Do we want the composer to be in charge, even when they're long dead? Do we want a collaboration? Do we want to legislate for it? Who benefits? Who is harmed? It seems to me, and it can only be an opinion, that we accept in WCM that performers have insights to offer; and it's fairly obvious from our behaviour as audiences and customers that we value the insights and we value the performers for having them. That seems to show that we do see performers as artists, creatives, not just as servants.[84] And so I suspect that there is a contradiction built into our ideology that we need to try to ameliorate. We're supposed to see composers as entitled to rule for ever on how to perform their scores, but at the same time we know that performers contribute substantially and are thankful that they do. It's not hard to resolve this contradiction. We simply accept that composer worship is misguided and we moderate it. We agree instead that performers are entitled to work unmolested in their own domain. That's to say, they are entitled to be treated as artists, not as copyists, and not to be judged on the faithfulness of their

[82] For more on musical dynamics, from numerous perspectives, see Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel, and Helen M. Prior. 2018. *Music and Shape* (New York: Oxford University Press).

[83] Even Adorno, deeply invested in the notion of correct performance, recognised that '… performance is not concerned with 'an eternal work *per se* nor with a listener dependent upon constant natural conditions, but rather with historical conditions … the works themselves have their history and change within it'.' Padison, Max. 1993. *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge University Press), 192–3.

[84] Kivy (1995, 122–8) makes a similar case.

copy but rather on the impact of their art: that judging is the molestation that prevents creatively deviant imagination, indeed imagination *tout court*.

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6.13 Composers' intentions are (can be) known

One of the funniest things I've read about WCM in a long time was a headline in the online academics' daily, *The Conversation*, on 14 January 2015: 'We're playing classical music all wrong – composers wanted us to improvise'. Suddenly disobedience becomes obedience: for we still have to be obedient, naturally. It almost makes me want to obey the score. But not quite.

Another interesting light was shed on this issue by a paper given by Mark Kroll at a symposium, 'Why look back?', held in Utrecht in 2017.[85] He was talking about the pianist Ignaz Moscheles (1794–1870) who spoke up for following the composer's intentions in 1830s/40s.

> "All good music has its time, its conception… [T]o obscure the distinction between styles, and to combine everything with one uniform [approach] is therefore the worst of all mistakes in the arts. The pinnacle of perfection in art is to render those [works] according to the time in which it is written…in order to reach this perfection, the performer must reflect on the work of the composer and capture its spirit… in summary… render each work according to the thoughts of those who created it."[86]
>
> Yet, regardless [Kroll comments] of the purported attention to "the intentions of the composers," it would not have occurred to Moscheles and his colleagues to ignore either nineteenth-century aesthetics and sensibilities or the demands of their audiences. …For example, Moscheles never objected to any composition of Handel being performed by large numbers of performers, as was customary at the time. He raved about the performance of *Messiah* at the Handel Commemoration of 1834 that featured 223 instrumentalists and a chorus of 397 singers, devoting many pages to the festival in his diary. … He felt equally sanguine about the use of an ophicleide after hearing another *Messiah* in 1834, writing to Mendelssohn on 26 June that this unique instrument was "a very useful addition, for just as you say of a steam engine (remember, this is written at the height of the Industrial Revolution in England), it has ten-horse power, so of this you can say, it has ten-trombone power." … He added wind instruments to some of Bach's keyboard concertos … (Schumann heartily approved of this practice), and essentially rewrote ten Bach preludes from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (including additional measures!) that he arranged for piano and cello (*this* inspired Schumann's wrath). …[87]

This is a vivid example of something that's very common in writings on performance. The practice the author refers to turns out, when there's a way of cross-checking, to be quite unlike what we would mean when using the same words. Moscheles's faithfulness to the composer's intentions are not ours, as we can see from his practice. Similarly, as I wrote in a previous study, when

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[85] Kroll, Mark. 2017. Ignaz Moscheles and the Performance of Early Music in the Nineteenth Century. Paper read at the International STIMU Symposium 'Why Look Back? The Seductive Power of the Musical Past', Utrecht, 30 August–1 September 2017. I am most grateful to Professor Kroll for sharing a copy of his paper.
[86] Kroll's note here reads: Francois-Joseph Fétis and Ignaz Moscheles, *Méthode des Méthodes* (Paris: M. Schlesinger, 1840, (facs. Geneva: Minkoff, 1973), chapter 13, p. 75.
[87] Kroll, op. cit., extracts from typescript pp. 3–5.

> Leopold Auer, born in 1845, … objected strongly to continuous vibrato in his textbook from 1921 I think we can assume that his own, which [as we can hear on his recording of Tchaikovsky's 'Melodie', Op. 42 no. 3, from 1920] was continuous but narrow, wasn't the kind of vibrato he was talking about.[88]

Yet without those recordings his words would be taken by performance practice scholars as conclusive proof that in the 1920s he and his students played with no vibrato. Kenneth Hamilton, in his great book *After the Golden Age: Romantic pianism and modern performance*, which everyone who plays nineteenth-century repertoire should read, gives further examples of pianists apparently forbidding practices but simply meaning, 'don't overuse' (Hamilton 2008, 149–50). Roy Howat quotes Marguerite Long and Pierre Monteux's memories of Debussy insisting on steady tempi.[89] If we had those as our only evidence we'd all be playing Debussy in strict tempo (actually, many of us are…). Yet as Marco Fatichenti comments, 'the evidence at our disposal, not least that of the composer's recordings, points towards a style that was much more expressive and free than those words would let us believe'.[90] Compared to some of his contemporaries Debussy's playing does use less wide tempo variation (save in his 'La plus que lente' which I've suggested may have been ironic).[91] But compared to our expectations Fatichenti is right.

It's clear, then, that we can't rely on texts meaning what they appear to mean to us. There is a great deal of written evidence on nineteenth-century performance practice, and a lot from the eighteenth, much of which is called upon to justify reconstructions of the dead composer's intentions as far as sound and style are concerned. (Their wider artistic or communicative intentions are a much larger topic, one on which musicologists can very reasonably and interestingly comment.[92] But here my concern is with performance style.) These examples, and others like them, show how easy it is to claim too much for the text evidence, and to jump to conclusions that seem obvious to us but are actually quite wrong, historically speaking. All this, not to put too fine a point upon it, rules out any confidence in imagining the sounds described in texts on musical performance that predate recordings. Not only do we not know composers' intentions in sound before the late nineteenth century, we cannot.

From the later nineteenth century, however, the composer's performance assumptions and thus expectations—sometimes, when they are performing, perhaps also their intentions—become a real issue to consider, and so we need a way of thinking about them. I separate expectations from intentions because it's the general performance style they know that leads them to assume that their score will sound a certain way. It's possible that they might intend something else, something

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[88] Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2009a. *The Changing Sound of Music, chapter 5, para. 9*. Auer (1921) 22–4; further discussed in Brown, Clive. 1999. *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750–1900* (Oxford University Press), 522.

[89] Howat, Roy. 1997. Debussy's Piano Music: Sources and Performance. In ed. Richard Langham Smith, *Debussy Studies* (Cambridge University Press), 80.

[90] Fatichenti, Marco. 2020. Rejecting the Dictator: Overcoming Identity Aesthetics Through Granados's Sounding Legacy. PhD thesis, King's College London, 95. https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/156367132/2021_Fatichenti_Marco_1636233_ethesis.pdf

[91] Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 'Theorie, Analyse, Performance Studies. Kooperationen und Konflikte' (with Tihomir Popovic). In ed. Tihomir Popovic. *Claude Debussys Aufnahmen eigener Klavierwerke* (Hofheim: Wolke, 2023), 11–30, last letter. [Text dates from 2013–14] <https://www.wolke-verlag.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/230816_Debussy_silbentrennung.pdf>

[92] On this see an outstanding essay by Michael Wood, *London Review of Books* 38(3), 4th Feb 2016.

perhaps not even realisable by contemporary performers. We can't know that, although for the most recent composers there is an increasing quantity of video evidence from rehearsals that's suggestive.[93] When we hear them play their own scores we may feel we're getting closer to hearing what they intended, but that very much depends on the ways in which their performance training leads them to use their instrument, and on the extent to which their technique allows them to make the sounds they imagined. We can never be sure, but with a competent player the sounds are certainly of interest if we care about their score.

But that is not to say that the score can only work well played this way, or even that it will always work best played like this. Composers' performances are very interesting: they show us what kind of sense the score made to the person who first imagined it being sounded. But that's all they do. A composer is another musician, not the measure of unsurpassably great performance. Not even legislating for eternal authorial control over interpretation, as happens in France (astonishingly),[94] can change that. A different musician may be more persuasive in a particular context: 'interpretation never ends', and in music it is even less constrained by content than in texts.

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[93] Bailey, Amanda, and Michael Clarke. 2011. *Evolution and Collaboration: the composition, rehearsal and performance of Finnissy's Second String Quartet* (PALATINE. Video: preview at https://youtu.be/xRL0VP0kTT4). Archbold, Paul, et al. 2011. *Climbing a Mountain: Arditti Quartet rehearse Brian Ferneyhough 'String Quartet no. 6'* (PALATINE. Video, available at https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3024at).

[94] Pavis, Mathilde. 2016.The Author-Performer Divide in Intellectual Property Law: A Comparative Analysis of the American, Australian, British and French Legal Frameworks (PhD thesis, University of Exeter).

6.14 The performer should be inaudible

Caring about the composer's intentions is admirable in its courtesy, its concern that his imagination continues to be heard long after his death.[95] We'll look at this in Chapter 11. But there's a much less admirable view that is strongly promoted alongside it and that we need to consider now; and this is, in Cook's summary, that 'the performer's highest ambition should be self-effacement' (Cook 2013, 15). A crude form of this is often heard in criticism of young musicians. As one of my participants in an online questionnaire recalls being told by a juror, 'Great composers do not need your input to improve their music.' We are there, in other words, for the great composers to speak through us: as far as possible our selves should disappear.

Lying behind this fantasy is the far-reaching extent to which norms are shared throughout WCM culture: performance style is so standardised that it creates a habitus within which no one hears the performance style as a style: it is simply taken for granted as the way music sounds. It becomes transparent. This is what Proust was celebrating when he imagined that 'the playing of a great musician is so transparent, so replete with its content, that one does not notice it oneself, or only like a window that allows us to gaze upon a masterpiece'.[96] It's a lovely idea, and a lovely feeling for the listener as much as for the performer, that they are all in direct communion with the composer, as the performer dissolves from the space between. But it's a delusion. There is always performance style shaping the way that notes are sounded and follow one another so as to create something that feels meaningful and that seems to convey a message direct from another mind. The performer and her performance culture, with all that that does to shape musical experience, is always there, and not just there but is always the proximate source of the very meaning that one attributes to the composer.

The unfortunate consequence of this degree of style-deafness is that when a performer does something original listeners suddenly notice that they're there and the illusion is broken. For this it's the performer who is blamed, for being there at all; not the listener for failing to notice that the performance has been making the music all along. How deluded can we be? What's particularly shocking is the character of the criticism that is often heaped on performers for being noticed. As we shall see later (Chapter 9), when we look in uncomfortable detail at the language of critics, the performer is accused of drawing attention to themselves, of narcissism, when what has actually happened is that the critic has failed to hear what's really going on, which one might think was a music critic's first duty.

And so, as we shall see, performers are expected to be inaudible (that's how absurd it is), to disappear like a well-trained servant who knows their place, to provide everything their master needs and yet to do it as if they were not there at all. Or is it more like ventriloquism in which the ventriloquist makes the audience believe that the dummy is speaking? Although the pleasure comes

[95] I use he/his throughout, when discussing composers, and she/her when discussing performers, to remind us of the difficulties still faced by women in WCM because of the patriarchal notion of the godlike composer.
[96] Adorno 2006, 119, who called it 'the real paradox of reproduction'. My thanks here to Mine Dogantan-Dack. See also Bruce Haynes's section on the transparent performer in Haynes, Bruce. 2007. *The End of Early Music: A Period Performer's History of Music for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press), 93–6.

from the pretence as much as the content, we do need to remember that it's a performance we're hearing, not a plausible illusion.

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6.15 Composers are alive and listening

Steven Isserlis imagines that when musicians arrive in the Next World,

> …there the great composers will be, though, waiting for us, scores in hand. 'You misunderstood this!' 'Why did you change that note?' And so on – a slightly worrying thought.[97]

Assuming, for a moment, that the great composers are there (we *are* joking?), one must wonder whether after all this time they're really that interested in us? Haven't they learned anything, changed their minds, decided it doesn't much matter now? Have they nothing better to do with eternity than check on us and on what we make of them? Do performers assume that since *they* are obsessed with the composers' intentions the composers must be obsessed with theirs? Does this fanciful idea hang over from childhood warnings about God watching our every move, ready to disapprove of anything we do? 'Remember, HE sees all.' And incidentally, did God think the composers were right in the first place? Or has He shown them what they should have written and how it should have sounded, and will they show us when our time comes?

I wouldn't be worrying about this, or joshing with the musings of a fine musician, were it not that this idea of the composer alive and listening is ubiquitous in WCM-speak.

> What does Mozart want? First of all, he is concerned… (Heinrich Schenker, 1925)[98]

> "Like this, like this, like this," Bach is saying in the threefold sequence of bars 5–6. (Joseph Kerman, 2005)[99]

> I only do what the composer wants (Teodor Currentzis, 2018)[100]

It's tempting to dismiss this as just a figure of speech, but I don't think it's quite that innocent. We use the present tense because we do feel, and believe unless we think about it, that the composer is present in the score, or at any rate in a work that lies behind the score, and that they are made present by us when we play the score as intended. That's to say, they come back to life and their imagination inhabits ours: they live in us, in our actions as performers and our experiences as listeners. And it's only a very small step from there to feeling that they are present in a Work, and that one is in dialogue with them as one tries to work out how it can ideally sound. It's another lovely idea, another happy delusion, but for all that still a delusion. I'm sorry to put it bluntly, but,

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[97] Isserlis, Steven. 2016. *Robert Schumann's Advice to Young Musicians, Revisited by Steven Isserlis* (London: Faber), 42. A similar thought, in a document that's full of notions worth challenging (if anyone's looking for a seminar topic), is up front here: www.benjaminzander.org/press-release-the-story-of-the-project/. (My thanks to Marten Noorduin for this link.)

[98] Schenker, Heinrich. 1994. *The Masterwork in Music: A Yearbook, I (1925)* ed. William Drabkin (Cambridge University Press), 22.

[99] Kerman, Joseph. 2005. *The Art of Fugue: Bach's fugues for keyboard, 1715–1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 11.

[100] Teodor Currentzis: Music to Die For. Interview with Thea Derks, 5 May 2018.

with the exception of those still alive, the composer is dead and usually has been for a very long time. They're really not very likely to be listening to us, or minding if we do things differently.

Fulfilled as we may feel by the sense that the composer is present and delighted, and sad as it may seem to let go of that, I do believe that we can still have equal satisfaction from a practice that produces moving results while at the same time keeping a realistic view of what's actually going on. Just as atheism doesn't stop us loving our neighbour and helping the traveller or the poor, we don't need to believe we are remaking the composer in order to feel profoundly moved by what emerges from a performance of their score, even though it may be very unlike anything that's emerged from it before.

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6.16 Composers are gods

Some good news here for composers, or it would be but for the awkward detail that you have to be dead; but give it time, and you too may become an authority beyond question. Perhaps I exaggerate a little. But we've seen plenty of respects already in which the great composers are beyond criticism. If we have a problem with their scores, we know it's we who need to adjust our thinking to make sense of theirs. One gets a hint of this from a tweet, again by the cellist, commentator and teacher Steven Isserlis:

> Musicians pondering hard-to-explain markings in a piece of music should perhaps bear in mind Sherlock Holmes' maxim: "Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth." It does work…[101]

And so interpreting the score is comparable to interpreting a sacred religious text: one is searching for the true meaning of the true word. As Lisa McCormick puts it,

> … the pantheon of musical genius is now thought to be populated only by master composers. (McCormick 2015, 125)

The pantheistic metaphor is apt, in that musical heaven is obviously populated by many composer gods, even if we all have our own idea of who is Zeus.

We'll look at the pervasiveness of religious thinking in WCM ideology in Chapter 30, in part 4. In brief, the composer is as a god, the critic is a prophet (judging how the word of god is to be applied), the performer a priest, and listeners the humble and obedient congregation. I'll argue there that, as in Christianity (which inevitably is the main source for WCM thought about composers), we affirm our love of our musical gods by performing their wishes, obeying their instructions, revering their works, in return for which they love us and look after us, rewarding us (as I said in introducing this chapter) 'when, and only when we achieve these aims most faithfully, with intense experiences of deep quasi-spiritual feeling.'

A similar analogy is offered by notion of the composer-hero (Scott Burnham's classic analysis of Beethoven reception a key critical text here),[102] evoked in Georgina Born's much-quoted comment that:

> the composer-hero stands over the interpreter, conductor or instrumentalist, interpreter over listener, just as the work ideal authorises and supervises the score, which supervises performance, which supervises reception.[103]

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[101] @StevenIsserlis tweeted at 5:58 pm on Fri, Sep 21, 2018. If I seem to be using Steven Isserlis as a source for several of these beliefs it's only because he so often repeats them and with such sincerity and conviction. It's the underlying belief-system I'm questioning here, not the integrity of any practising musician, listener or follower.

[102] Burnham, Scott. 1995. *Beethoven Hero*. (Princeton University Press.)

[103] Born, Georgina. 2005. On Musical Mediation. *C20th Music* 2(1), 26.

Another model might be that of architect, builder and client, where the composer is architect, the performer the builder who carries out the plans, no more and no less, and the listener is the client.

I find all these inappropriate. The composer is not a god, but (as I argue in the next section) a musician on a par with the performer; both are creative, though only the performer is essential. So one needs a model in which they can cooperate at best. Hence the architect/builder/client model fails. The performer is very much more creative than the builder;[104] though if we arranged our building habits differently the builder could (and to be fair sometimes does) play a much more creative part, again without an architect. Normally when this happens (the volume builders) the results are highly economical and aesthetically dire. But they needn't be. We could train them differently. There is much to learn, I suggest, from taking literally Cook's script model for the musical text,[105] taking it back from Performance Studies into the theatre rehearsal studio, bearing in mind how much more original and how much more varied are productions of play texts than musical scores. Here the composer/author hardly figures in decisions about how to play, what to mean. We'll look at this in Chapter 18.2.

Taking a different route, Emily Payne (2016, 2018), drawing on Ingold and Hallam (2007),[106] has argued (with support from Cook, who closes his 2018 book on *Music as Creative Practice* with her case) that performers are better understood as craftspeople: 'I characterise musical performance within a framework of craft, summarised by Richard Sennett as 'the skill of making things well'.' (Payne 2018, 108) This view is inflected by attending to the element of improvisation in real time interaction among performers and between performers, texts, instruments, technique, and performance norms, or in Payne's words, 'the constant attention and response entailed by engaging with the surrounding environment.' (ibid.) Much about the interest shown here in performers' creative exploration of their materials, working with new scores, is welcome. Naturally, there is much more of this creativity to be seen in an analysis of musicians interacting in the preparation of new scores, for they throw up interesting new problems to solve in ways that, in the preparation of canonical scores for performance, are generally confined to matters of coordinating detail. But to take these examples and to speak in terms of improvising solutions only serves to disguise the narrowness of the space within which that happens and the faithfulness of the improvisation to institutional norms. 'Musicians' capacities are developed through improvisation, not in an extraordinarily innovative or revelatory sense, but through the exercise of proactive yet practical engagement with the world around them' (Payne 2018, 118) where the musical world around them is defined and bounded by norms. The danger with this model is that to celebrate the performer as craftsperson may be taken, by less subtle thinkers than Payne, as another reason to constrain them within a world in which innovation is more technical than artistic, and in which finding solutions that

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[104] Liszt [1926], 265–6: 'The virtuoso is not a mason; who, taking blocks of stone and with a square, level and trowel in hand, (a conscientious and exact proceeding), constructs the poem which the architect has already designed upon the paper. He is not a passive instrument, reproducing the thoughts and feelings of others whilst adding nothing of his own. He is not a reader, more or less expert, delivering a text; without marginal notes or glossary, and requiring no interlinear commentary.'

[105] Cook, Nicholas. 2001. Between Process and Product: Music and/as Performance. *Music Theory Online* 7 (2).

[106] Payne, Emily. 2016. Creativity Beyond Innovation: Musical Performance and Craft. *Musicae Scientiae* 20(3), 325–344. Payne, Emily. 2018. The Craft of Musical Performance: Skilled Practice in Collaboration. *cultural geographies* 25(1), 107–22. Ingold, Tim and Elizabeth Hallam. 2007. Creativity and Cultural Improvisation: an Introduction. In E. Hallam and T. Ingold eds., *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation* (Oxford: Berg), 1–24. Cook, Nicholas. 2018. *Music as Creative Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press).

enable the better performance of norms and the composer's intentions is admired as the height of professional achievement. In this respect it is as dangerous as other beliefs examined here, if not more so in the high status it gives to skilled normativity at the same time as placing process above outcome and keeping performers in their place as craftspeople, not artists, manufacturing beautifully turned objects conforming to a model bequeathed by tradition, selected by the employer. It is a move that inadvertently could, in the wrong hands, elevate the oppression of performers by deepening admiration for their achievement as intensely skilled tradespeople—a metaphor we shall see wielded when we read the critics in chapter 9.

By following this link you can read Emily Payne's very interesting response to what I wrote above. It's especially helpful in emphasising that her argument should not be taken in the way I feared it might be. While naturally one wouldn't wish to restrict interpretation to the author's intentions… if anyone tries this on, please send them here!

In sum, by treating composers as if they were gods we treat ourselves as devoted worshippers whose purpose is to maintain the sanctity of tradition and reconfirm its values. I think classical music can do more than that, but only if we refuse to continue to accept these roles.

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6.17 Works

From seeing composers as gods, and scores as their sacred texts instructing humanity in how to make ideal music, it follows very easily that their texts are the written representation of their immortal Works (capital W). And thus we arrive finally at the one master delusion, the delusion to rule them all, that musical Works exist.

The appeal of a notion of Works is powerful partly because so many performances of so many scores are powerful. And so if I am overwhelmed, as usual, by a performance of Mahler 9, or Tristan, or (please…, insert your ideal example) how can I not feel that an artwork has been created, and—because the experience is overwhelming every time—that it's been created by the composer, sounded by fine musicians on His behalf? Art has been made, there's no question about that. But it's been made as a process in time by performers using a score rich in potential to afford great experiences. The composer, the performers, the performance style, the listeners and their previous exposure to these kinds of events, the environment, the context, and so on, are all contributing. The first four are all contributing to a very large extent. And it really is only the particular view developed by nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophical and legal thought and practice that's led to a situation in which the first (the composer) is seen as the only one that really matters. It's a product of romanticism and capitalism acting together, the genius and the employer, realising that they will both be better off if they can use the culture's worship of genius to concentrate in their own hands whatever rewards the culture can be persuaded to offer, distributing as little as possible to the partners in the process.[107] The Work works very well for capitalism, concentrating into one concept everything that the culture worships about the product and that in turn ensures its stability and confers on them—the composer and the employer (the publisher, the record company)—the rights to it. Those who argue for an ontology of Works are simply doing their bidding.

Can we come up with an analogy to test the ways in which music exists or happens? The element of play suggests football. Both happen over time. Performers of both are interacting, the fans are appreciating their expertise and the aesthetics of the game. Football is more like jazz than classical in that moves practised in rehearsal are selected to suit the context of improvised play. Individuals can shine but mainly it's a team effort. Football—let's do this thought experiment—could be composed like a piece and notated, learned, rehearsed, and performed. The performances could be more or less persuasive and engaging, and thrilling etc. Styles of play could change over time, though possibly less varied in football than in music because there may be more ways of getting one note to follow

[107] On capitalism and the ideology of creativity see Toynbee, Jason. 2018. The Labour that Dare Not Speak its Name: Musical Creativity, Labour Process and the Materials of Music. In Clarke, Eric F., and Mark Doffman. 2018. *Distributed Creativity: Collaboration and Improvisation in Contemporary Music* (New York: Oxford University Press), 37–51. For the relationship between composer and performer at a key period of change see Hunter, Mary. 2005. "To Play as if from the Soul of the Composer": The Idea of the Performer in Early Romantic Aesthetics. *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 58/2, 357–98. And then for the next phase, Taruskin, Richard. 2006a. Is There a Baby in the Bathwater? Part I: *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 63/3, 163–85; Part II: 63/4, 309–27.

another than physics allows for getting a ball from one place to another (although the two may be related),[108] due to different kinds of motion, real and quasi-real.

One could push the analogy too far, but it goes a long way, and more than far enough to allow us to ask of both in the same way, 'is there a work?'. People who want to earn money from the labour of composing, or from the labour of those who compose, will say 'yes', because then they have something to go on charging for. But that doesn't mean there is. Set aside the need, forced on us by capitalism, to have something to sell. Then the answer will depend on one's 'need' for reassurance. Clearly there's nothing there, just plans and memories of performances of a particular game. For some, the idea that the plan is a work will have useful psychological effects. Others can manage very well without that. As with payment, it's a question of need, in this case personal rather than institutional. But one can well imagine an institution, such as FIFA with its endless corruption scandals, doing very nicely out of rights based on the insistence that there is a work in each case. It's about money, not about play. In both cases what actually exists are instructions and performances. And it's the performances that people go to see. That's the football, and that's the music. They're made as they happen, and that happening and the experience of it is overwhelmingly the most important aspect of them.

A conventional move would be to argue that what remains common to every playing of the notation constitutes the Work, perhaps together with some aspects of its aesthetic effect, maybe even of its meaning, whatever one means by that, or that its workness embraces all possible playings. But what happens when a team of players choose to move the ball by a different route to the next goal, say passing to player Q rather than player P who then passes to N rather than M? Or perhaps even the final score might change? The standard WCM-ideological response would be to claim that the game played was no longer the Work, and that the changes in play must therefore be disallowed. But what's actually happened is that a perfectly satisfactory game of soccer has been played, with an entirely legitimate and, no doubt, exciting outcome, perhaps more exciting for being unexpected. The only casualty on the field is the notion of the work, which turns out to be quite irrelevant to the matter of what makes good football. It's nothing but a regulation to prevent difference, maintained by those whom difference unnerves.

It may be helpful to visualize what really happens when scores and performances are made. In an earlier study (Leech-Wilkinson 2012) I represented this as a multi-stage process, split apart by the gap that separates composer from all those (and the context) involved in performing their scores.

performance style → composer → notation || notation → performance style → performer → listener

Here the composer imagines a sounding performance, a little at a time, usually contributing to a larger plan. He—I use 'he' lest we forget the overwhelming preference the ideology has given to male composers until very recently—he imagines it in the performance style he knows. And he notates whatever current notational practice allows him to notate of whatever he thinks performers contemporary with him will be able to use to make something close to what he imagined. It's nothing like an adequate representation of what he heard in his mind, but it's a practical substitute

[108] Todd, Neil P.M. 1995. The Kinematics of Musical Expression. *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 97, 1940–9. Todd, Neil P.M. and Christopher S. Lee. 2015. The Sensory-Motor Theory of Rhythm and Beat Induction 20 Years On: A New Synthesis and Future Perspectives. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 26 August 2015.

given all the constraints. Then comes the gap. The gap separates the composer completing the score from the performer picking it up and doing what seems to them to be their best to turn whatever they think it implies (via their own period performance style) into sounds with which they are familiar. When composer and performer are contemporaries, most of all when they can work together, what was imagined and what is experienced by the listener may be similar. But the longer that gap the more different they must be. Now where is the Work? What we typically mean by a Work (a score, the sequence of sounds habitually made from it, their usual character and effect, their meaning if you think that those effects constitute meanings, perhaps (some have argued) all the effects and meanings that have ever been and might ever be made from that score, the conception, the ideals it represents, and so on) is at best an artefact, an imaginary by-product of the process we've just mapped. It's something we feel ought to exist, even though it really doesn't.[109] Partly we want it, as I've said, because of the power of performances of the score. But in fact, the transmission of ideas along that line mapped above is so tenuous, with so many interruptions—not just the gap itself but all the reinterpretations that happen after it—that it's quite unrealistic to suppose that anything as complex and rich as the Work we like to imagine has passed along it. That's not what's happened. Rather, the idea that there is a work, and of what it's like, is gradually constructed in the minds of people near the end of the line, and it constantly changes between them all and over time. Where it is, or what it's like, even at a specific moment and place, is impossible pin down.

But that is not to downplay the very concrete notion of a Work that is used for buying and selling musical activity as a product, that's to say for the commodification of music-making. Max Padison has shown how, following Marx, it's possible to see object-ifying music as a form of commodity fetishism, mistaking labour for its product (Padison 1993, 124). And that is essentially what we see here. The labour of musicians making music, starting from a composer's score, becomes fetishized as a commodity, a Work, which is ascribed not to them but to the composer and is then sold by others (those who claim to own rights to the composer's work and/or the performance made by the musicians) for their own benefit, while the musicians are minimally rewarded. This sense of Work is as clear as legal language can allow, for this sense makes money.

Yet how can the Work possibly bear the weight of the cultural, legal and financial systems that rest upon it? There's not a lot we can do about the legal and financial burden. It will take much longer to get that onto a sensible basis. But we can certainly do something about the cultural view we take of works. Given how little is there, and that for performers and listeners the constraints imposed by a belief in Works are so disadvantageous, limiting options, enforcing conformity, preventing insight through the exploration of difference, we can and sensibly should accept that in effect there are no works in the grand sense. Previously I suggested speaking of 'pieces' rather than works, retaining 'composition' for the composer's side of the gap. It still seems to me that this is an appropriately

[109] Lydia Goehr (1992, 106) theorises works, therefore, as 'fictional objects', a category that strives to allow them to exist while knowing that they don't. '[W]orks do not exist other than in projected form; what exists is the regulative work concept.' Indeed. Goehr (esp. 99–107) shows very clearly how shaky is the basis for WCM ideology, 'founded upon a complex [one might say 'confused'] aesthetic theory underlying the conceptual and institutionalized structure of classical music practice' (99); though unsurprisingly this is not the main lesson that's been taken from her (still very important) book. A significant refinement of aspects of Goehr's notion of 'work-concept' is offered in Strohm, Reinhard. 2013. Werk – Performanz – Konsum: Der musikalische Werk-Diskurs. In *Historische Musikwissenschaft: Grundlagen und Perspektiven,* ed. Michele Calella and Nikolaus Urbanek (Stuttgart-Weimar: Metzler), 341-355.

modest word in English for the very fragmentary and variable nature of whatever there might be in common between performances of the same score over time. A piece is a bit of something, but of what (in the case of a piece of music) we can never really know. Nor do we need to, given that what we can produce as performers from a piece, that's to say from a score, a performance style, skill and imagination, is already, and so often, so overwhelmingly wonderful.

So we should remove the notion of a Work. (I suggest we stop using the word entirely. I banned it from classes many years ago, and successive generations of music students seem to have managed very well without it.) We can recognise composition as an activity involving making plans and imagining performances and notating instructions. And we can use the notion of a 'piece' for the reduced sense that performances will be of a set of moves reduced to notation provided by a composer but not contained in or restricted to it. Notation is not lossless compression: it's very lossy indeed. And performance is not distortion: performance makes music.

Continue to 6.18 'So music is… What is it?'

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6.18 So music is…. What is it?

Finally in this chapter it may be helpful—now we've removed 'the music itself' and 'the actual music' on the grounds that there is nothing there behind the curtain, and now that we've dissolved the notion of a work— to consider for a moment what is 'music' in WCM.

For Nicholas Cook, it was a 'fantastical idea that there might be such a thing as music, rather than simply acts of making and receiving it'.[110] For Christopher Small,

> There is no such thing as music. Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something people do. [It] is .. an abstraction of the action, whose reality vanishes as soon as we examine it at all closely. … It is very easy to come to think of the abstraction as more real than the reality it represents, … a kind of universal or ideal lying behind and suffusing the actions. This is the trap of reification, and it has been a besetting fault of Western thinking ever since Plato…' (Small 1998, 2)

'And yet,' Ruth Levitas says, 'because music exists only in performance, it is also in this sense peculiarly concrete.'[111] You can't pin it down, and yet there it is, being made in front of your ears. It *happens*, though, as I've repeatedly emphasised; it doesn't *exist* except in memories of performances and of how they felt. Is 'listening' a sufficiently committed and involved word for this? Doesn't it sound too passive, too objective? Do we need a new word for listeners? Experiencers, perhaps, co-creators, participants, musical partners? Music, if we must have a definition, is the experience of a performance.

Jeff Warren (2014, 42) quotes Thomas Clifton, who wrote, 'Music is what I am when I experience it.'[112] And 'music is not a fact or a thing in the world, but a meaning constituted by human beings.' (Warren 43, Clifton 5) 1983 was a while ago, and it seems a shame that we continue to speak of music as if Clifton had never put this so well. But that is rather the nature of talk about WCM. Whatever scholars say, everyday talk about and beliefs about music continue to be reproduced, repeated, indoctrinated, with the damaging results we'll see in Part 2 of this book.

Continue to 6.19 'Conclusion: Why do we maintain these delusions?'

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[110] Cook, Nicholas. 2012. Music as Performance. In Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton (eds), *The Cultural Study of Music* (2nd ed. New York: Routledge), 188.
[111] Levitas, Ruth. 2010. *The Concept of Utopia* (2nd ed. Bern: Lang), 224.
[112] Clifton, Thomas. 1983. *Music as Heard: A Study in Applied Phenomenology* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 297.

6.19 Conclusion: Why do we maintain these delusions?

There are a great many forces bearing down on performers—intensive teaching from childhood combining indoctrination with models to follow, and the acquisition of technical control, exams, competitions, belief and conformity as qualifications for work, criticism, selection by agents, planners, record companies—all of which seem lighter if one accepts these folk beliefs about what one is doing. And so, in effect, these beliefs function as heuristics. Helen Prior and I defined these, in an article on 'Heuristics for Expressive Performance', as 'short cuts based on experience that solve problems too complex to resolve quickly enough using analytical thought'.[113] There we were talking mainly about concepts and metaphors that facilitate expressivity: ideas to do with shape, direction, style, gesture, speech, singing, and so on, all of which helpfully substitute for the minutely detailed, conscious calculation of sound.

The delusions we've been looking at here are also heuristics, but their role is not to assist expressivity but rather to narrow the field of possible choices as to what could be musical in performance. By ruling out non-structural playing, styles that are neither current nor documented in historical texts, significantly varied performance, the bypassing of indications in the score, the unexpected; and by asserting that what's left is natural, inevitable, in line with the composer's quasi-sacred and well-understood intentions, definitive of a work, encoded in the notation, currently stylish and therefore correct; this set of heuristic delusions simplifies the performer's decision-making by narrowing choice to the point where they almost have none. To some extent this makes life easier for the performer: they have much less to decide and less experimentation and practice to do. To a greater extent it makes it cheaper for the employer, who minimises the time performers have to be paid while deciding how to play most effectively together: almost all that is obviated by their knowing, before they meet, most of what they will do with a score.

We can thus think of both performance style and the ideology that helps to constrain it as a heuristic-complex which defines normative solutions within what would otherwise be a huge field of open possibilities. The practicality of the ideology is thus another powerful factor—alongside its claims to sacred status through safeguarding the composer as a figure worthy of worship and obedience—that leads musicians to value and rely upon it. It makes the job doable in real time while giving it a value beyond time. These are effective reasons to overlook its delusional aspects, despite their obviousness when one stands back just a little and looks at them in turn. Avoiding these questions enables performers to perform convincingly to themselves, which is a helpful ingredient in being able to persuade others; not essential, perhaps (a performer can easily simulate and frequently does), but helpful. Convincingly expressive performance within a given style, however thoroughly embodied the style through decades of training and repetition, might be difficult without the conviction that one was performing (expressively) correctly.

Equally, realising that these limits are ideological, and period-bound, opens up new approaches through challenging the delusions that contribute to it. Some will enjoy that and some will not. One

[113] Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel and Helen M. Prior. 2014. Heuristics for expressive performance. In Dorottya Fabian, Emery Schubert and Renee Timmers (eds), *Expressiveness in Music Performance: Empirical approaches across styles and cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 34-57 at 36.

has to be careful not to underestimate the difficulty of managing without these tightly-drawn limitations on freedom of choice; and be wary also of seeking to impose on performers an obligation in the other direction to range widely within the potentially unlimited space that surrounds current norms. Genuine freedom of musical expression involves being free to work within as well as without any number of constraints, so long as they are recognised and accepted willingly (see also Chapter 19.2). But for that proviso to be genuine we have to recognise what constrains us, what constitutes normativity in beliefs and practices, and also that they could be different.

We also must recognise that change will happen anyway over time, whether we like it or not. And so we should perhaps have more respect for it and be more intrigued by the possibilities it offers. Change is the engine of musical expressivity. Change is expressive locally, through often tiny adjustments of timing, loudness, pitch, or timbre. It's those that signal feeling and specify meaning when we speak and gesture. Only through change is musical (and indeed all other human) expressivity possible. Change brings a sense of meaning from moment to moment, but also on much larger scales over decades and generations as musicians (and indeed all humans communicating) adjust general parameters in order to enhance the significance of the sounds and movements they make. Any performance style needs change to enable expressivity. But when change is built-in and essential to the working of the system it inevitably is going to bring with it changeability on a much larger scale over time. Style change is a function of the mechanism of performance expressivity, vital for meaning-making. Yet precisely because of this, musical expressivity functions also as a meme-complex, spreading from one communicator to another. In addition, in another crucial factor, musical performance style and musical practices need to be related to other changing cultural practices in order to generate musical meaning that is recognised while being more subtle than the gross happy/sad, calm/excited differences whose musical and general cultural representations remain relatively stable, thanks to their being selected for by evolution. More subtle feeling states are mutable, responding to culture, enabling musicianship to remain relevant. And so again the practice and thus the ideology cannot help but mutate. Given all this, should we fear change, or the unexpected, in musical communication? Or might we learn to admire and celebrate it?

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We've seen, then, that performers benefit from maintaining a network of delusory beliefs concerning composers, their intentions, their products, our understanding of them and obligations to them. We shall see in later chapters how, at the same time, performers are disadvantaged, oppressed and made unwell by these same delusions and especially by the ways in which they are enforced. And that in turn will draw attention to those who enforce. For those who benefit most and most consistently are not the performers but the employers and also the gatekeepers who, knowingly or (often) unknowingly, work on their behalf. We shall be looking at them next, in Part 2.

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PART 2: The Policing of Performance

Alongside and in amongst WCM performers, as they seek to prepare and carry out their job, is a whole army of those whose job it is to constrain them, to ensure that the job is done in much the same way as in the recent past, and to prevent significant innovation. These gatekeepers to the profession include teachers, examiners, adjudicators, agents, managers, concert planners, fixers, record producers, critics, music journalists, broadcasters, bloggers, and more. Their job is to ensure that performers provide positive experiences for audiences with the least innovation that as gatekeepers they can achieve. They believe—and believe is the key word here—that they have a right and a duty to do that. I argue that they don't have that right, and that they have a duty not to. In Part 2 we'll focus on teachers (chapter 7) and critics of performance (9), and bring in others as (in chapters 8 and 10–17) we consider a series of themes and problems that make the job more constrained and less rewarding than it need be.

Continue to Chapter 7.1: Teachers and the WCM State

7 Teaching

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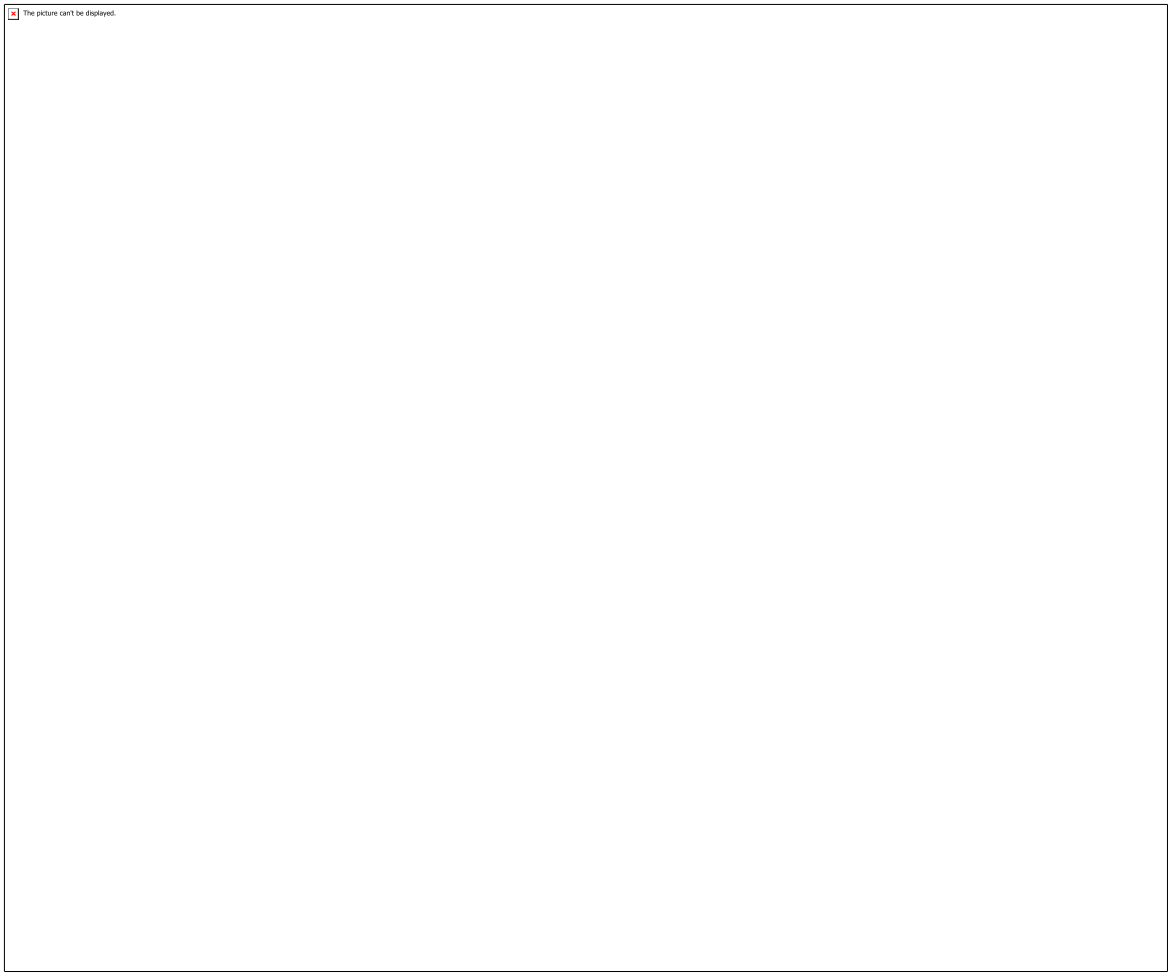
7.1 Introduction: the place of teachers in the WCM State

Music teachers, including (perhaps especially) those who teach children, are central to the dissemination and maintenance of WCM ideology. To understand just how far their reach extends through the music business it may be helpful to create a simplified model of the larger system within which musicians and gatekeepers work.



You'll see it's circular – that's essential to its power, for at every point it's self-reinforcing. At the outside and at the top I've put the record companies, not because they are always leaders (far from it) but because they concentrate the most economic power to disseminate, and thereby to validate, norms. The artists whom the big three companies (Sony, Universal, and Warner) promote necessarily have, or have had until very recently, the greatest reach among all kinds of audiences, in concert and on record. (I use 'record' here to include all forms of dissemination of recorded music, although the CD is still surprisingly common in classical.)[114] Recently, YouTube (and streaming more generally) has enabled a handful of stars to form without their help, albeit disseminating the same norms: for the purposes of this model we can include them within this circle, even though they are not reaching the public through quite so many gates.

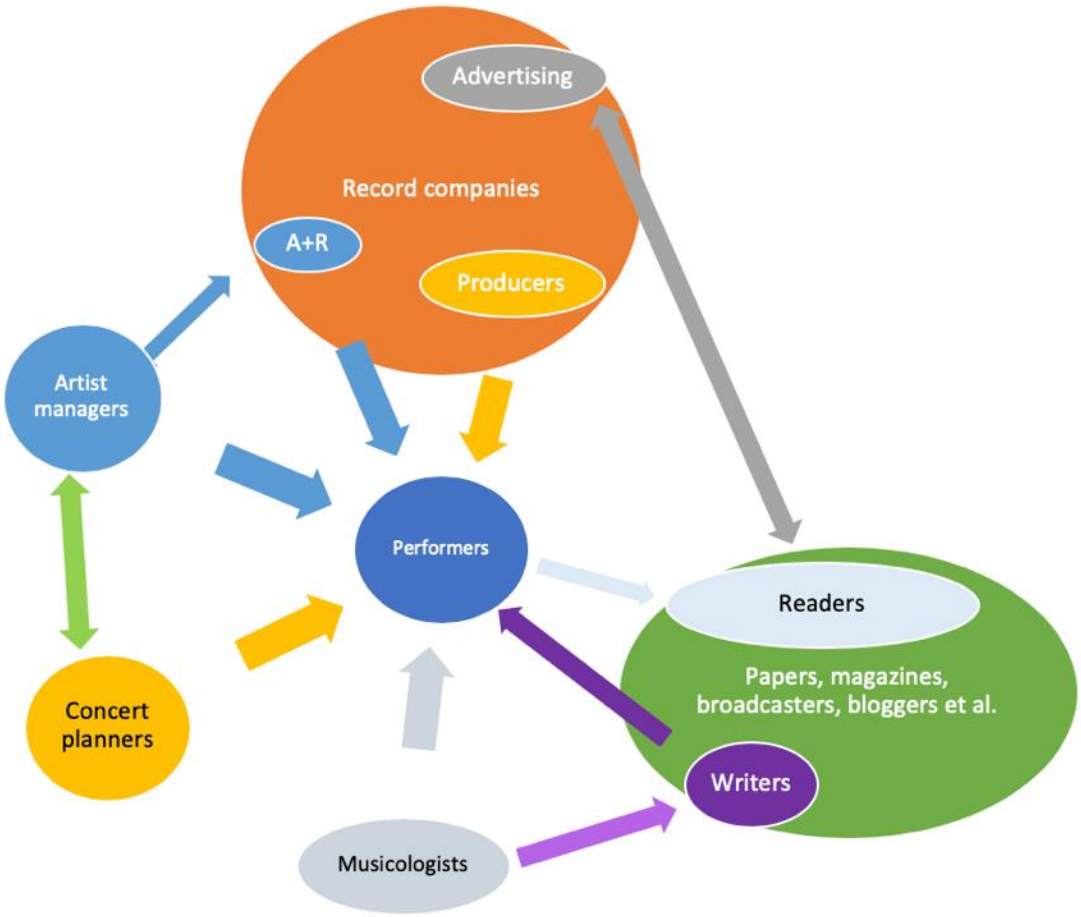
[114] Carboni, Marius. 2018. Evolving Business Models in the Classical Record Industry. In ed. Chris Dromey and Julia Haferkorn (2018), *The Classical Music Industry* (New York: Routledge), 44–54 at 47.

Through their Artists & Repertoire departments, record companies interact with artist managers (or agents) in deciding whom to promote. Being taken on by a major artist management company is confirmation that your playing or singing has the power to promote norms more persuasively than most. Artist managers interact with concert planners (opera houses, orchestras, venues etc) to get their artists work: both are looking for artists who will attract the largest audiences, providing the kinds of performances they expect and want repeatedly to hear. Record companies also interact through their advertising departments with the musical press, placing advertisements and supplying recordings for review, not infrequently on the understanding that an advertisement will be rewarded by printed coverage (more in this in Chapter 9.3).

As well as a variety of writers and broadcasters, in print and online, this circle includes readers in the sense that they, too, are gatekeeping by buying publications, subscriptions, concert tickets, and recordings, and also because a great many of them, bearing in mind the closed system that keeps WCM culture apart, share the same musical upbringing. This is why at the centre of our model sit the instrumental and vocal teachers. Almost everyone who works in the music business who's involved in selecting or critiquing artists had music lessons as children, often continuing to young adulthood, and through that process they all absorbed, at an age before they could think critically, a common set of fantasies, and beliefs in those fantasies, about works, the composer-god, the sanctity of the text, about correct style and the correct relationship between composers and performers, and about the correct behaviour that will enable them to succeed as performers, to pass exams, ultimately to get work. (Many of these are examined in chapters 5–6). Musicologists have input here because writers on music have usually done music degrees. And of course musicologists, like everyone else, have learned their underlying musical values from instrumental and vocal teachers. So you have a self-reinforcing system in which everyone shares and promotes the same values.[115]

At the same time, and especially at conservatoire level where the rules of the business are really set in stone, teachers are also performers. Thus in the alternate state of the model (below), the teachers simply switch roles with themselves to become the performers. In so doing they exchange policing for being policed, as those to whom they and their predecessors have taught WCM values and beliefs enforce those normative beliefs back upon performers. Hence the direction of the arrows of influence and enforcement switch as the roles switch: the rest remains unchanged, as it is intended to.

[115] This circular system is comparable to, interacts with and belongs within the self-reinforcing system discussed in Bull, Anna. 2018. Class, Gender, and the "Imagined Futures" of Young Classical Musicians. In Dromey & Haferkorn (2018), 79–95.



And so by alternating these two states, and looking at the direction of the arrows, we can see how teachers and performers police, and are policed by, the shared ideology which is thus constantly repeated and reinforced.[116] Now we can see just how powerful (how much more powerful than most ever feel) are the teachers of young musicians. What they believe, what they have been led to believe, provides a firm basis on which the ideology can be rebuilt in each new generation.

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[116] Another angle on this model is offered in Chapter 7 and especially 7.7a below.

7.2 Childhood lessons

Most teaching for WC musicians begins in childhood, among the children of middle- and upper-class parents, at parents' initiative and with parental encouragement, their conformist values built-in to WCM's ideology; and in this way pleasing the parent inevitably becomes associated with performing well.[117] (We'll see later how this gets transferred to pleasing the composer.) The teacher/parents/child become a team, at their most effective when in agreement about goals.[118] Gradually emerging as central to those goals are the approved ways of being musical which are thus rooted in the most formative relationships of one's life. Essential from the start is a willingness to subjugate oneself to a regime of regular practice, in which one teaches oneself to obey both the instructions in a score and one's teacher's advice on how to mould one's body into a tool that can realise those instructions effectively. Obedience, hard work, love, praise and musicianship are all bound-up together at a formative stage, as self-esteem interlocks with self-discipline and self-policing: the teacher's guidance, the composer's intentions, the score's instructions seem indistinguishable.

Nevertheless, from our perspective we can easily see how much is excluded, and how ill-equipped young performers are to do anything other than read and obey. A very obvious gap opens up between their musicianship and that of their contemporaries engaged in making popular music. For the latter, learning to make music is also about copying, but it is copying by ear, not from a text, often not through a teacher. It is a matter of becoming like one's model rather than being obedient to instructions. So while the classical musician may have superior technical command of her instrument, the popular musician discovers how to improvise.

We can see this difference with particular clarity in a study by Lucy Green (2008),[119] the last chapter of which reports a study she undertook with schoolchildren who were asked to use informal learning (learning through copying by ear) to play classical pieces.

> Michelle [one of the minority who'd also had classical lessons] got out her clarinet for this lesson (trying to learn 'Für Elise'). She seemed nervous about trying to learn it by ear and wanted to go and find the notation… She seemed worried about playing the wrong notes. Interesting, as she hadn't been inhibited before on other instruments… (163)

This little example emphasises how strongly the values of correct performance are instilled in WCM children. However free you can be with other instruments, on 'yours' you do what you're told. 'It took a while for these pupils to bridge the connection between formal and informal approaches, and realize that they could aurally copy music from a recording on their orchestral instruments by ear' (163). Because most pupils had less inhibition about making mistakes they played with more flow than classically-trained pupils tend to do at this stage (163–4). The informal learning approach—

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[117] For an essential analysis of the relationship between WCM training and class see Bull, Anna. 2019. *Class, Control and Classical Music*. New York: Oxford University Press. See also Bull, Anna. 2022. Getting it Right: Why Classical Music's 'Pedagogy of Correction' is a Barrier to Equity. *Music Educator's Journal* 108, 65–6.
[118] Creech, Andrea and Susan Hallam. 2011. Learning a Musical Instrument: The Influence of Interpersonal Interaction on Outcomes for School-Aged Pupils. *Psychology of Music* 39:1, 102–22.
[119] Green, Lucy. 2008. Music, Informal Learning and the School: a New Classroom Pedagogy. Farnham: Ashgate.

working music out with fellow pupils as a group—led to non-classically trained children doing effective musical work with classical music and enjoying it, despite starting from a belief that it was 'boring', 'pointless' and 'depressing' (155–6). One of Green's conclusions is that if kids are able to play classical pieces flowingly by ear first, accuracy will come later (171): exactly the opposite of a standard classical training where you achieve accuracy from notation first, and hope then to be able to introduce some flow. While some pupils remained hostile to classical music, for others the experience of playing it enabled them to find ways to listen (172–3).

What emerges from Green's work is that the obstacles to enjoying classical music for that majority of kids who are not getting classical lessons overlap with the problems that I'm identifying here with the way that classical musicians are trained to behave and think. In particular the lack of opportunity to discover for themselves, with their contemporaries, and to be creative in their playing, are major factors that put them off. Allowing a greater variety of approaches to playing scores (and indeed playing without scores) may well allow many more young people to find participating in WCM rewarding and socially including (as opposed also to social death). Improvisation is important here, as Green's work makes clear: working by ear, making a personal contribution, are key ingredients in enjoying taking part.

To this end, The Music Lab – A Toolkit for Exploring Youth Voice within Music-Making Practices in Classical Music offers teachers a fresh way (radically fresh for WCM) of enabling students to find new and personal ways of interacting with classical music as they learn.

In the same spirit, the kinds of classical improvisation that are now being fostered by the Trinity exam board in the UK, and that David Dolan and others are now teaching at advanced level in conservatoires, could be used even more productively as a normal part of classical music training for children, bringing benefits (clearly shown in recent studies of audience response)[120] in intensity and communication of musicianship for all kinds of classical repertoire. The lack of ability to improvise may be one of the reasons that musical training in childhood doesn't lead to lifelong engagement for a great many.

Another may be the related intolerance—not just on the part of gatekeepers but induced in everyone who learns an instrument—of any stylistic or technical stumbling or shortcoming. That you need to do hard things not just ably but perfectly in order not to seem a bad musician is a real disincentive to anyone whose musical skills falter through interruption, through what might otherwise have been only a temporary reduction in interest or regular practice, which can happen all too easily during difficult teenage years.[121] It is difficult and dispiriting to recover from even a temporary hiatus when perfection is the only acceptable product. Simply picking up your instrument and playing for fun is never (allowed to be) that simple when performing classical music.

A model that has been much admired and imitated is that of Venezuela's El Sistema. What could be more positive than to provide instruments and music education for deprived kids, and to offer them a route towards a middle-class profession in the arts? It ticks so many liberal boxes. As this chapter develops we'll see just how easily WCM values, based on obedience to a higher authority (nominally

[120] Dolan D, Jensen HJ, Mediano PAM, et al. 2018. The Improvisational State of Mind: A Multidisciplinary Study of an Improvisatory Approach to Classical Music Repertoire Performance. *Frontiers in Psychology* 9:1341. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6167963/

[121] Pitts, Stephanie E. 2017. What is Music Education For? Understanding and Fostering Routes into Lifelong Musical Engagement. *Music Education Research* 19:2, 160-168.

the dead composer, for all practical purposes the teacher and the system), lead to bullying and abuse. Geoff Baker (2014) has shown just how far that has gone in El Sistema,[122] and how what was ostensibly a social programme came to function as a machine for teaching obedience to authority. It shouldn't surprise us, if we really understand what worshiping the composer's intentions means in practice in WCM: the way in which it gives individuals licence to impose their beliefs, their practices and their will on young children.[123] '[B]eing a music student' writes Basilio Fernández-Morante (2018), 'becomes a risk factor when it comes to being [psychologically] harassed'.[124]

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[122] Baker, Geoffrey. 2014. *The System. Orchestrating Venezuela's Youth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[123] Fernández-Morante (2018, 18) arrives at the same conclusion. Fernández-Morante, Basilio. 2018. Psychological Violence in Current Musical Education at Conservatoire. *Revista Internacional de Educación Musical* 6:1, 13–24. Another important study, cited by Fernández-Morante, is Quigg, Anne-Marie. 2011. *Bullying in the Arts. Vocation, Exploitation and Abuse of Power*. London: Routledge.
[124] 'ser estudiante de música se convierte en un factor de riesgo a la hora de ser acosado'. Fernández-Morante (2018, 14–15), citing Elpus, Kenneth, and Bruce Allen Carter. 2016. Bullying Victimization among Music Ensemble and Theater Students in the United States. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 46:9, 1191–1225. Fernández-Morante discusses sexual harassment later, pp. 18–19, citing mainly the work of Ian Pace (see 7.9 below). My thanks to Marco Fatichenti for advice on the translation.

7.3 Exam boards and the space for creativity

Assessment is obsessive in WCM. Exams, children's competitions disguised as 'festivals',[125] masterclasses, competitions, auditions, concerts, recordings, all check repeatedly on the faithful and convincing performance of norms. Because conformity needs to be so thorough if one wishes to work, this frequent, in effect continuous assessment is always stressful; and because the stakes feel so high, WC musicians are unusually sensitive to the smallest criticism (as we shall see in chapter 13).

In the UK the Victorian thirst for assessment, as a guarantor of standards of behaviour, led to the establishment of several new conservatories for music in the 1870s and 80s, which in turn spawned curricula for examination throughout the country: notably those of Trinity College London (since 1879) and the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (since 1889).[126] Both TCL and ABRSM quickly spread their examinations through many other countries, sending their own examiners on tour, initially across the British Empire (now the Commonwealth), more recently wherever a need can be created and met.[127] Cultural imperialism is still inherent in the belief system that underpins WCM: the standards and practices that are normative in Europe are held to be natural to WCM and definitive of it. Young musicians elsewhere are assessed against European and American norms, and as we shall see later (chapters 9–10) can experience blatant racism when they are perceived as failing to meet them. And so it seemed entirely proper to WCM culture that British examinations should be held far and wide.[128]

Similar systems now operate from the USA and Canada, working together to regulate North American preparatory music training,[129] while US conservatoire and other graduate-level music training is overseen and standardised by the National Association of Schools of Music.[130] There are comparable organisations elsewhere, including in Australia and New Zealand, competing with

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[125] For example, http://www.northlondonfestival.org.uk/ , https://www.twomoorsfestival.co.uk/discover/young-musicians , https://www.lancashiremusichub.co.uk/site/make-music/ramsbottom-music-festival/

[126] Other UK exam boards are available: https://www.rhinegold.co.uk/music_teacher/off-beaten-track-small-exam-boards/

[127] An outstanding study of ABRSM is Wright, David C.H. 2013. *The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music: A Social and Cultural History*. Woodbridge: Boydell. In August 2020 a public letter called on the ABRSM to diversify its syllabi: https://www.musiciansunion.org.uk/ABRSM-Diversify.

[128] For a sight of the implementation of these values in South Africa see Johnson-Williams, Erin. 2020. The Examiner and the Evangelist: Authorities of Music and Empire, c.1894. *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* (forthcoming). The classic study of the non-European experience of ABRSM assessment in modern times is Kok, Roe-Min. 2011. Music for a Post-Colonial Child: Theorizing Malaysian Memories. In ed. Lucy Green, *Learning, Teaching, and Musical Identity: Voices Across Cultures* (Indiana University Press), 89–104. Also informative on the historical development of a composer's-intentions-focused view of performance is Wilén, Sara. 2013. In Search of Oscillating Relations: Power, Gender, Remix in Operatic Performance. In ed. Petter Dyndahl, *Intersection and Interplay: Contributions fo the Cultural Study of Music in Performance, Education, and Society* (Malmö: Malmö Academy of Music), 105–23.

[129] National Association for Music Education: https://nafme.org. US Music Certification Exams http://www.usmce.org/ and Conservatory Canada https://conservatorycanada.ca/.

[130] For an enlightening study of NASM values see Mantie, Roger and Brent C. Talbot. 2015. How can we change our habits if we don't talk about them? *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 14:1, 128–53. act.maydaygroup.org/articles/MantieTalbot14_1.pdf

ABRSM, Trinity and others to supply the enormously expanding market in South East Asia.[131] Interestingly, continental Europe has managed to avoid a central examination system, although a comparably thorough programme is based in Austria.[132] As a result, these programmes 'have shaped the way that very many teachers teach, and have defined musical standards and musical taste for millions of people'.[133]

These systems of course have much to offer in encouraging purposeful development of technique and knowledge of repertoire. But inevitably they at the same time instil normative interpretation, indeed insist upon it in return for the highest marks: the successful performance of norms is the very thing that these exams aim to reward and ensure. For Trinity this is marked as 'stylistic understanding' coupled with 'effective communication and interpretation', for the ABRSM the slightly more interesting 'musical shaping', 'communication of character and style'; where 'character' and 'style' represent interpretative norms, and 'communication' their persuasive performance.

A particularly targeted set of criteria are offered by the ANZCA Music Examinations whose key terms are[134]

> Accuracy, security, evenness, observance, control, fluency, planned variation [dynamic variation, but the notion is striking in its distaste for the spur of the moment], shaping, musical planning [whatever that is], expression suitable to the style of the work, understanding and evocation of the characteristics of the style ['the' style], musical involvement, confidence.

Through criteria like these the exams schematise and institutionalise standard practice and enforce conformity. Only the improvisation element encouraged by the Trinity exam syllabus offers any possibility for fresh musical thinking. For these the examiner provides a two-bar starting-point which (at the candidate's choice) may be stylistic, motivic or harmonic, and the candidate improvises for a further four to sixteen bars (according to the Grade) using specified chords, keys and classical forms. Here the key criteria are a 'sense of musical structure' and a 'creative and imaginative response': not far from norms, it's true, but at least introducing the possibility that creativity and imagination might have some role to play.

One shouldn't underestimate how much of a challenge this is for classically trained musicians. The overwhelming emphasis on acquiring technical skills on one's instrument causes the under-development of other skills essential to musical creativity including decision-making and the ability to play by ear,[135] while the constant emphasis on notated repertoire, on faithfulness to score, and to stylistic norms that are held to be desired by the composer, inhibits the sense of agency without which a performer cannot feel confident enough to create. Nothing short of improvisation as an

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[131] Australian and New Zealand Cultural Arts http://musicinaustralia.org.au/index.php?title=Music_Examination_Boards_in_Australia

[132] Vienna Music Examination Board http://www.vmeb.org/e_main_musicexam.htm

[133] Wright 2013, 6. Hence Anna Bull's apt label 'the standardisers'. Bull, Anna. 2014. The Musical Body: How Gender and Class are Reproduced among Young People Playing Classical Music in England (PhD thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London), 71.

[134] http://www.anzca.com.au/Syllabus%20PDFs/ANZCA%20Performance%20Syllabus%20Information.pdf

[135] Hill, Juniper. 2018. *Becoming Creative: Insights from Musicians in a Diverse World* (New York: Oxford University Press), 33.

essential strand in classical music training will be sufficient to counteract these pressures, which is why Trinity's initiative is so important and their syllabus so much to be preferred—and worth extending and developing. (For more on classical creativity see Chapter 7.4 on Juniper Hill's (2018) book, *Becoming Creative*.)

What might then be the possibilities for including 'creativity' or 'imagination' as criteria for assessing candidates' performances of scores? Some seem still to believe that individuality comes later, once 'the basics' have been 'mastered'. But it cannot once it's been drilled out. As a conductor and pianist reported to me of the way he was taught,

> No-one had motives other than good ones: they were trying to get the music performed well and as it "should" be played. But they tried to control rather than encourage personality in interpretation and find out what their students were looking for. It was only when I worked as an assistant to a famous conductor who said to me that the most important thing was to develop "an own artistic vision" that I began to understand what it meant to be a musician, and I was nearly 30 by that stage![136]

The other common objection to accepting creativity from young musicians is the problem of how to assess it. In a system where marking is very tightly regimented to ensure consistency and to be proof against appeal, anything unexpected is a challenge. And yet the boards already give marks for 'communication': how do you assess that? By how engaging you find the musical performance. And creativity is no different in this respect. The performer's job is to be persuasive; that's what you mark. So please, teach creativity and, if you must, assess it. It can be done. (We'll look in more detail in Chapter 22.5 at assessing non-standard performances.)

A workable practice, I think, is offered in the performance exam regulations introduced at King's College London in 2015. Key passages are these:

> Persuasive communication and imaginative musicianship are the ultimate goals of performance at KCL. Examiners distinguish between performances that creatively reinterpret familiar repertoire, and performances that are under-informed about current conventions or the information contained in the score (or possibly in the recorded tradition; the latter may be especially relevant for a jazz recital).
>
> …students should offer a *brief* verbal introduction (a few sentences) to their performances, highlighting any interpretative challenges. Candidates offering a radical performance that negates aspects of the score or of current performance practices should use this opportunity to clarify intentions.

It's really not hard to work judiciously and fairly with criteria along these lines.[137]

But when we look at the public syllabi as a whole, and at the kinds of activity that they require of children in the daily repetition of scales, arpeggios, and (typically) three pieces until all can be

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[136] Response to a Survey Monkey questionnaire, 2018, an investigation of musicians' experiences of obstacles to creativity. Further details in the notes to Chapter 7.5, further reporting of results in Chapter 7.7 below.

[137] An example of conservatoire criteria that reward originality see Royal Academy of Music: Examination Procedures 2018–19, pp. 12–13, where a mark of 90–100 rewards 'Performance which combines striking originality with authority in all matters of technical and artistic delivery, which is consistently inspiring and engaging, and has the highest standard of presentation.' The question, though, is always what kinds of originality are acceptable. The King's criteria differ in explicitly including the breaking of fundamental norms.

carried off perfectly under stressful conditions, in the knowledge that the smallest slip will be noted and marked down, it's impossible not to see how the practices and anxieties of a lifetime are being laid down. To progress through the exam system is to learn not just what is required but that it is required absolutely; that the route to perfection is through drill, repetition, obedience, reproduction.

Anna Bull reports on the way that child musicians are socialised to trust their teacher, however badly their teacher treats them.

> …four of my participants told me about being bullied by their instrumental teachers. What is striking about three of these accounts, from Miriam, Jonathan and Jenny, is that they all emphasised how good these bullying teachers were, and how the teachers were *right* to pressurise and humiliate them in these ways. … Even Emily, who was bullied by her cello teacher till she stopped playing, took responsibility for her teacher's behaviour. (Bull 2014, 145)

What are the models for this kind of behaviour? Henry Kingsbury suggested conservatories were most like seminaries, where trainee priests learn devotion to God.[138] But in the case just quoted a closer model is domestic abuse, gaslighting, and worse, cases where the victim blames herself for deserving the abuse. From this perspective it's not entirely unreasonable to see even relatively benign classical instrumental training as the deliberate induction by adults in children of an obsessive compulsive disorder in which complex actions have to be repeated until they can be performed correctly from start to finish, at which point a new sequence has to be learned, and so on ad infinitum; albeit with the unusual refinement that they get adult praise, medals and certificates. We'll see in Part 4 in more detail, though it's all too obvious by now in outline, how the infantilization instilled by the interrelationship between repetition, obedience and rewards feeds attachment to parent, teacher, and later to conductor and gatekeepers of all sorts; and always to the composer and His Works.

At first, much of this seems highly enjoyable.[139] The young musician accepts their teacher's word, learns the fundamental rule: 'play what the composer says (i.e., what teacher says), get praise'. With little sense, yet, of what is normative, everything they do feels personal because they're discovering how to do it: they feel they're being creative as they learn the moves their body needs to make to sound acceptably expressive. As the moves start to work they're happy to accept the beloved leader—teacher/composer—as the source of their delight. But norms are also oppressive, and as the student learns to behave within them they become aware of gradually increasing fear: fear of making a mistake, fear of playing out of style, fear of non-conforming, of being judged unsuitable for work, of being judged 'unmusical' (see Chapter 5). With fear comes stress, anxiety, and performance-related illness, a plague now for which the ideology may well be substantially responsible. The likelihood of exclusion becomes ever stronger. Children (particularly in specialist schools where many potential professionals are sent) may be excluded from ensembles if they don't meet the best standards. Even dedicated, highly skilled young musicians are dropped as they get

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[138] Kingsbury, Henry. 1988. *Music, Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 19.

[139] Most of this paragraph appeared previously in Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2016. Classical Music as Enforced Utopia. *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 15:3–4, 325–36 at 329–30. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1474022216647706

older and the targets get harder. Eventually they're disappointed at or soon after conservatoire, when it's far too late to get a normal education.[140] This is made horribly clear in the essential book by Izabela Wagner, *Producing Excellence*, which every parent and teacher of child musicians should read,[141] and which we shall look into in Chapter 7.6 below.

Before we do that there is another aspect of childhood learning that is crucially important for the way we think about music, and by introducing it now we can keep it in mind throughout the rest of the book. Music is not just a matter of display, of expert practice, of aesthetic contemplation, nor even just a matter of profound emotional and personal experience. It is also a social praxis. It assists in the effective interaction, cooperation and mutual understanding of people. And this is also a lesson that, depending on how it is taught, can be more or less positively learned in childhood.

Thomas Regelski, in an important article on music teaching and institutional ideology, shows how Kantian beliefs about aesthetic distance and the autonomy of art—which are very much in keeping with the limiting and conventionalising of performance expression, and still hold sway in our thinking about classical music—deny an understanding or a practice of music's potential to be a social good.[142] Policing musical expression, so that it may only serve as a marker of conformity to behavioural norms, decreases a child's sense that music is a social, rather than a State activity. Far from encouraging cooperation, mutual give and take, sharing of ideas and expressions, normative classical music teaching encourages the notion that reproducing manners correctly is first and foremost what society requires of one.

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[140] One of Juniper Hill's participants says: 'If you become the highest, the first top violinist in the radio symphony orchestra, then you might be happy with your education. But if you don't, then what have you got? You didn't become anything, you can't play without notation, you can't play anything other than classical music, and that's where people have tried to ask … should it be like this, and could it be different?' (Hill 2018, 62). Cf. Ginsborg (2018)'s participant quoted in Chapter 7.6 below.

[141] Wagner, Izabela. 2015. *Producing Excellence: The Making of Virtuosos*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

[142] Regelski, Thomas A. 2016. Music, music education, and institutional ideology: A praxial philosophy of music sociality. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 15:2, 10–45.

7.4 Conservatoire and creativity: Juniper Hill's *Becoming Creative*

Some attempts are now being made at the next stage of musical education, in conservatoire, to deal with the problem of classical music as the obedient performance of 'proper' behaviour. By this time it is already very late, since such tight reins have already been placed for so many years on the child musician's delight in creative self-expression. Moreover, conservatoire's overriding task is to fit its students for work where, as things stand, there is rarely any room for individuality beyond those tiny differences between soloists that the culture celebrates (and often, in its claims, exaggerates) for want of any other distinguishing characteristics.

Creativity in conservatoire is thus difficult and can easily be perceived in some quarters as unhelpful. We get a sense of this from Juniper Hill's recent studies of musical creativity.[143] Comparing attitudes in different musical traditions, and on different continents, Hill (2018) emphasises how strange WCM is in its fear of creativity and hostility to improvisation, and also how damaging that can be to classical musicians.

Hill sees six ingredients in creativity: '(1) generativity, (2) agency, (3) interaction, (4) nonconformity, (5) recycling, and (6) flow.' (More discussion of this in Chapter 18.1.) She notes that 'realizing pre-existing works should only be considered creative when the process also involves other components of creativity' (Hill 2018, 4). Yet several of these ingredients are perceived as dangerous for WC musicians: above all 'it is the component of nonconformity that threatens to make creativity socially undesirable. Powerful social mechanisms encourage conformity and work as adverse motivators against individuals' intrinsic desire to be creative' (Hill 2018, 12).

Hill identifies 'Four mechanisms for enforcing conformity to sociocultural norms [which] emerged as significant in this study: (1) direct punishment, (2) socially induced emotions, (3) anticipation of judgment from others, and (4) internalization of norms as values' (Hill 2018, 12). 'Feeling that they are being watched, individuals anticipate the judgement of others and thus modify or censor their own behaviour accordingly' (13).

Direct punishment takes the form of strong criticism by teachers and other gatekeepers of non-normative performance, leading readily to being thought unsuitable for work and thus to ingrained fear of transgression. One of Hill's string-playing participants recalls that:

> 'One of my teachers wanted to play this game where he was standing like this pretending he had a whip and if I did a mistake then he would [pretend to] hit me. He didn't hit me, but of course I was in total panic of making a mistake. I'm a perfectionist myself and I was really struggling not to hate myself because of a mistake …'

Many readers will find this story quite horrifying and will readily agree with the participant who continued, 'I think it is very dangerous, this kind of being destructively critical towards yourself or to your student … I just learned … that this is killing me, being so destructive' (Hill 2018, 107).

For performers, overly-prescriptive teaching can be psychologically crippling: 'Those years with [my teacher—this is a different participant, a cellist] had such a strong impact that I couldn't survive without somebody telling me what to do and how you have to do it' (60). And 'I had just so much

[143] Hill, Juniper. 2017. Incorporating Improvisation into Classical Music Performance. In ed. Rink, John, Helena Gaunt and Aaron Williamon, *Musicians in the Making: Pathways to Creative Performance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 222–240. Hill, Juniper. 2018. *Becoming Creative: Insights from Musicians in a Diverse World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

schooling in all around the violin and everything, and I just couldn't tap into where my voice was anymore' (37).

It's all too easy to see how this kind of treatment generates the socially-induced emotion of shame as a habitual response to any kind of mistake or overstepping of lines (Hill 2018, 114–6). Thus self-esteem and courage are vital for creativity (13), fortifying one against criticism and against attempts to shame one for challenging normative practice. Many young musicians, ground down by years of criticism and obedience, simply don't have sufficient self-esteem or courage to fuel a desire to be creative. As Hill points out, 'One of the main factors inhibiting improvisation in today's classical music communities is an underlying attitude that the creative potential of performers is somehow inferior. To encourage the incorporation of more improvisation into western art music is inherently to advocate for performers to be allowed—and to allow themselves—to exercise greater authority in the creative process' (Hill 2017, 223).

Thus pianist Kristiina Junttu: 'I try to keep myself open and not have too criticizing an attitude toward myself. That's hard because that criticizing attitude is something that I learned from a very young age and it's destructive, it does not help me play well at all.' Hill comments, 'Junttu's experiences here are representative of many musicians who found that overly critical and perfectionist attitudes towards the execution of the score impeded technique and heightened performance anxiety, whereas maintaining a more playful attitude can help musicians better perform to the full extent of their abilities' (Hill 2017, 226).

In routine professional work many musicians will play beneath their best rather than risk a mistake: 'I was not putting my whole personality or whole soul or heart into it, because I was trying to play perfectly … All the time I was putting this kind of big mute on myself … You're so afraid of missing something that you miss the music' (Hill 2018, 108, quoting the string player cited above).

Consequently, starting to exercise creativity once one reaches conservatoire or professional life can be exceedingly challenging, if ultimately empowering. Hill reports on courses at the Sibelius Academy, Helsinki, in which students are routinely introduced to improvisation as part of their basic training (Hill 2018, 174–91). Tellingly, it takes all three years of the course, in carefully controlled conditions with safe spaces and the very gradual introduction of new ideas, to make significant progress. Even (or perhaps especially) at higher levels it can be a challenge to let go of years of training in obedience to the score: vocalist Päivi Järviö describes a situation with her masters students in which there were several interpretative options and no one right answer: 'they had never done this. They were really scared of making decisions' (Hill 2017, 228). But the benefits of this kind of training can be very great:[144]

> On the *moral* level … the promotion of diverse musical expressions may help musicians realize that their previously internalized value judgments are relative, situational, and socio-culturally constructed. Challenging their community's aesthetic judgement system may in turn help them feel less compelled to conform to socio-idiomatic boundaries and give them more inner resources for coping with negative feedback. On the *social* level, seeking and building supportive social relationships may help to provide a relatively judgment-free space in which musicians experience less fear and anxiety about receiving negative feedback and thus feel freer to explore, experiment, develop new ideas, and take creative risks. On the *psychological* level, increasing self-esteem and improving perception of one's own potential are important for motivation, … developing … inner resources…, and for developing the self-confidence and courage to take risks in one's own creative work. (Hill 2018, 172)

[144] On the relationship between flow and creativity, with special reference to the social level, see also Ford, Jessica, Vosloo, Justine, and Arvinen-Barrow, Monna. 2020. 'Pouring Everything That You Are': Musicians' Experiences of Optimal Performances. *British Journal of Music Education*. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051720000078

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7.5 Conservatoire and conformity

The kinds of training in improvisation that are available at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, described by Juniper Hill (summarised in the preceding section 7.4), and the classes run by David Dolan at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London which teach solo and ensemble extemporisation in classical forms and which have been shown to significantly enhance audience experience of the performance of canonical scores, are encouraging signs of change; but they are not yet common, and they have little if any part to play in that dominant feature of conservatoire-level training, the one-to-one teaching studio or (often taught privately) the virtuoso class. The essential model here is that of master–apprentice, an oral method in which the master demonstrates and the apprentice copies, leading easily to the craftsperson model of classical musicianship questioned in Chapter 6.16.

The whole purpose of this core teaching is to fit the student to find work, which at the moment is by definition conventional work.

> ‘My job is to train them so that they will win the auditions’ (Hill 2018, 145, quoting horn player Erja Joukamo-Ampuja). ‘The people who get the jobs here are the ones that can just play all the notes and all the rhythms in tune and in the right place’ (Hill 2017, 237; Luke, a US clarinettist). ‘The ideal is a person who can produce the right notes with the minimum amount of work and then they’re happy with it’ (228; vocalist Päivi Järviö).

What could be more reasonable than this? Of course students want work, of course conservatoires exist to qualify them for it. Equally, this very simple fact operates with the characteristic ruthlessness of market capitalism to ensure that the beliefs of the employer are performed, flattered and confirmed by the student whom they employ and who (remember Chapter 7.1’s circular model) has been moulded by the same beliefs. It works well if you accept it uncritically and contentedly. It is in the teaching studio that these beliefs are turned in minute detail into perfect, faithful, persuasive, sounding practice.

Yet while most accept these practices as musically ideal and ideologically well-founded in faithfulness to the composer’s intentions, they may even so be significantly damaged by them.

> My young students at the Academy, very often they are, in a way, in a prison. They are afraid of many, many things. And they are in a prison also because of these kinds of rules, how you have to interpret or how you have to play technically. (Pirkko Simojoki, quoted by Hill 2018, 37)
>
> Those years with [my teacher] had such a strong impact that I couldn’t survive without somebody telling me what to do and how you have to do it. … When I finished with [my teacher] … [and] then graduated … it was like a nightmare because there was no model to be copied (Hill 2018, 60). After studying seven years with him, I was unable to make any decisions, unable even to find out how to make fingerings for a classical piece of music (Hill 2017, 237). (All these quotes from Tuomas, a cellist)
>
> As the student, my only option was to perform pieces precisely the way my teacher played them. As he put it, “I am the teacher, and I am always right. I am the one who determines

> creativity and originality. As my student, you are to follow my model exactly. If you do not, you are not only a bad student, but a bad musician." … I left classical music because of what I experienced. (Classical guitarist, 50-59; a questionnaire respondent for this book)[145]
>
> I studied with a well-respected teacher when I was 18–20 who really only wanted her students to play exactly the way she did. Any deviation from her way was met with ridicule. I almost quit playing. She never fostered any critical thinking in her students or helped us learn to develop our own interpretative skills. Most of the young people in that studio never pursued music further. (Cellist, 40-49)

As Hill says of her participants, 'An overly-negative interpretation of feedback [which is almost inevitable, one might add, in this obsessively constrained environment] can influence a musician's trajectory for years' (Hill 2018, 96). I found exactly this in many of the participants in my own research for this book, whose comments show just how long-lasting the effects of this kind of response to individuality can be.

> Another teacher … told me to stop feeling things, that I don't get to do that—it's for the audience to feel, not me. This one made me more angry and confused, I didn't understand how that was even possible (I still don't). However, I did end up basically numbing out for the remainder of my time at that school[;] and getting over that has been and continues to be a long and difficult process. (Violinist, 30-39)
>
> The end effects were me feeling incapable of my own ability, something I still worry about when performing my own realizations of canonical works. (Pianist, 18-21)
>
> The environment I studied in was extremely discouraging, though they may be unaware. Mountains of opinions and criticism greatly discouraged my creativity. This resulted in a development of anxiety which now hinders my voice, technique, and creativity. (Singer, 20-29)

What kind of culture are we celebrating when these kinds of experiences are common, and to be expected, and are accepted as a price worth paying?

Helena Gaunt's useful essay on 'Apprenticeship and empowerment: the role of one-to-one lessons' (Gaunt 2017) offers (as one might reasonably expect from the (then) vice-principal of a progressive conservatoire) a relatively optimistic, but not uncritical view of the master-apprentice culture in conservatoire, based on research studies. Here, the well-known pianist and teacher Boris Berman is quoted to provide an idealised view: 'with advanced students "the teacher's main role is to help

[145] Where no publication reference is provided for a quote it comes from a questionnaire carried out for this study. The survey was addressed to professional classical musicians and asked the following questions. 1) Please give an example of when you were prevented from, or strongly criticised for, being innovative or creative or original in the way you performed a piece or a moment in a piece. Feel free to give more than one example. 2) What do you tell your students about being original in their performances? 3) Would you like musicians to feel freer to be creative when performing classical scores? 4) Anything else you'd like to say. 59 responses were received (25 female, 28 male; 3% aged 18-21, 15% 22-29, 42% 30-39, 20% 40-49, 12% 50-59, 7% 60+; 76% studied at a conservatoire, the rest at university and/or virtuoso class).

them find their own musical voice"' (Gaunt 2017, 30, citing Berman 2000, 198).[146] This is certainly what is claimed, and what we would like to happen; but does it? The quotations above, which are far from atypical for those who have studied at this level, suggest that students' experience can be very different. Berman sees the student as substantially responsible in that case: 'the student needs to offer the result of his [*sic*] creative work, thoughts, and ideas for me to be able to respond' (31; 200). Moreover, 'a student must be ready to subscribe to the teacher's *Weltanschauung*, his general musical and aesthetic principles' (32; 199). In other words, believe in your master, and then for your lesson take him musical ideas that are compatible with his beliefs. That seems a fairly honest and realistic assessment of how one-to-one teaching works best at this level. But it hardly encourages creativity. Rather it feeds a culture in which each teacher is seen, and sees themselves, as having a unique insight into the repertoire in question, insight the sharing of which will enable their students to develop unique insights of their own.

Somehow, then, the student absorbs a unique view and *within that* still manages to find something of their own to contribute. It's not hard to see how, if this is what is going on, over time these differences will become smaller and smaller; because at every generation the scope for innovation is limited to that range that was available to one teacher in the previous generation, which was itself a subset of the range available to one teacher from the generation before; and so on. Of course this model is idealised and fanciful, and of course students hear many more performers they admire; but given the cultural and social constraints, especially the authority felt by the student in the famous teacher, it is horribly possible that it contains some truth.

Gaunt (40–1) reports Koopman et al.'s finding that 'while teachers often stated that one of their aims was for students to develop artistic independence, students were not aware of this' (Koopman et al. 2007, 388).[147] Koopman et al. also found that students who were not overawed by their teacher and who played a more active role in lessons had more positive experiences (perhaps justifying Berman's claim above). We need to bear in mind how much this demands of a student who has been taught for years to be obedient and who may now find themselves being taught by one of their childhood idols ('…lessons are easily dominated by the personality of the teacher, and students are not encouraged to take initiative.' Koopman et al., 392).

They also reveal the extent to which students are left to work out technical problems and strategies for themselves, with teachers content to provide inspiration and examples of what's required, but not detailed guidance on how to achieve it. ('The master makes use of his personal strengths—superior knowledge and inspiring qualities—rather than taking the self-effacing role of servant to the learning process' (Koopman et al., 391–2).) There does appear to be a widespread perception among the harder-headed conservatoire teachers that, when it comes to technical matters, students should not be guided too closely or too kindly, and that those who sink are not strong enough to swim on their own in the professional sea. Overall, Koopman et al. reveal a surprising level of non-coordination between teachers' and students' perceptions, and between both and the observations

[146] Gaunt, Helena. 2017. Apprenticeship and Empowerment: The Role of One-to-One Lessons. In ed. John Rink, Helena Gaunt and Aaron Williamon, *Musicians in the Making: Pathways to Creative Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 28–56. Berman, Boris. 2000. *Notes from the Pianist's Bench* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

[147] Constantijn Koopman, Nico Smit, Adri de Vugt, Paul Deneer & Jeannette den Ouden (2007) Focus on practice-relationships between lessons on the primary instrument and individual practice in conservatoire education, *Music Education Research*, 9:3, 373-397.

of the researchers, reflecting all too well the extent to which (as argued in Chapter 6 above) WCM provides fertile ground for self-delusion.

Throughout the research literature on conservatoire teaching similar problems are highlighted. And so it becomes easier to understand the reluctance of some institutions to take part in research studies.[148] Let us credit, then, the Royal Conservatoire of the Hague who hosted the Koopman study and aimed to learn lessons from it; and the other conservatoires now asking questions about their own practices and fostering more open attitudes to research and creativity.

Another good example is the study by Mirjam James and Karen Wise, agreed to by the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Royal College of Music (both in London), in which lessons and practice sessions were videoed for later analysis by the participants working *with* the researchers. One interesting finding was that while, on the one hand, not following a teacher's advice can feel like 'betraying the teacher'—a telling word to use—on the other, students are considerably more creative in their practice sessions than their lessons would lead one to expect.[149] This doesn't necessarily translate into counter-normative performances in public because of the obvious career constraints, but it does emphasise the potential that remains within young professionals to think and work differently.

In James and Wise's study teacher and student (separately) used videos of their one-to-one lessons to identify moments when they felt that something creative had been achieved or something had been learned that would help in being 'more creative or original in performance' (James, Wise & Rink 2010, 230).[150] What is striking here, from our perspective, is how small are the changes that students identify as 'creative': most of these moments are really about legitimate ways of being more expressive within norms. In the studio environment tiny changes seem highly significant because they are all there is: as a trainee musician one has to invest oneself in them in order to stay positive; hence seeing them as creative, rather than just as skilled, that's to say as moments of good craft. There's a instance of this in their Example 4 where, viewing a moment in their lesson video, the student comments:

> '[…] he just said at the end there, 'trust yourself' which is a fantastic thing to say, so if you just sit back with the long arms, you feel calmer […] you feel like you're overseeing the whole system […] gives you much better sound and psychologically much calmer, you're breathing better, and you know, I just love that, trust yourself … it's so easy to have so much self doubt, and worry, which immediately makes the sound go quite poorly. I thought that is fantastic. And that can be applied everywhere […] in performances even better a mantra to

[148] '…there is a reluctance among teachers to participate in studies of teaching. … to expose their behavior to the scrutiny of an observer may seem to involve an element of risk.' Karlsson, Jessika & Juslin, Patrik. 2008. Musical Expression: An Observational Study of Instrumental Teaching. *Psychology of Music* 36:3, 309-334 at 310–11. One recalls Christopher Small's comment, using the symphony concert as a model, that 'I cannot help wondering if those who show such resistance to asking questions of a symphony concert might not themselves be a little afraid that they will uncover meanings they would rather not know about' (Small 1998, 14–15).

[149] Wise, Karen, James, Mirjam, and Rink, John (2017). Performers in the Practice Room. In ed. John Rink, Helena Gaunt and Aaron Williamon, *Musicians in the Making: Pathways to Creative Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press), 143–63, esp. 153.

[150] James, Mirjam, Wise, Karen, & Rink, John (2010). Exploring creativity in musical performance through lesson observation with video-recall interviews. *Scientia Paedagogica Experimentalis*, 47:2, 219-250. As the journal is unusually difficult to access, page references are to the typescript at http://www.academia.edu/download/38092930/James_Wise_Rink_2010.pdf

> have because that's when you are even tighter and even more nervous, […].' (James, Wise & Rink 2010, 238)

This example is unusually revealing of the problem that students face: constant anxiety leading to tension, induced by fear of failing to achieve what's required to succeed. This is a key moment for the student, when they find themselves able to make guidance from the teacher their own (Wise, James & Rink 2017, 151). Something previously only understood as advice—something they strove to enact or copy—becomes understood through embodiment, becomes part of the way they make music. It's easy to appreciate and celebrate the sense of achievement that this brings. And yet, it is far from being creative in the sense of innovating: it's creative only in the sense that it adds to the student's abilities, enabling them to conform with more convincing artistic results, performing more persuasively now that they embody the norm. When this seems creative one can see how the concept of performance creativity has been appropriated by normativity in order to tighten its grip.

It's understandable, precisely because there are so many constraints upon their artistic freedom, that students still buy the fiction that they are developing unique musical personalities expressed though their interpretations of canonical scores. If one didn't believe this it would be hard to maintain a positive attitude, to feel that this is a desirable profession and that the pain required to get into it is worthwhile. When, many years later, professional musicians do suffer breakdowns it is often, as we shall see in chapter 14, because they're no longer able to maintain this fiction. So it is understandable that the aspiring musicians questioned for Volioti and Williamon (2017) gave one of their highest scores, when asked how they use recordings to influence their practice and performance, to 'to develop my own distinct style' (closely followed by 'to comply with current performing styles and practices').[151] Students are using recordings to get access to readings they're not learning from their teachers, to get a sense of what else has been acceptable, of the range of the norm, and to hear models on which they can draw in order to find a safe space within it. That's what 'distinct' means in WCM: a place of safety within normative practice that they can call their own, even if, in truth, it's not.

Henry Kingsbury, in his 1988 study of life in a US conservatoire, emphasised how 'The social dynamics of the conservatory are of fundamental importance to the aural tradition of "classical" music' (46). What he meant by aural here includes pressures and politics of student/student and student/staff interaction and discussion—the ideas that circulate, the beliefs that underpin assumptions and comments—not just what's explicitly taught. '[B]oth the manifesting and the assessing of musical talent are to a great extent matters of social power and authority' (77). It's in this light that we can better understand the importance for both teacher and student of the student 'making' what they're taught 'their own' or, as I've put it, embodying in themselves the tradition (re)presented by their teacher. Not only do they now fit better into the in-group of those who understand, feel and do; it's also a vital stage in the passing on of one musician's cultural genes (or memes) to the next generation, of teachers keeping themselves alive by keeping their musicianship in circulation while believing that they are keeping the tradition alive.

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[151] Volioti, Georgia, and Aaron Williamon. Recordings as Learning and Practising Resources for Performance: Exploring Attitudes and Behaviours of Music Students and Professionals. *Musicae Scientiae* 21:4, 499–523 at 513 and 523.

We can see this at work in Kingsbury's observation of one of his conservatoire's teachers: 'A fundamental principle of Goldmann's teaching was that students must play what is printed in the score, and yet that they must not play something simply because it is written in the score, but rather because they feel it that way' (87, cf 99). To play as required is not enough; you must also *believe* in the correct reading, feel it in yourself, and prove your belief by making that feeling audible in the way you perform. In doing so you prove to your teacher your belief in them and in the musicianship they represent: 'While the score is invoked as an authority in Goldmann's class, it must be kept clear the real authority does not reside in the score, but in Goldmann and, to varying extents, in the students' (92). The feeling is the music's meaning (101), and thus music can only be meaningful when performed by someone who believes the correct reading of the score. To transmit musical meaning from composer to listener you must believe.

There is an important aspect of this that rings true for any performer. A note, a phrase, a whole piece, can be driven along by feeling in emotional synchrony with the dynamics of the sounds one makes, and vice versa. Feeling, and believing in the feeling, are powerful tools in the making of persuasive performances. The danger comes from adding into this the belief that a particular sequence of dynamic shapes, or a particular performance of a dynamic sequence, is the right or the wrong one—that it's not enough to produce something that works dynamically; it has to be something that proves one's adherence to a particular set of beliefs about what it is right and wrong to sound and to feel. Conservatoire, and indeed all WCM gatekeeping, is ensuring both that the process is convincing and that it is correct, while all the time arguing that only what is correct can be convincing. Hence the belief illustrated in Goldmann's lessons that 'with an authentic edition of a work by an acknowledged genius, the values of good performance simply cannot conflict with adherence to the score' (94). Well, of course they can. One has to insist that they cannot as one of a battery of strategies needed to prevent either oneself or one's students discovering that alarming, revolutionary fact.

Like Kingsbury, Bruno Nettl (1995) draws on experience of US institutions,[152] approaching the conservatoire as an ethnomusicologist and anthropologist. He finds that, as well as all the positives of WCM culture, 'we are also forced to suggest dictatorship, conformity, a rigid class structure, overspecialization, and a love of mere bigness are all explicitly or by implication extolled' (Nettl 1995, 42). It's argued by those within, he observes, that this is necessary and 'that the kind of social structure described, for all its undesirable aspects, is essential for the proper performance of music by the great masters, that in order for music of such an incredibly elite character … to be created and performed one must simply sacrifice independence and personal opinion, must undertake an incredible amount of discipline and accept dictates of an elite wherever they lead' (ibid.). Nettl finds his observation of conservatoire culture leading him inexorably (and to his evident discomfort), in the final paragraphs of his book, to the conclusion that

> 'we have this—by many criteria—great music, styles, and genres that have been accepted in most of the world as music at its best. Yet this music lives and is transmitted in institutions that abound in conflict and inequality, in which population groups and their musical

[152] Nettl, Bruno. 1995. *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

> surrogates constantly jockey for position, in which little is said that does not make comparative evaluations and where everyone keeps score. … What is it about Western culture that makes this great music so representative of aspects of our cultural system with which many denizens of the music school would not wish to be identified?' (144–5).

Nettl's last sentence there reminds us that the WCM State and its policing—the nature of which is gradually emerging in this and the next few chapters—is antithetical to white western values, to the extent that one constantly wonders what this music says about us. Another sense in which music schools are failing to do exactly what they claim to do, in terms of students' membership of wider society, is all too well identified by Carol Richardson (2007):

> The call for papers for the 2006 International Conference on Music Education, Equity, and Social Justice centered on the ways that democratic issues of equity, social justice and social consciousness might be enacted in the practice of music education, broadly defined. I found this call disturbing, as upon first glance there seemed to be little or no connection (or even a potential for connection) between these democratic issues and music teaching and learning as I have come to know it during my career as a performer, conductor, classroom practitioner, scholar, college professor and department chair. For example, the master/apprentice and conductor/ensemble models institutionalized in our profession are *not* democratic; the typical teacher/student exchanges at the core of our studio lessons, rehearsals and music classrooms are *not* models of shared musical decision-making power, in spite of national standards statements about music education as a means of enhancing each student's ability to 'define and solve artistic problems with insight, reasons and technical proficiency' (MENC, 1994 *What every young American should know and be able to do in the arts* (Reston, VA, Music Educators National Conference), p. 19).[153]

Hardly less concerning is the extent to which teachers (despite their certainty in their expertise, and the authoritarianism that that is felt to justify towards students) do not know—because the knowledge does not exist; perhaps also because teachers don't think they need help from research in this respect—what the body does and needs to do in order to make music. An example of the extent to which even fundamental matters of physical technique are disputed is provided (with many more) in a survey of piano teaching guides by Katharine Liley:

> Article 14 strongly advocates a low wrist, particularly in octave playing, where the wrist is to be lowered 'even further if tiredness starts to take hold'…, while Articles 4 and 8 both propose a high wrist for octaves…, Article 4 also arguing that keeping the wrist in a low position for too long could lead to injury… Article 7, meanwhile, argues for flexibility in positioning of the hand, wrist, arm, elbow, and particularly the torso, all body parts being ready to adapt to the varying positional requirements of the music at any moment…[154]

It's hard not to conclude that there are no sufficient grounds for enforcing either technical or artistic approaches to WCM performance, nor for any teacher demanding unquestioning obedience from a

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[153] Richardson, Carol P. 2007. Engaging the World: Music Education and the Big Ideas. *Music Education Research* 9:2, 205-14 at 205.

[154] Liley, Katharine. 2019. The Feeble Fingers of Every Unregenerate Son of Adam: Cultural Values in Pianists' Health and Skill-Development (PhD thesis, Royal College of Music, London), sect. 7.4.1.2.

student who wishes to play or sing healthily or musically. It's always something that has to be negotiated and discovered in each individual case.[155]

We may readily agree that it's the job of conservatoires to fit their students for work, but when that means to *get* work that makes the institution thoroughly complicit in maintaining norms, with all the damage that norm-enforcement does within and far beyond the institution. No one is more aware than a conservatoire now of the need also to fit students to *make* work, and it's there that the space could be created for far more varied results.

An ethical music school should not be gatekeeping to suit the gatekeepers: it should be putting pressure on them to rise to the challenge of thinking and responding as imaginatively as its students.

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[155] Very similar conclusions are reached independently in Barton, David. 2019. The Autonomy of Private Instrumental Teachers: Its Effect on Valid Knowledge Construction, Curriculum Design, and Quality of Teaching and Learning (PhD thesis, Royal College of Music, London), esp. ch. 8. 'I would argue that the dominance of technique, which is often cited as necessary on safety grounds, is a means by which teachers can exert their control.' (186) … 'Teachers felt responsible to cover everything that was 'needed'. As there are no agreed definitions of what is 'needed', we might interpret that by consequence, teachers teach that which is needed to conform to the system.' (187) … 'teachers seem to see knowledge as something which is passed on, rather than something which is constructed, and which evolves through negotiation, partnership, social interaction and community.' (191) Also 208–9.

7.6 Izabela Wagner on the training of virtuosi

Izabela Wagner's *Producing Excellence: The Making of Virtuosos* (2015)[156] is a distressing but essential book, whatever your view on the rights of performers. It is based on her experience as the mother of a child being prepared for a life as a violin virtuoso, filtered through her expertise as a sociologist able to observe and analyse social interactions and contexts.[157] As a parent she had behind-the-scenes access to an extent that would not have been available to an independent researcher, able to witness and understand situations that they might not have seen or felt. This brings dangers, of course, but the book is remarkable for its clarity of perspective and for allowing the material to speak for itself. In summarising her work I may fail to be so objective; for much of what she sees is deeply shocking, especially some twenty years after her data was collected, given that public concern for the emotional abuse of children seems now more acute. Wagner's research focuses on Eastern European-trained violin teachers, drawn from the soloist elite, working in mainly in Western Europe, but also in Poland and the USA, between 1997 and 2004. Some of the behaviour she witnessed may be less severe now, but given the extreme conservatism of the ideology we cannot sensibly assume radical change. (Linda MacArthur's 2011 study of emotional abuse by Canadian and American music teachers offers a small insight from the far west.[158] It would be interesting to hear from more people who have studied at this level recently.)

Training at this elite level often takes place outside the specialist music school and conservatoire systems in an even more intensely hot-housed and competitive atmosphere. Virtuoso education 'involves a dual and interdependent hierarchy of teachers making reputations and students making careers, each using the other as rungs on their respective ladders.' … '[E]ducating virtuosos is the job not only of teachers but also of complex informal networks and institutions' (Wagner 2015, 3). Soloist classes are often semi-private; to hear about them you need pushy and well-connected teachers and/or parents (33).

Wagner identifies three stages of career formation. 1) early years: the parent-teacher-student relationship. 2) teenage: the teacher-student relationship. 3) 'the relationship between categories of professionals who introduce young soloists to the adult market' (Wagner 2015, 4).

In stage 1 parental ambition is key. Most members of the virtuoso class have 'at least one parent who is a musician' (64% work within the profession, a further 16 % as amateurs) (24; 44–5). 'Regular education becomes a secondary investment in terms or time, energy, and involvement' (32). 'Almost all soloist students who do not originate from a musical family—less than 10 per cent of the sample—have parents in intellectual occupations who are passionate about music' (26). Tellingly, 'In almost all cases, parent-violinists who were interviewed had not achieved an international solo career' (27).

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[156] New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press.

[157] I have previously summarised Wagner more briefly in Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2018. The Danger of Virtuosity, afterword to special issue on virtuosity. *Musicae Scientiae* 22:4, 558–61.

[158] MacArthur, Linda. 2011. Behind Closed Doors: Emotional Abuse in the Music Studio. In ed. Aaron Williamon, Darryl Edwards and Lee Bartel, *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Performance Science 2011* (Utrecht: Association Européenne des Conservatoires), 387-92.

‘Many such children remember learning to read and write, but do not remember their first violin lesson. They have the impression of “always having played”’ (25). 10% start before the age of four; 69% between four and six years old (28), which must be an important factor leading to naturalization of the ideology. Thus ‘The adjective “normal” is frequently used by the students’ (26).

To get access to this world, a child needs to be labelled as ‘talented’ or ‘particularly gifted’; and ‘The power of this label is proportionate to the position of the expert who expresses it’ (35). ‘This “talent” is presented by teachers as if it were a supernatural attribute that could be lost if parents do not “invest” in a soloist education. In soloist classes, all students have this label: it is a sine qua non of belonging to this category’ (36).[159] ‘…[P]arents … tend to believe that their child’s talent will enable them to prevail in the struggle that is the consequence of a saturated market’ (37). ‘It is not in the interest of the teachers that parents know … the low chances of achieving a successful position after more than fifteen years of professional training’ (72). Thus ‘teachers never reveal [to parents] the probability of success in such a long-lasting and exhausting education’ (4).

‘Students must submit to the authority of their teacher’ (41) as must the parents. Willingness to do what they’re told, however hard (e.g. practise at 3am, p. 42), is taken as an indication of their fitness for the profession. Access to the profession at this level is impossible except through pleasing distinguished teachers (42–3): it’s completely controlled by existing subscribers. Parents learn to conform, partly from seeing other parents and discovering how essential it is if their child is to receive the best attention. Teachers emotionally blackmail parents in order to ensure loyalty (47): families follow teachers abroad, even at the cost of family break-up (53–4). Students grow up to accept psychological pressure and punishment from their parents as necessary for success (48) with (one assumes) inevitable consequences for the relationships with their own children and students later on.

There is a ‘hierarchy of students in the soloist class’ … ‘this kind of rat-race ambience is welcomed by some teachers’ (63). Teachers’ favourites are marked out by length of lesson, choice of repertoire, venue of lessons (64). ‘Students are used to unequal treatment by teachers and give the impression that they consider it “natural”’ (65).

In sum, ‘The young soloist is enclosed in a sort of cell, built by the parents and the teacher’ (72). The nature of this early training helps to explain why, even at the highest level where successful soloists finally have autonomy, there is so little innovation. It’s a closed world, and they’ve got where they are by working faithfully within it.[160] Hence, ‘Even decades after finishing their lessons, many soloists seek the advice of their former teachers before important events’ (143).

In stage 2, teenage years, we see an increase in student anxiety (76), a problem only exacerbated by this stage being ‘marked by the quest for technical perfection and sharper individual interpretation’—the irreconcilable conflict which we’ve seen repeatedly in the preceding chapters here. An increase in public classes—and especially a variety which Wagner describes as ‘theatre’ in which the master creates a stage on which he can dazzle (86–7)—now leads to ‘intense emotional strain on the students … [which] helps prepare students for their professional lives’ (88). In classes

[159] Recall Kingsbury 1988, 76–80.

[160] ‘Based on my research, it seems the primary function of the instrumental lesson is to uphold the values of the ‘system’, in other words that which the teacher judges to be valid. It is a self-perpetuating system which shows no signs of abating’ (Barton 2019, 208–9).

where teachers foster competition between members a 'feeling of ironbound discipline evokes a military drill field. This strict disciplinary atmosphere seems quite contrary to the ideal of a soloist education that nurtures creativity and independence in an artist' (90). But then, who is truly nurturing either of those? In the 'torture chamber' style class, 'An ambience of fear reigned during lessons, and students were scared' (91). Wagner quotes Nathan Milstein speaking up for this approach as it 'improves the quality of playing' (91). Or as one of Wagner's teacher participants explained, '"If they can't maintain self-control because they are hurt that I screamed at them, they have no place here. This is not a world for little children who need their mum"' (207).

It may not surprise you to learn (as concluded in Lehmann, Sloboda & Woody 2007) that performer-teachers like these may be less effective than trained teachers.[161]

'[T]he behavior expected by soloist teachers is, in a word, obedience' (105). '…[S]tudents must relate docilely with their teacher in the domains of technique and musical interpretation' (201): 'Docility permits the student to achieve good results quickly' (208). Wagner reports a participant's story about a child being marked down for being too confident, aged nine (105-6), as if teachers require deference, even fear to be shown; and in this sense interacting with a teacher may be not unlike interacting with a security force or a criminal fraternity where respect has to be shown in return for protection. 'Frequently, I heard the following critique from teachers: "He/she plays as if he/she is already a soloist, but he/she is only a student"' (106).

The bullying of a student by their teacher 'is not seen among virtuoso students as … a particular abuse but as a case of a "not-good-lesson"' (106; cf the description of this lesson, 96–8). '…[A] soloist student cannot be emotionally fragile, scared, or self-effacing. Working with students who present these characteristics …, teachers say, is a waste of time' (107). Equally, a student who is too wilful won't be accepted either. '"I won't work with him because he has too much personality. He doesn't hear me…"' (ibid.) During three lessons reported in detail, 'only one student dared ask a question' (108). 'Young virtuosos are accustomed to rude treatment' (109). As one of her student participants explained, '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' (127).

In stage 3, the last stage of training, there's much focus on success within the social milieu of soloists, teachers, and other gatekeepers (142ff). Here students' 'value is based on peer evaluation and a market controlled by cliques' (147). Finally, at this level the false promises, made implicitly or explicitly throughout the earlier stages, are exposed in the failure of most students to become soloists. Only a few from the soloist class succeed; more change career; most teach or join an orchestra (189). 'Teachers carefully hide the fact that success is rare, even nearly impossible. … It is absolutely contrary to the teacher's interest to speak about the relative proportion of successful students. And so, the teachers continue to support the notion that the students' aspirations are realistic. …[T]here is silence around [students who leave] that makes it possible to avoid blaming the organization or doubting the quality of the teacher's work' (190). 'Teachers, parents, and students typically keep silent about [those who drop out]' (79) For the students themselves, anything less than an international soloist's career is experienced as a failure (196); this after perhaps twenty years of intensive training and practice to the exclusion of a normal education, social life or

[161] Lehmann, Andreas C., John A. Sloboda & Robert H. Woody. 2007. *Psychology for Musicians: Understanding and Acquiring the Skills* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 202–3.

upbringing. After so many years of relentless criticism, 'even very successful violinists can feel comparative failure[s]' (197).

It is not hard to imagine what this kind of childhood does to all those who are not most exceptionally resilient. One of Ginsborg (2018)'s participants spoke of 'The sacrifice of a lost childhood, then giving up performing whilst at [conservatoire] because I realised I didn't want that which I'd worked so hard to achieve'.[162] One of Wagner's contributors gave up at the last stage of training in order to study medicine because 'When she played, she said, it was only her teacher playing through her' (Wagner 2015, 201), a devastating and yet a brave and sane response.

What we see documented throughout Wagner's study is the controlling environment associated by Bonneville-Roussy & Vallerand (2019) with 'obsessive passion' as opposed to 'harmonious passion' for music. '[W]ith OP, musicians feel controlled by external or internal pressures (e.g., external pressures from auditions or internal pressures to excel at all costs) that drive their involvement in music.' Wagner shows all too well why and how this is common among high-achieving musicians. Obsessive passion for music can lead to 'very positive emotions' when all goes well but 'overwhelming negative' emotions when failure is perceived, leading to 'burnout and injuries'. As Bonneville-Roussy and Vallerand wryly observe, 'a controlling environment may lead to the development of a more obsessive type of passion. Unfortunately, controlling behaviors seem to be prevalent in classical music cultures (Evans, 2015).'[163]

Wagner's study raises huge questions about this world, and whether the artistic results, wonderful as they are, are truly worth this level of physical and psychological pain or the level of abuse—because that's what it is—that children suffer in the (usually fruitless) quest for success. Linda MacArthur's 2011 study of emotional abuse by music teachers, cited above, bears out Wagner's with testimony from North America, showing both the viciousness of the abuse and the students' willingness to see it as justified and necessary for their success. Clearly, superlative technical control of one's instrument is only possible with years of practice, assisted by an expert practitioner. But the requirement also to acquire and reproduce a standard interpretation of each canonical score, within a barricaded performance style beyond which you may never stray without censure however successful you may be, adds to that technical education a degree of obedience and non-creativity which prevent there being any significant reward or even compensation other than a fee and routine approval.

It's not hard to imagine how the experience of being a performer could be transformed if personal creativity were a constant presence throughout training and professional practice. Then acquiring and maintaining a technique could be more than worth the work it unavoidably and constantly requires.

If, as should surely be happening throughout soloist training—which, let us be clear, is the initial goal of all musical training—a serious intervention was made for child protection, then it seems likely that

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[162] Ginsborg, Jane. 2018. "The Brilliance of Perfection" or "Pointless Finish"? What Virtuosity Means to Musicians. *Musicae* Scientiae 22:4, 454–473 at 464. Cf Hill's participant quoted in the notes to Chapter 7.3 above.

[163] Bonneville-Roussy, Arielle and Robert J. Vallerand. 2019. Passion at the Heart of Musicians' Well-Being. *Psychology of Music* 47:N, NN–NN (forthcoming). Evans, Paul. 2015. Self-determination theory: An approach to motivation in music education. *Musicae Scientiae* 19, 65–83.

fostering personal creative expression would necessarily become a key aim. The two go together. Nothing else is ethically defensible, or artistically desirable.

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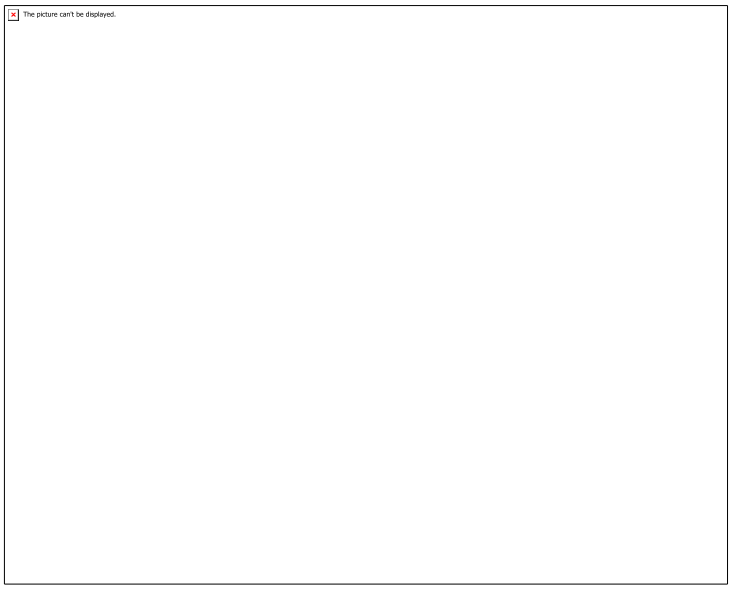
7.7 Micro schools and their discontents

Another model of WCM gatekeeping may help to place competitions in relation to teaching and other kinds of performance policing. (And there is a more detailed version in 7.7a.)



Here, normative concert life is squeezed between the pressures applied by the widespread gatekeeping in the profession (critics, agents etc)—which is never silent about anyone with a public profile, while anyone without one yearns for the notice—and the long preparations through teaching and competition. In line with Izabela Wagner's findings, and for that matter with anyone's experience of high-level training and career-formation, teaching is modelled as consisting of micro schools. Here the individual teachers—the 'masters' or 'professors' with whom students seek to study in order to benefit not just from their teaching but also, crucially, from the patronage and contacts—sell themselves, to those students with greatest potential to be led and to succeed, as the only teacher who can guarantee them a career, playing the correct way, benefitting from the best address book. The micro schools represent musical dynasties (Wagner 2015, 61) through which teachers both show their knowledge (122) and seek (though, thanks to style evolution, never succeed) in ensuring the survival of their interpretations, their own musical genes.

The extent to which identity is bound up in these slightly differing views is illustrated by one of my questionnaire participants:

> I can remember playing the Rhapsody from Brahms op. 119 to my teacher (…), after attending a summer course with a different pianist (…). The latter had suggested that just before the recapitulation I bring out more the inner voices (with detailed reasoning based on score analyses of legato marks and note lengths), creating effects that have rarely been used by other pianists. My teacher felt it was all too thought out and irrelevant, an unnecessary complication, dismissing completely my enjoyment of that approach. … since that day the relationship with him started to fade. (Pianist, 30-39)

To have a different musical response is to reject not just your teacher's preference but the self whom that preference sounds. The following is a selection of similar comments from the

questionnaire responses which give a sense of how common this is, of just how closely teachers identify their readings with themselves, and of how unable they seem to be to recognise a student's right to a view of their own.

> I think most teachers I have had in any instance (lesson or masterclass or coaching) have in the end been about trying to get me to play their ideas, rather than trying to teach me to play my ideas better. (Violinist, 30-39)
>
> I was shouted at by one of the jury members of a German competition for playing Bach too slow, with pedal and with too much contrast[, his] only argument being that "you cannot do that". And in order to humiliate me about it more would develop on the poor standard of London conservatoire[s] since students merely had to pay to get in. (Pianist, 22-29)
>
> … final exam. Panel of conservatoire, for interpretation I had to follow… my professor's interpretation. … I failed my exam when I know I did not play badly…. Didn't agree with interpretation myself but had to follow… [M]y own professor felt angry with me because I was meant to be the star student to represent them. I was caught in the middle of this political thing because my professor was new. … [P]rofessor never spoke to me again because the comment I received said the interpretation was not authentic. (Cellist, 30-39)
>
> One of the judges … devoted all of her critique of my aria to telling me how inappropriate it was to add notes that the composer hadn't intended, and how I would have known better if only I had studied at the Mozarteum, as she had. Ironically, I HAD studied with a teacher at the Mozarteum the previous summer, and it was that very teacher who encouraged me to ornament that cadence in the aria! (Singer, 30-39)

This kind of behaviour arises inevitably from a system in which all are competing to produce the most persuasive version of a product that is already comprehensively standardised. Competition focuses on the tiniest details, differences far smaller than could easily be accommodated even within the current practice, never mind stepping outside the norm. The squabbling arises, nonetheless, because of the false claims we examined in Chapter 6, all tending towards the assumption that there must be one reading that is better than all the others. I think it must be clear by now that there isn't, and that these scores can make persuasive music in an enormous variety of ways according to personal, local and period tastes. To build one's authority as a teacher around the claim that one knows how the music should go is only to advertise one's failure to handle the variety of past and possible approaches to performing WCM.

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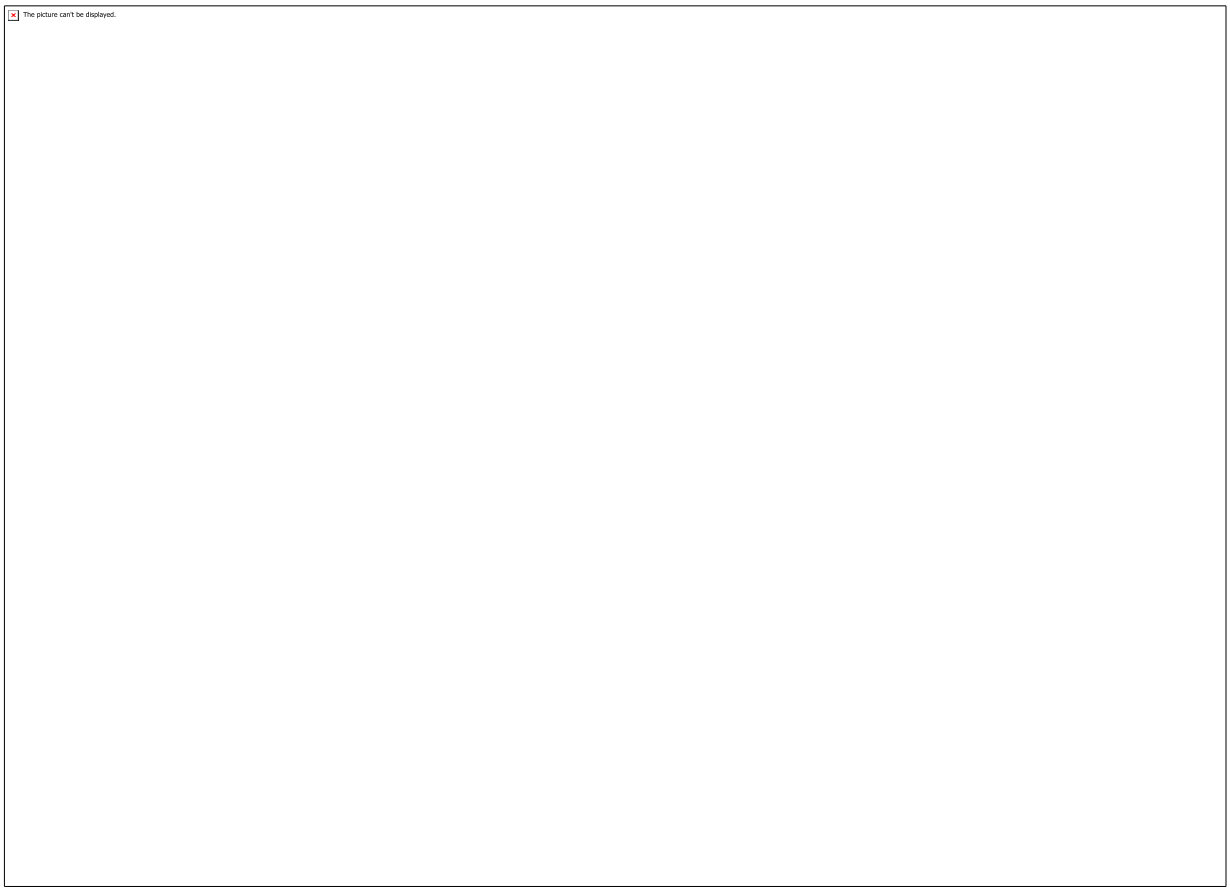
7.7a State Teaching

As a footnote to the models of the WCM State offered in Chapters 7.1 and 7.7, the version below adds arrows of influence to emphasise the close interrelationship between teaching and policing, each shaped by experience of the other. Bear in mind, as before, the number of critics, agents, etc, who had music lessons in childhood and so were trained in normative beliefs which they now aim to preserve. In turn, teachers read and listen to the results of their work (the work of those critics, et al.) and seek to train their students to please them. In an environment that's structured like this, how realistic are the claims—made at all levels—that individual creativity is sought, fostered, and prized? How much is possible?



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7.8 Competitions

Competitions show all the (over-)sensitivities of micro schools but now in a public forum, with prizes. They are showcases for teachers almost as much as for their students; while any performance that another teacher on the jury finds dissident in relation to their own is in danger of being marked down and then, literally, dismissed. At the same time, jury members may well wish to attract the most able among the excluded to join their class, adopt their memes, and win elsewhere. Wagner (2015, 182) reports an unsuccessful competitor being invited separately by four jury members to study with them in order to correct their perceived shortcomings, on which, incidentally, they all disagreed. And so competitors are playing (and teachers teaching) on a tightrope between a normativity so safe as to be bland and a distinctiveness so evident as to be lethal. As ever, the performer is caught in an impossible bind, leading to the cliché that only the most inoffensive survives to win in the final round (McCormick 2015, 96). Thus the tiny differences, which are all that differentiate the micro schools, are siphoned out through the competition filter, before the winners (or often, because they may be less bland, the runners-up) make it onto the concert-scene.

Juries consist substantially of soloists who also teach; and until recently in some competitions, and still now in others, it is not unusual for a juror's students to be competing and even to win. ('In the competition I observed—and this is not exceptional—all the competitors who ended up as finalists were students of members of the jury' (Wagner 2015, 67).) It is considered normal for entrants to arrange classes with jurors before a competition so that there is some interest in and familiarity with them when it comes to the event. ('Among the ten laureates of competitions included in my study, nine were the disciples of at least one jury member' (Wagner 2015, 180).) The same jurors tend to show up on different competition panels, offering several opportunities each season for their own students to be favoured. As one of Wagner's participants reported, 'the competition starts long before the opening ceremony' (181).

At this level it's a small world for each instrument; and so it's easy to see how the competition circuit provides a convenient space in which aspiring soloists can be scrutinised for acceptability by those already in place. Do they fit in, or are they too challenging for the existing elite? As ever, the overriding concern is for the most persuasive performance of musical norms which are thereby affirmed. That said, research suggests (and this confirms Wagner's story above about the four contradictory views of a competitor's shortcomings) that judgements of performances are highly unreliable. Glen Kwok and Chris Dromey bring together a number of these studies in their recent survey 'On Classical Music Competitions':[164]

> Harold Fiske, for example, asked experienced adjudicators to rate a set of performances on their overall musical quality, but only he knew that each performance was presented twice, producing inconsistent scores for each performance. Similarly, Renato Flores and Victor Ginsburgh analysed the Queen Elisabeth Competition over a ten-year period and found that competitors appearing on the final day stood a much greater chance of being ranked higher. … George Duerksen, for example, presented listeners with two recordings of an identical

[164] Kwok, Glen, and Chris Dromey. 2018. On Classical Music Competitions. In ed. Chris Dromey and Julia Haferkorn (2018), *The Classical Music Industry* (New York: Routledge), 67–76, esp. 72–3.

performance but labelled one as professional, the other amateur—the latter received much lower marks.[165]

Lisa McCormick's 2015 book on WCM competitions, *Performing Civility*,[166] presents a somewhat more positive view of competitions, citing changes to rules that postdate Wagner's research and that are aimed at greater fairness, although how faithfully they are adhered to seems sometimes open to question (Norman Lebrecht keeps a beady eye on cases in his blog 'Slipped Disc').[167] McCormick herself reports instances of juries breaking their rules (186–8) as well as the problems that arise from 'professional jurors' (192–4). When it comes to judging unorthodox performance, 'A common refrain among jurors was that there was no greater delight than to hear competitors find something new in a piece that the juror had performed throughout his entire career'. Yet 'The performer's responsibility to the composer was a common theme in interviews with judges, and it was invariably discussed in moralistic language' (173). … And so, inevitably, 'there is a limit to judges' open-mindedness, and … this limit is defined by the score, which serves as a proxy for the composer'. … 'Unorthodox interpretations … not only are inaccurate; they also cause offence' (174). What an interesting observation that is; for again we find the anger that any challenge to identity invariably generates in those who fear the Other or who, beneath their shocked certainty, are insecure about the justification for their own beliefs.

Gender (which we'll consider in more detail in Chapters 9–10) is another important issue raised by McCormick, for it surfaces all over the WCM business and, thanks to their already dubious ethics, no less in competitions than elsewhere. The masculine values of pianism in particular, and musical athleticism in general—strength, power, dominance, mastery—which we saw analysed in Katharine Liley's work reported in Chapter 6.5, 'poses a unique problem for female performers, who must juggle contradictory cultural expectations regarding musical virtuosity and conventional femininity' (McCormick 2015, 120–1). 'Kern', she reports of the 2001 Cliburn competition, 'was still remembered as much for her concert attire as for her aggressive athleticism'; a problem which remains common today and is discussed (sympathetically for once) in Janet Malcolm's 2016 profile of Yuja Wang, which we'll return to in Chapter 16.[168] A recent survey by Richard Parncutt reports

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[165] Kwok & Dromey, 72. Their references are: Harold E. Fiske, *The Effect of a Training Procedure in Music Performance Evaluation on Judge Reliability* (Ontario Educational Research Council Report, 1978); Renato Flôres and Victor Ginsburgh, 'The Queen Elisabeth Musical Competition: How Fair is the Final Ranking?', *The Statistician*, 45:1 (1996), 102; George L. Duerksen, 'Some Effects of Expectation on Evaluation of Recorded Musical Performance', *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 20:2 (1972), 268–72. Their note 25 reads: 'Several recent flashpoints are detailed in Stuart Isacoff, 'Competition Judging: Keeping Evil Out of the Jury Room', *Musical America* (3 February 2015), www.musicalamerica.com/news/newsstory.cfm?storyID=33290&categoryID=7'

[166] McCormick, Lisa. 2015. *Performing Civility: International Competitions in Classical Music*. Cambridge University Press.

[167] https://slippedisc.com

[168] *New Yorker*, Sept 5 2016. www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/09/05/yuja-wang-and-the-art-of-performance. Leah Broad has written powerfully about the sexism pervading critiques of women's concert dress: 'Fashion, fabrics and fishtails – why we need to talk about what female classical performers wear', *The Guardian*, 19 April 2022.

several studies showing attractiveness, gender and racial biases in the evaluation of performances.[169] To be white and male still seems the safest option.

Ultimately, 'In entering an international competition, musicians volunteer to undergo a public labelling ritual in which there are only two outcomes' (McCormick 2015, 122).

An intriguing recent study of competitions comes from a jury member.[170] It's a favourable picture, but then the Chopin Competition, which it describes, is among the most carefully regulated and open to scrutiny. John Rink's approach to judging—hardly coincidentally, given that he led the AHRC Research Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice (www.cmpcp.ac.uk)—was a great deal more nuanced than those jurors reported in Wagner's and McCormick's studies.

> '…I want to discover *an individual Chopin* brought to life by the performer in question.' This would be true of 'a performance with new insights to offer, presented in a way that is convincing not only pianistically but *musically* – that is to say, artistically.' … What I definitely did not have in mind was the sense of 'responsibility to the composer' evoked by some of McCormick's jurors, even if I do feel a certain responsibility in my own music-making. Instead, the accent was on 'an individual Chopin', that is, the performer's personal take on the composer's music in a uniquely creative instantiation which nevertheless paradoxically realises one or more aspects of the music's potential. (Rink 2019, ts p.5)

The reference here to 'the music' may ring some alarm bells among readers of Chapter 5; at the very least it puts the performer of a non-standard reading at a substantial disadvantage, even for such a relatively broad-minded listener, for she has to be more than usually persuasive in order to overcome that sense of what belongs with a score. (No one said being a creative performer was easy.) But at the same time, Rink is unusually willing to judge a performer on what seem to be the performer's terms:

> I myself try to make sense of whatever performance I hear *in the terms defined by the musician or musicians in question*. And so, there can be extreme liberties taken, great flights of imagination, but somehow it has to work within the context of the performance. And I think that's the ultimate responsibility of the performer: *to make it work in the context of their performance, whatever one is doing*. … [T]hat becomes a source of liberation rather than potential constraint: the score as a starting point. It's then up to us to do with it what we want. What people think of it is up to them to decide: some will love, some will hate the same performance. (Rink 2019, ts p. 6, quoting his interview available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=juXod260J3E)

Which is why a competition is no place for these kinds of risks if you want to win. But Rink also reminds us how a performance can be heard so differently as to leave one wondering how any kind of performance evaluation can ever be sensibly made at a professional level:

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[169] Parncutt, Richard. 2018. The Reliability/Validity of Cognitive/Emotional Approaches to the Evaluation of Musical Performance: Implications for Competition Juries. *The Chopin Review* 1. http://chopinreview.com/pages/issue/6/1#3

[170] Rink, John. 2019. Judging Chopin: An Evaluation of Musical Experience. In ed. Gianmario Borio, Alessandro Cecchi, Giovanni Giuriati and Marco Lutzu, *Investigating Musical Performance: Theoretical Models and Intersections* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge), forthcoming; quoted here from the typescript. My thanks to the author.

> As I was leaving the building, I spoke rapturously about Liu's playing to someone I encountered whose musical opinion I greatly respect. To my astonishment, the person replied, 'I did not like it. It left me cold.' Instead of remonstrating, I said, 'How fascinating: tell me why you feel that way.' The response: 'It is too studied. She does not feel it.' I saw no point in arguing: it was better to agree to disagree. But the moral is that even a performance like Liu's – one that left half the jury speechless – could be perceived as 'cold' and 'unfeeling'. This confirms what I had said just days before: 'some will love, some will hate the same performance'. (Rink 2019, ts p. 8. The Liu performance is at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6cv_rOpeO8)

Rink usefully reminds us, too, of the availability in editions (especially of Chopin, though scandalously not the Liszt edition, as Kenneth Hamilton repeatedly laments in the video lecture already cited) of alternative readings sanctioned by the composer.[171] The sanctioning is neither here nor there for this book, of course, but it is telling how rarely Rink found competitors taking advantage of alternative readings, no doubt (if they knew of them at all) fearful that jurors would assume they were mistakes. As one of Wagner's participants observes, 'One small error and it's finished' (Wagner 2015, 176).[172]

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[171] Hamilton's lecture is at www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaU-T8ZAHkc.

[172] Or on a lighter note, and as a reward for reading the footnotes, see the trailer for 'Grand Piano' (2013) at www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEoM7bM7KVw

7.9 Alternatives

Rink's approach to judging a competition (7.8), while far from being unconstrained by norms (he'd hardly be an acceptable judge at the moment if he were), points towards a more enquiring way of thinking about what performers may have to offer. But on the whole, for all the well-intentioned, sympathetic and encouraging teaching that goes on in WCM, there remains a deeply ingrained belief that what is written in a score must be sounded exactly, and that there is broadly one ideal way to do that, the way that 'we' (those admitted into the profession) do it now. To ensure that that continues to be so, the teaching of WCM accepts—even believes necessary—behaviours of teachers to pupils that would be wholly unacceptable in mainstream education.

What we've seen across Chapter 7 is bad enough. Sometimes the abuse is far worse. An environment in which bullying is already common; in which a teacher has complete authority, above that of the parents, and represents, and is seen as having a quasi-sacred duty to teach, the desires of composers whose authority is held to be quasi-divine; and in which the musical results they get seem to many to justify whatever it takes to get them; in such an environment it is only a small step from authoritarianism to sexual abuse. As Ian Pace reports,

> What I have seen, overwhelmingly, from having gone through an elite musical training, working as a professional musician, and also from a large amount of information disclosed privately to me, is a systematic pattern of domination, cruelty, dehumanisation, bullying and emotional manipulation from unscrupulous musicians in positions of unchecked power, of which sexual abuse is one of several manifestations.[173]

Through his blog Pace has done essential work documenting and campaigning against sexual abuse in musical training, and has published valuable guidelines for teachers and students.[174] (It's scandalous that this has had to be done by an individual.) There is nothing I can add to this, other than the observation—which after all we've seen must now be self-evident—that in much of this abuse WCM ideology plays an enabling role.

Do western classical musicians always realise how out-of-step their teaching is, particularly at advanced levels, with teaching in other contexts, and how abusive it is? Accepting this as essential for success is entirely unnecessary. There's no reason—aside from the narrow-mindedness of gatekeepers to the profession, which as we've seen results from the same kind of teaching—why students should not be taught in a normally respectful and supportive atmosphere in which their ideas are heard and developed in productive ways, not simply dismissed.

There's a fair case, then, for a movement for reform, led by young professionals with the desire for a practice that values them, determined to teach their students differently. The desire is there, as answers to another question in the survey for this book often showed.

> Q) What do you tell your students about being original in their performances?

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[173] Pace, Ian. 2015. Music Teacher Sentenced to 11 Years in Prison as Abuse Film Whiplash Prepares for Oscars. *The Conversation*, February 20. https://theconversation.com/music-teacher-sentenced-to-11-years-in-prison-as-abuse-film-whiplash-prepares-for-oscars-37786

[174] Pace, Ian. 2015. Safeguarding. *Music Teacher* April 2015, 13–15.

Among the answers here there is plenty of open-mindedness and encouraging of students to experiment. It seems more than likely, given the nature of the questionnaire and its emphasis on having been prevented from being creative in performance, that the respondents are on average unusually open to non-standard approaches. So we need to remember that these answers are probably not typical of WCM teachers as a whole; but they should be.

> The past was much stranger than you think. Experiment in as many different ways as you can imagine; try going too far and striving for originality. (Historical flautist, 30-39)
>
> I encourage them to be original and support their own ideas – oftentimes students are insecure and have to be pushed to come up with their ideas or go outside of the norms – I try to create a safe space in my lessons for them to do this. (Violist, 30-39)
>
> As a teacher I incorporate improvisation into music lessons and encourage students to be as original as possible in performances, although this isn't always easy. I often ask them to try out an interpretation that they consider to be 'over-the-top' and this tends to be the most interesting. (Violinist, 30-39)

There is usually a caveat of one sort or another:

> Respect the text, but think for your own. Think about every note and how YOU (not me!) want to make it sound. Play your repertoire and don't feel obliged to perform as your teacher wants it. (Horn-player, 40-49)
>
> As long as it feels necessary for them (necessary meaning here something that they burn to do, that they fell they MUST do), I encourage them to try out mostly anything. (Pianist, 30-39)
>
> I push them to go to the very end of their own musical intentions. When I do propose some musical ideas, I always ask them if they agree, and I always remind them they're allowed not to agree! (Pianist, 20-29)
>
> Generally speaking, to go for it, but also to be honest about what it is they are doing and why. This is especially relevant for the performance of historic materials where one has to negotiate the borderlines of "authenticity", both in relation to scholarly and performative partiality of knowledge and to audience's expectations. (Medieval fiddler, 30-39)

And on audience expectations:

> However, remain aware of the context of your performance. In certain countries like the United States, you may have to tone it down a bit to accord with the regional tastes, but you may be able to get away with much more in other places. (Flautist, 30-39)
>
> Based on my experience, audience in different country also have a bearing on creativity and originality. For instance, I could be slightly innovative in my interpretation in Germany, but not in Italy. (Pianist, 22-29)

There was much emphasis on knowing the historical context for, or the musical construction of a score.

> There is a lot of work that goes into being truly creative with a work that is new to you. You must understand style, structure, harmony, motifs and how they all relate to one another and to the overall shape of the piece. (Cellist, 40-49)
>
> I tell them to respect historical context, performance practice and the composer. Besides that, if they have something individual and is truly what they believe in, they should believe in themselves. (Cellist, 30-39)

And emphasis on the need to be able to explain yourself.

> I ask them to consider the intentions of the music displayed through the score and through its social and historical context. I encourage students to annotate their scores with the musical decisions they have made ready for discussion of why they have come to these conclusions. (Clarinettist, 30-39)
>
> I want my students to be able to discuss and justify their choices out loud, not because they simply want to do something. (Classical guitarist, 50-59)

Even among this self-selecting constituency there were some much more *dirigiste* approaches.

> must first understand the idea of HIP (Historical Informed Performance), then they could, as they become a more mature musician, examining different interpretation approach. (Pianist, 22-29)
>
> you're supposed to serve music, not vice versa. … if you want music to serve you, then compose or improvise. (Organist, conductor, 40-49)

But even so, the results showed a powerful desire for more open-mindedness in the teaching of WCM. Is a movement for change too much to propose? To be noticed and to work it needs to be supported by widespread public discussion in social and other media, which will have to include examples, on occasion even the naming of names. In the light of Pace's evidence the relevance of #MeToo is clear; even without it, the kinds of psychological abuse that are routine surely justify a comparable response.

I've made a number of suggestions in this chapter for alternative ways of approaching the teaching of WCM. In Chapter 7.2, drawing on Green's research, we looked at the benefits of teaching classical music aurally in schools. Getting away from the score as a sacred text which must be obeyed would be beneficial at all levels, and starting in childhood would make it easier to achieve. (We saw in 7.3 how the King's College regulations encouraged that.) Introducing improvisation into classical practice at an early age (as we saw the Trinity board doing in 7.3) would give musicians far greater confidence later on. Playing down perfection would ease the pressure on young musicians. All three would reduce their sense that obedience is the only route to success: that you obey or you give up. It is not impossible to imagine a teaching that encouraged and accepted more, and denigrated and punished less.

Also in 7.3 I suggested how reducing conformity might increase the sense that music can be (arguably, by its very nature is) a collaborative, socialising practice and would benefit from being allowed to be in WCM as it is in other musics. In 7.4 Hill (2018) made a powerful case for the moral, social and psychological benefits of much more creativity in musical training and practice.

In 7.5 Nettl (1995) and Richardson (2007) reminded us that WCM training is diametrically opposed to values fundamental to western life, including democracy and (crucially for us) freedom of expression,[175] which we'll return to at the very end of this book. As a guide, reforms can usefully take freedom of expression as a measure of their progress.

7.5 concluded that an ethical conservatoire, looking to its relationship with the music business, 'should not be gatekeeping to suit the gatekeepers: it should be putting pressure on them to rise to the challenge of thinking and responding as imaginatively as its students'.

7.6 brought together the benefits of having creativity as a a 'constant presence throughout training' with a much more serious attitude to child protection, in which 'fostering personal creative expression would necessarily become a key aim', leading to training and practice that are more 'ethically defensible and artistically desirable'.

7.7 gave a sense of how strong is the desire among younger professionals for better treatment and for more freedom to be creative; and it called for 'widespread public discussion in social and other media' which would not be afraid to air abuses of all sorts in order to achieve a better learning and working environment.

The challenge for competitions (7.8) is one we can shrug off, I think. It's their problem to work out whether competing is really a useful way of comparing performers in the absence of fanatically constrained norms. If it is, then maybe we'll not have expanded norms far enough.

In Chapter 14 we'll look at how more freedom of musical expression would benefit musicians' health, and in Chapter 17 we'll add to this the advantages for audiences and for the music business.[176] Here, though, I'd like to add two more aims, not in any attempt to be comprehensive—because this is just a tentative beginning to thinking about a new kind of practice for WCM—but simply to add a couple more ingredients to the cauldron. We need to be more accommodating of those who don't enter the profession as performers; and we really should also be opening ourselves back up (this is one thing you can say for the Victorians) to amateur music making as a widespread part of our cultural life. The value of that can only increase as most entertainment becomes digital and virtual.

The extremely narrow and demanding requirements for a career as a performer are more than anything what makes being a music student so stressful: if you can't hit the target exactly you're not going to make it. It's quite unlike art school, or even drama school, in that sense. (Only classical ballet is worse, in that there you also have to look a particular way.) Thus talented, sensitive, skilled people are simply jettisoned; left with painfully acquired skills they can't use except privately, and whose private use is itself now painful because of the sense of loss and exclusion that is rekindled whenever one exercises them. (There's a touching and realistic evocation of this sadness in the 2015 movie 'Victoria'.)[177] It's wasteful and cruel. Can we not find a way of welcoming and using musicians

[175] Fernández-Morante (2018), table 2 (p. 17), usefully compares the values of the standard ideology with an imaginary humane approach to teaching music.
[176] While Ch. 17 remains to be written let me make it clear here (in case it is not already obvious) that it will not promote the notion that creativity should serve the neo-liberal notions of entrepreneurship critiqued in Kanellopoulos, Panagiotis. 2015. Musical Creativity and "the Police": Troubling Core Music Education Certainties. In Cathy Benedict, Patrick Schmidt, Gary Spruce, and Paul Woodford (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Justice in Music Education* (New York: Oxford University Press), 318–39.
[177] Victoria, dir. Sebastian Schipper (2015). Curzon Artificial Eye ART 781DVD. 00:42:30–47:25.

who are not concert players, other than as disappointed teachers, without them feeling failures? Several conservatoires are now encouraging students into doing community work, which needs and deserves much more funding because it does so much good for those it serves. But that could cover a much wider range of activity. There is still room, if we look for it, for WCM to have much more presence in everyday life if it can become more varied, less predictable, less classed, more surprising, more participatory.[178] Making room in training for a wider range of musical imaginations, which at present are suppressed, may enable the music business to include many more fine performers who at the moment drop out, discouraged by a training that has no use for their alternative voices.

I suggested earlier in this section that it's no coincidence that whether we look at childhood teaching, examining, conservatoire, the virtuoso studio, competitions, and whether we listen to research observations or student experiences, the same abuses are found. Like the prejudices that run through our society from top to bottom and which we'll see equally at work in WCM very shortly, these problems are structural; they are built-in to the belief system that underpins WCM. The worship of composers and texts, fantasies about the past and about the intentions of the long-dead, and obligations to them, all masking the desire to hold on to the power to determine the behaviour of others and to protect one's own identity from the challenging encounter with others, all of these drive the oppression of each new generation by the last.[179] Absurd beliefs lead inevitably to abusive behaviour, because there's no other way of forcing people to hold them. Cleaning up WCM involves cleaning out the ideology, and then discovering other ways of being musical. We've looked at the first of these in Part 1. And we'll look at the second in Part 3. For now, I'm afraid there are many more problems to face up to if—and this is surely a necessary step, however painful—we're to admit to a motivating and galvanizing selection of the problems that the ideology will go on causing until we change it. Until we have conservatoires, teaching studios, performance institutions, commentators, and music businesses that no longer believe this delusional ideology, we won't have a musical culture that represents and nurtures the kinds of people that we try to be.

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[178] On the narrowness of WCM culture in terms of class, and of course gender and ethnicity, see Scharff, Christina. 2015. Equality and Diversity in the Classical Music Profession: A Research Report. London: Kings College London. https://www.impulse-music.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Equality-and-Diversity-in-Classical-Music-Report.pdf

[179] A very pertinent discussion of Freire (1996), *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, can be found in Barton, David. 2019. The Autonomy of Private Instrumental Teachers: Its Effect on Valid Knowledge Construction, Curriculum Design, and Quality of Teaching and Learning. PhD thesis, Royal College of Music (London), 84–6. Freire, Paulo. 1996. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. London: Penguin.

8 Musicology and editions

This could easily be a very long chapter, looking right across the musicological scene at scholarship that oppresses performers. Some of it is now very obvious. Do we need, for example, anyone to say more on the ways in which HIP depends (or pretends to depend) on the musicological study of texts from the past? For that we can have more than enough fun rereading Richard Taruskin's work which already uncovers so many of the absurdities of the way we talk about and practice 'informed' performance.[180] A case remains, of course, for using texts from the past to guide choices in the present—the case being that, like any choice of starting-point, it can make devising a reading a little easier by restricting the huge range of possibilities (the heuristic argument from Chapter 6.19 above). But the usual arguments of those who would make it an obligation have no reasonable basis. Part 1 has made that clear enough, I hope. A more pertinent question asks who has the *power* to force others to perform in particular ways, and that's the question addressed here in Part 2.

It's true that at second or third hand musicology does have a large role in the policing and oppression that I'm writing about here in Part 2. It instils ideas in people either through academic teaching at university/conservatoire which then shapes their behaviour in the profession (its second-hand influence); or its ideas are absorbed in watered-down form in the studio by people who go on to teach young musicians. And so ideas about 'correct' ornamentation, to take a crude example, seep through into general practice, supported by what's heard in concert and on record.

Maybe I'll come back to this, or maybe someone else would like to: I'm very happy to put up material by others here that's pertinent. But at the moment I'm much more concerned with looking at the forces that performers encounter directly in their daily work, the factors that don't get much discussion because they're taken for granted as belonging naturally within the WCM state and its system of beliefs. Musicology is quite a minor factor in that scheme, after all, as the model in 7.1 tried to show.

I should, though, say a little about editions, because they are ever-present—a starting-point for so much everyday work—and the beliefs around them have not been sufficiently challenged. (If you are an editor you may prefer to look away at this point.)

The editor who wishes to provide a new edition of a canonical composer can become the most fanatical of the many oppressors of the WCM performer. He (usually he—why is that? Because it takes a sense of entitlement?) is the biblical scholar of WCM. It's no coincidence that some of the techniques of music editing were taken over from biblical scholarship. The aim is to provide the composer-god's text exactly as He intended it. For of course He must have had a very precise intention. Indeed, there are few things quite as embarrassing for a fanatical editor as a composer—Chopin, say, or Liszt—who kept changing their mind or who seems to have been relatively unbothered about being precise or consistent, who perhaps saw a piece as something that *should* always be changing in performance. (NB we must even here be careful about 'should', lest we start

[180] Taruskin, Richard. 1995. *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
____2009. *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
____2020. *Cursed Questions: On Music and its Social Practices*. Oakland: University of California Press.

damning performances that don't change the notes. Though I don't expect that happy day to dawn anytime soon.)

And so we arrive at competing 'Urtext' editions, each claiming to be the most correct; and at examinations and competitions in which using the correct edition is necessary for one's musicianship to be heard at all. And yet what is the difference between all these editions, and between these and those that preceded them? A note here or there. Or just a phrase mark or a dot. Are these the grounds on which we damn a musician's reading of a score? Well, yes, they are; but that says more about us than about the music-making, and what it says is not pleasant. Humans' capacity for pedantry generating law-making, with punishment for those who don't think it matters, is horribly exposed in attitudes to WCM editions.

In 6.7 I cited, hidden in a footnote, the rather telling video from publishers Bärenreiter entitled 'Searching for the True Beethoven', the title reminding us of how naive these beliefs still are, and of a highly-regarded publisher's unthinking (though commercially rewarding) assumption that 'es muss sein': this is how it must be. Well, it needn't be. What matters isn't the notes, it's the experience that arises out of a performance of whatever notes are sounded. Let's try to keep that in mind and resist the oppression of the text or rather, for this is really the point, oppression by those (not just editors) who like to use a text as a (police) baton.

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9 Criticism

9.1 Introduction: u and non-u

The discussion of Patricia Kopatchinskaja's Beethoven cadenza in Chapter 1 offered a snapshot of how performance criticism works, of the prejudices it summons up, and of its tendency to privilege belief over experience. In this chapter I want to look more closely at this toxic interaction of belief, prejudice and judgement, where beliefs are specific to WCM—the kinds of beliefs we were looking at in Part 1—but prejudice is structural, rooted in conservative, white, middle-class upbringing and culture, within which beliefs about WCM sit comfortably.

In that Kopatchinskaja example we saw her artistic choices associated damningly with her gender: 'a lady with her violin' and her 'childish' cadenza (would that word have been used of a male soloist?). Much of what follows is, one way or another, about fear of the Other. And much of the other is characterised by critics, more or less explicitly, as effeminate. So we shall be dealing here implicitly with gender and sexuality. The next most common Other, unsurprisingly, is the interloper or foreigner—either literally the performer from a non white-western culture who is felt not to understand adequately what's required, or metaphorically the musician whose performance is unwelcome because foreign to the critic's understanding of how a score should sound. Closely related is class, at issue whenever a performer (the composer's servant) has the presumption to do anything that's noticeable. Servants should be invisible, or in this case, so transparent as to be inaudible.

This may seem a shocking way to begin to look at performance criticism. But after all we've seen in previous chapters it cannot come as a surprise to find that people who critique performance think in terms of right and wrong, proper and improper, belonging and foreign; and once you think in those terms your metaphorical language, as you write, very easily extends into binaries such as strong and weak, master and servant, masculine and effeminate, healthy and unhealthy, normal and abnormal, straight and deviant, us and them. This is where the ideology takes one, and not by an indirect path: for these are the categories in which WCM thinking deals.

And so there is nothing surprising or out of place within this culture—apart from the furore it sparked—in the way that a clutch of male critics described the opera singer Tara Erraught as Octavian in *Rosenkavalier* at Glyndebourne:

> I stand by every word of what I wrote… she is dumpy of stature and … her costuming makes her resemble something between Heidi and Just William. Is Jones [the stage director] simply trying to make the best of her intractable physique…? (Rupert Christiansen, *The Telegraph*, 21 May 2014)[181]
>
> *Financial Times* writer Andrew Clark referred to the singer as "a chubby bundle of puppy-fat", *The Independent*'s Michael Church described her as "a dumpy girl", the *Guardian*'s

[181] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/opera/10844053/Rosenkavalier-row-I-stand-by-every-word.html. For a similar case from 2019 see https://www.bbc.com/news/amp/entertainment-arts-49522172.

> Andrew Clements called her “stocky” and *The Times*‘ Richard Morrison labelled the opera star as “unbelievable, unsightly and unappealing“.[182]

None of this has anything to do with Tara Erraught’s singing, of course, but it’s the kind of commentary that follows easily, for a critic with a sense of entitlement, from a particular way of thinking about how the world should be in their dreams. Music is supposed, it seems, to construct a Utopia in which everything they most like is ideally presented; an enticing mix of what they know—what is comfortable—and what they desire. Followers of the links in the second of these quotes should not be surprised to find that some of the reviews have been edited in their online versions to remove the most offensive phrases. That at least indicates some shame.

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[182] https://www.stylist.co.uk/life/critics-spark-outrage-after-calling-opera-singer-stocky-dumpy-and-chubby/56423

9.2 The metaphorical language of record reviews

The purpose of journalistic performance criticism, it by now surely goes without saying, is to promote and reward the most persuasive normative performances and to discourage everything else. Performance critics are thus people with a particularly strong sense of what is normative and a particularly acute ear for what is not. They acquire these by extensive listening, checked against the values in which they were brought up as musicians or music-lovers. If they have degrees in music this upbringing may have included familiarity with quite sophisticated historical and critical musicology and music theory. They are likely to be, or at an earlier stage in life to have been, frequent attenders at concerts (in the case of record critics) and listeners to recordings (in the case of concert critics). They generally know many performers, composers and other gatekeepers well. They are in every sense insiders, an in-group within an in-group, deeply imbued (perhaps deeper than any) with WCM ideology and norms. For us, then, what they write about performance is likely to be particularly revealing.

What follows in this section, based on the words of a still-smaller subset (those who review classical recordings), shows their words in an unflattering light. The words are theirs, it's true, but I can't claim not to be implicated: I share this background with them; I know where they're coming from; I've written like this myself.[183] People like us, greatly advantaged in so many ways, educated into a sense of white western culture, belonging within it, feel entitled to judge. I do it again and again throughout this book, perhaps (we'll see) nowhere more than in this and the next section. True, I use this sense of entitlement to judge the system in which I've lived (comfortably); and/but (it's both), I know whereof I speak when it comes to prejudice. You'll have to bear that in mind. The exclusion of difference is practised by WCM to such an extent that few who are not already insiders have enough interest in it to be in a position, or even to be bothered, to call it out.

What we'll see in this section continues to develop the theme that was emerging through chapters 6 and 7, and that will be reinforced in the chapters that follow: WCM is ideologically a microcosm of elite, western, capitalist culture, and indeed one of the very clearest examples of it. Here, in the writings of performance critics, and especially record critics (those most thoroughly implicated in the values of the commercial WCM business), we see its assumptions and prejudices displayed more explicitly than anywhere.

Performance from their perspective requires constant and intense vigilance: comparing the current to the recent past, seeking out the non-normative, pointing to it and writing in such a way as most effectively to discourage it. Their scrutiny therefore reaches down to the smallest details of a performance in order to draw our attention to anything that differs from their expectations.

> She also loses the momentum of the *agitato* pedal-point…, which in turn loses its climactic aura on account of Fliter's mincing ritenutos. (*Gramophone*, October 2018, 67)

Several things are achieved in this short passage. The critic shows us that they're an acute listener; they're at home with the technical jargon; they know the score well and the affects it 'should'

[183] Examples are quoted in Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2020. Moral Judgement in Response to Performances of Western Art Music. In Ananay Aguilar, Eric Clarke, Ross Cole and Matthew Pritchard (eds), *Remixing Music Studies: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Cook* (Routledge), 91-111.

produce (i.e. has produced in performances they know well); it's open in front of them, serving as an authoritative reference, the sacred text that must be meticulously obeyed; and in order to condemn the non-standard handling of small-scale timing they're willing to use the dog-whistle term 'mincing'. Here's another recent example, discussing pianist Anatol Ugorski:

> The first time I heard it, I felt dirty all over. … His monkey tricks render Var 18 unrecognisable … his mincing, droopy and impossibly vulgar reading of *Für Elise* makes Liberace look like Artur Schnabel (*Gramophone*, Awards issue 2018, 128) [Liberace was a famously flamboyant and extravagantly-costumed gay pianist specialising in light music on TV and in films. You can hear an extract from this *Für Elise* recording in episode 2 of the Challenging Performance podcast. And the quotation is further analysed in Chapter 30.1 below.]

Any other pianist reading this now knows what might be said of them if they play so much as a ritenuto fractionally differently; as does any CD label thinking of recording them, or concert planner thinking of booking them. At this level, and in a magazine read widely across the record business, this matters. The control of deviance could hardly be more obvious or more discouraging.

Critics are thus highly attuned to and on the alert for difference, testing it against expectations on the one hand and aesthetic pleasure on the other: is it, they wonder, an unusually powerful confirmation of the norm, or is it wrong? We've already seen in chapter 1 how easily belief trumps aesthetic response, and so inevitably most difference seems wrong: the possibility of a new reading of a score being wrong but pleasing doesn't arise, therefore; if it lies outside the pale formed by the composer's imagined intentions (in truth, the recent norm), it can only generate a hostile reaction. Thus, paradoxically, composers themselves are much more capable of tolerating difference than are critics. Lotte Lehmann, in a masterclass happily recorded for posterity, recalls Richard Strauss accompanying her in his 'Heimlicher Afforderung':

> You know, I must tell you a very funny story about this song. I sang it with Richard Strauss, and when we rehearsed it I took a very wrong tempo. He wants it very slowly…. But I *felt* it very differently; I felt it very quickly and I started… He said, "Are you crazy? What's the matter with you? This is a slower tempo." And I said, "I think that's terrible, I feel it quick." And he laughed — he had very much humour — and he said, "No, this is very wrong, but let's go through it so, if you like it; I want to hear it." And I sang it very quickly, and he laughed very much on the end. He said, "What you do is *entirely* wrong, but I like it."[184]

Not much chance of that from a modern critic of performance.

Critics' strong tendency to fear and condemn difference makes WCM performance criticism another form of social and cultural exclusion, and so criticism offers us a particularly brutal and explicit forum for the intolerance that is integral to WCM ideology.

A selection of quotes will illustrate the kinds of associations that are routinely made between performance details and the character or behaviour, gender, sexual orientation, class, or race of performers. Much of this must be the automatic, unthinking use of descriptors whose implications have not been consciously considered but which spring to mind as apt, as one writes about a

[184] Transcribed from an unpublished audio recording of a masterclass given by Lotte Lehmann in the Wigmore Hall in 1960, from recordings made by the BBC Transmission Service. I'm most grateful to Michael Letchford for sharing these recordings with me.

performance, because they call upon assumptions, as well as habits of speech and thought, that are part and parcel of one's culture; in this case typically the culture of white, male, middle-class, enthusiasts for WCM. But nonetheless, bearing in mind that in every case the aim is to discourage difference, it's important to see what kinds of associations are being made, however unconsciously. It clarifies how habitually WCM ideology reaches into and faithfully mirrors many dark corners of white western heritage. At the same time, and on the surface, these quotes are also concerned with how noticeable a performer is; noticeable, that is, to the critic who knows, thanks to the confidence that comes with entitlement, that their values are objective, rational and indeed natural (cf Chapter 6.5 on 'natural' musicianship). For the ideal performer is both one of us and also so discreet as to go unnoticed, which is what 'one of us' naturally does: 'we' only notice the interloper.

Let's begin, then, with some unvarnished sexism.[185]

> …she is as tempestuous and temperamental as the music demands: some might even say more than it demands. But she never loses her head (*Gramophone*, Dec 2018, 94)[186]

This is as clear an example as one could wish of the trope of the hysterical, childishly irrational woman, seen from the perspective of the judicious, rational man, relieved that this time, at least, she manages not to lose her precarious self-control.

> …the cover photo shows more leg than is usual at an organ console (July 2016, 71)

where, to many, women still seem a novelty.

And from there, we may continue into performers accused of drawing attention to themselves. It's never the critic's fault for having their attention attracted, or as they would say, distracted. And that's the point: there's a curious intertwining of attraction and distraction in which what is heard seems enticing and yet (or therefore) wrong. It's out of place, and yet the temptation is there to succumb.

> The whole of this section, the Andante un poco tranquillo at fig. 92 (indexed as 5 on the CD) is, I'm afraid, not completely free from narcissism (June 1988, 32)

Note the way in which how someone plays is taken, quite explicitly and insultingly, to reveal something about who they are. If I play a passage in a particular way I must be in love with myself, more with myself than with the composer whom alone I ought to serve.

By contrast, a set of performances from Adam Harasiewicz are

> not for those who warm to Chopin plastered with self-serving idiosyncrasy. (Feb 2011, 77)

Here, to play Chopin in an individual way—and we see here how performers, encouraged within the commercial ideology of WCM to think of themselves as having something individual to contribute,

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[185] I've written a separate research study of 'Moral Judgement in Response to Performances of Western Art Music' (see note 1) which examines reviewers' use of a single concept, deployed in an astonishing variety of ways, to wrap up and dismiss many different kinds of response to performer individuality. Here I've used different examples and a much less forensic approach.

[186] Except where noted, subsequent references in this chapter are all to *Gramophone*. I'm not naming individual critics: this isn't intended as an ad hominem attack (and there's hardly any opportunity for ad feminam). It's a culture of thought about WCM that I'm discussing.

are pilloried for doing it—is to plaster Him with… what? Makeup? In the next quotation that link is explicit.

> Less self-regarding or at least less wilful… Is Mahler's emotive force blunted by Fischer's careful manicure? (Apr 2009, 69)

Notice how, in all the quotes in this group, the self-serving is feminised. The undesirable, the out-place, the interloper, is a woman—or gay.

Telling in the next extract is the use of 'coy'. ('Displaying modest backwardness or shyness (sometimes with emphasis on the displaying); not responding readily to familiar advances; now *esp.* of a girl or young woman.' *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'Coy, 2a.') We may well ask what is the reviewer thinking about here; certainly something in which gender stereotypes are well entrenched:

> a more assertive swagger is surely required for… K271… (why the coy diminuendos in the former's first piano entry?) (May 2011, 81)

And here?

> …as cloying as it is enervating…. Its four bedfellows provide comparably mellifluous, audience-friendly fare… (March 2014, 71)

Why, in this context (cloying, enervating), choose bedfellows as your metaphor?

> such warmth and opulence often undermine the music's visceral impact, which is emasculated within a haze of pastel-shaded rumination. No other recording makes it sound so alluring (June 2018, 109)

All these quotes, and so many more (I have a database of almost 1000 accusations of 'mannerism', the image discussed in Leech-Wilkinson (2020),[187] with a rich hinterland of evocative and moralising metaphor), are hovering around longing mixed with fear of being emotionally affected, of giving in to a seductive musicianship that critics know they ought not to like. The images of effeminacy, sensuality, display and attention all seek to condemn what is also desired, the more strongly because of what their appeal suggests.

Nothing makes this clearer than the regular use of the word 'eschew': 'To abstain carefully from .. an indulgence' (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 'Eschew, 3.'), limited now to literary use. Whatever a reviewer finds a performer eschewing one can be sure has a dangerous appeal. Here's a selection of things that are eschewed in *Gramophone* over the five years between 2012–2016.

> all sentimentality; any suggestion of hectic flashiness; overt emotion; flashy continuo; grotesquerie; overindulgence; residual hints of Romanticism; portamento; surface charm and expressive clichés; flamboyant showmanship; rhetorical overkill; attention-getting; theatricality; any suggestion of Romantic excess; inflated gestures.

[187] Moral Judgement in Response to Performances of Western Art Music. In Ananay Aguilar, Eric Clarke, Ross Cole and Matthew Pritchard (eds), *Remixing Music Studies: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Cook* (Routledge), 91-111.

You get the idea. With a wider date-range the list could go on for pages (again, I have collected many hundreds of uses from 1923–2016).

How much easier for the performer to be unnoticed, to know her place, a mere servant to the composer's wishes. Compare with the previous group the desire for the performer to vanish, what Richard Taruskin has called 'one of classical music's most venerable but useless assumptions: to wit, the funny notion abroad among classical-music reviewers that the best thing a performer can do is disappear':[188]

> their musicianship… absolutely serves the music: no intrusive personalities getting between … music and … listener. (July 2011, 87)
>
> at no point does he seek to overlay the music with gratuitous individualism. (Apr 2004, 53)

And these last two categories often combine in celebrations of the lack of any distracting affectation, while somehow never failing to reveal affectation's appeal:

> her superbly serious performance, one that eschews all personal vanity,
> all preening mannerism and flamboyance (March 2015, 71)
>
> As commanding as ever, Mutter is differently intrusive, her pulsations slower and wider – and even she is not above inserting the odd apocryphal smooch. (Aug 2018, 110)

In Part 4 we'll look at some of the psychological drivers that underlie critics' feelings of discomfort-mixed-with-temptation, exploring the way in which music is perceived as another person with whom one interacts as one listens and as a model of perfectly-shaped feeling and with which one aligns oneself (on this see also Chapter 12.2). In these contexts it's easy to see how uncomfortable it might be to experience and be moved by a performance one believes (for ideological reasons) to be improper.

Finally, perhaps most shocking, is the category of comment in which hostility to the Other is at its most blatant, where performers are held not to belong because of where they come from. Take this example, reviewing Wu Qian—born, the review notes, in 1984 in Shanghai—who is:

> a cut above the stream of Asian pianists… (Sept 2009, 71)

The 'stream' is reminiscent of 'hoards', 'swamped', 'overrun', and so on, words often arising in xenophobic comment about immigration; and it's then combined with common clichés from white western criticism of Asian musicians evoked in the review by 'mere digital efficiency', lack of individuality or musical insight. Dehumanising the yellow performer, as they become indistinguishable within a mass, is underlined, not redeemed, by singling out one to praise. By the same means, the supremacy of the white norm is emphasised.

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[188] Taruskin, Richard. 2009. *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berlekey: University of California Press), 129. See also Taruskin, Richard. 2006. Is There a Baby in the Bathwater? (Part II). *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 63/4, 309–27 at 310–11.

From the same writer, the following year, comes a complaint characteristic of what Robin DiAngelo (2018) has analysed as 'white fragility',[189] that white people are somehow, despite their overwhelming cultural dominance, being disadvantaged:

> The number of young Asian pianists winning major prizes at piano competitions … makes one wonder exactly what … European and American pianists are suddenly doing wrong. (March 2010, 79)

As if white pianists could ever be disadvantaged by their whiteness, with the overwhelming cultural, social, political and economic advantages it brings. It's not so hard to fall into these patterns of thought, however, when your view of WCM assumes cultural ownership by white people: another form of Small's 'this is who we are' (Small, 1998).

To know that a performer is East Asian is to look for what you expect to find. The same tropes appear repeatedly. A review of the pianist Yundi somewhat grudgingly admires his 'exceptional technical command and accuracy', ascribed by the reviewer to his Chinese training (as if technical perfection were not compulsory for students in the west):

> but too often … here that is all you get. (May 2016, 58)

A review of Yekwon Sunwoo, the following year, complains of 'a heartless fingerfest' and likens him to the

> now long list of brilliant Asian-born American-trained pianists undistinguishable one from another. (Dec 2017, 93)

Similarly, 'Japanese pianist' Ryutaro Suzuki 'dispatches' Scarlatti 'with neat efficiency'. The performance is 'exceedingly polite', a chord-sequence so equal as to be 'devoid of meaning'. He is 'imperturbable', his playing lacking 'the tiniest hint of personality' (May 2018, 73). What was the reviewer, what were the editors thinking of when they let this through?

A sense of how oblivious white WCM professionals can be to what they're saying in comments like these comes from the following, from the head of a conservatoire, published in a 'China and Classical Music' issue of *Gramophone*, which is quite breathtaking in the way it patronises and stereotypes:

> My colleagues and I are always impressed at how quickly Chinese students respond to the styles and fashions thrown at them when they come to a sophisticated European city, and how quickly their personalities emerge. (Apr 2019, 21)

These examples may be shocking to white people who consider themselves free of racism (on this delusion see DiAngelo) but they will hardly be news to people who have to put up with this sort of thing all the time.[190] By now, though, it should be obvious and unsurprising when viewed in the context of the delusions and behaviours we've already seen in chapters 6 and 7. At its root the context is the society whose values WCM performs and upholds. Brought up to see white culture as superior and classical music as one of its most complex and skilled manifestations, the WCM

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[189] DiAngelo, Robin. 2018. *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard For White People To Talk About Racism*. London: Allen Lane.

[190] For a thoughtful discussion of this issue in conservatoire see Ford, Biranda. 2020. Can Culturally Specific Perspectives to Teaching Western Classical Music Benefit International Students? A Call to Re-examine "What the Teacher Does". *Frontiers in Education* 5, 113 www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/feduc.2020.00113

establishment would have to think long and hard not to assume that those brought up outside the culture are likely to be inferior in their performance of it. Thus musicians from ethnic minorities have to prove their qualification for membership by playing normatively even more persuasively: to be musically whiter than white. The idea that East Asian or indeed any performers have a right to different kinds of musicianship with different norms (just as western musicians practised different musicianships 100 years ago) seems not to be conceivable.

Cultural imperialism, white supremacy and patriarchy are wholly consistent with a set of beliefs in which an elite culture reproduces itself through passing on as exactly as possible a set of values which it claims have remained unchanged since at least the 18th century (Bach to Birtwistle). While musical practices have in fact changed hugely (as recordings show, chapter 3), it would seem that attitudes have not, at least not enough to shake the structural oppressions at work here. This is still an unforgiving culture in which disobedience is punished and in which you are either aristocracy (composer, gatekeeper) or servant (performer), masculine or effeminate, white or not; and then within that, musical or unmusical, normative or wrong. The culture of 20th– and 21st-century WCM and its criticism, like that of much of contemporary society, is the culture of the 18th– and 19th-century West, preserved in musical practice just beneath the gorgeous surface of superlatively skilled performance which is the sounding equivalent of Classical and Romantic architecture and the decorative arts, built on capitalism and slavery. The survival of these attitudes in writing around WCM performance bears out much that's been said above about the nature of WCM ideology.

It's clear by now that WCM reproduces the same oppressions we see in society more broadly: a white, straight, male, selectively-educated norm is held Naturally to embody and to perform supremacy, skill, technique, power, control, decent expressivity, understanding of and respect for tradition. WCM is the conservative establishment in sound. How ironic that it has so cut itself off from contact with the general conservative populace that it's no longer a tool for which they can find a use. For that, at least, we may be thankful.

Is it unfair to single out *Gramophone* in this brief survey? I don't believe so. *Gramophone* has been publishing reviews of recordings since 1923, representing faithfully the tastes of the culture from which it draws its reviewers and (it seems more than likely) most of its readers. It offers a fair impression of the attitudes and tastes of gatekeepers to the profession. Across those (near) 100 years, tastes in performance have slowly and unintentionally changed (Leech-Wilkinson 2009),[191] but the language and the images used to discourage change have remained surprisingly constant. You'll have noticed, though, that almost all my quotes come from the last few years. What you read here represents current acceptable thinking among WCM gatekeepers. It is for exactly that reason that I'm not identifying individual reviewers in the references I've provided. If I could avoid providing even those, I would. I'm not writing about this in order to point fingers at individuals. My aim is to open to view and to debate a whole culture of thinking about classical music as a means to sound belonging, belonging to a forcibly restrained practice that barely has room to be more than minutely individual; a practice that enforces in order to exclude.

[191] Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2009. Recordings and Histories of Performance Style. In Nicholas Cook et al. (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music* (Cambridge University Press), 246–62.

In the end the question we must keep asking ourselves is whose interests we serve by seeking to discourage variation in performance. 'The composer's' (as we saw in Chapter 6, and shall see again in Chapter 11) is not a sensible reply. Is it the critic's identity, which they've allowed to become entwined with a particular kind of musicianship? Is it simply their desire to control, which they owe it to musicians to overcome? Is it merely the comfort of belonging to a like-minded group? Whatever it is, it needs honest self-criticism in the interests of a more generous, inquisitive, hopeful approach to experiencing performance.

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9.3 The value of record reviewing

In the previous section we saw some quite unpleasant and highly personal criticism of performers. But on the whole, and especially in record reviews, performance criticism is overwhelmingly positive. Partly this is because, as I've repeatedly emphasised, standards of performance at this level are so astonishingly high. These are wonderful performers making glorious music. That being so, what is the point of performance criticism at this level? Record reviewing seems to have no function other than to rank difference in order to offer a recommendation service to buyers. And the only criterion for that ranking appears to be faithfulness to the norm disguised as faithfulness to the critic's understanding of the composer (which depends on what they're used to hearing). As we saw in Part 1, there's little or no basis for the beliefs on which these norms and understandings rest.

There is another factor involved, however: the magazines depend on advertising, and the advertising comes from the record companies. There is a strong incentive, then, to praise their products. The US CD-review magazine *Fanfare* is the most up-front about this relationship. Their standard letter from the editor to artists offers that "If you advertise, I will personally guarantee that your CD will be reviewed". The letter continues,

> Here are the four options for advertising if you'd like to be interviewed (and have your CD reviewed).
>
> 1) Inside front cover ad or inside back cover ad in two consecutive issues (total cost $3000).
>
> 2) Inside front cover ad or inside back cover ad and full page color ad in two consecutive issues (total cost $2500).
>
> 3) Full page color ad in two consecutive issues, or a two-page spread in a single issue (total cost $2000).
>
> 4) Full page color ad and 1/2 page color ad in two consecutive issues (total cost $1700).
>
> *When you're interviewed, the review of your CD will be attached to your feature in the front of the edit review section of the issue*. … If you decide to accept the proposal, I won't proceed with any aspect of it unless I find a critic who's receptive to your CD.[192]

How telling, that last sentence.

Immediately below Norman Lebrecht's publication of this letter are reader responses, including sympathetic reactions and also posts from the editor of *Fanfare*. What's especially interesting about the discussion is how easily some performers accept this practice, reflected also in *Fanfare*'s being so upfront about it. All credit to them. But this may help to explain why criticism of musical deviance tends to be partly covert, at one metaphorical level removed from plain accusation. For the most part, though, one suspects that reviewers are also deluding themselves, unaware of the full implications of the language that comes most easily to mind, yet in need of it in order to have quasi-

[192] Norman Lebrecht's blog, 'Slipped Disc', 24 October 2011. https://slippedisc.com/2011/10/how-to-buy-a-record-review/. (Italics in Lebrecht.)

moral grounds for making distinctions of quality between performances that are too good for distinctions of quality to have any rational basis.

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9.4 Performance criticism in social media

Critics' skill at disguising the depth of the threat they feel from slightly non-normative performance is something one can look back on with some nostalgia when one faces the kind of commentary routinely published on social media. Here are comments from a conversation on Facebook in response to a video of Patricia Kopatchinskaja playing Ravel's 'Tzigane' at the Wigmore Hall, London, on 26 April 2017.[193] I've done a simple web search to find out more about these contributors. The results are added in square brackets after their names. And you'll see that several are or trained to become professional musicians.

> *Pia Styver [Former violinist, Sjaellands Symphony Orchestra. Studied at the Royal Danish Conservatory.]*[194]
> Hun er på stoffer! Forfærdeligt!😱😱😱😱😠😠😠😠😠😠
> [Transl: She's on drugs! Terrible!]
>
> *Daniel McIntosh [US cellist. Teaches at MacPhail Center for Music. Former principal, Colorado Philharmonic; former cello in the Atlantic Quartet.]*[195]
> She may be the Donald Trump of the fiddle but she didn't learn that shit in the US.
>
> *Judith Weizner [Voiceover artist with a degree from the Manhattan School of Music. Also writes books and articles attacking political correctness. Says on her website that people tell her she sounds trustworthy, believable and educated.]*[196]
> Lesson: never, never, never forget to take your meds.
>
> *Cristian Cimei [Conductor, studied at the G. Briccialdi Conservatorium of Music in Terni and at Texas Tech University.]*[197]
> I think she was trying to act like a gipsy … Failed!
>
> *Ole Bohn [Norwegian violinist. Studied at the Juilliard School and with Max Rostal in Cologne. Concertmaster of the Norwegian National Opera. Gave the world premiere of Elliott Carter's violin concerto. Teaches at the Sydney Conservatorium.]*[198]
> Denne versjonen er etter min mening verdiløs og jeg synes hun viser seg som en særdeles dårlig musiker !

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[193] The conversation began with Ole Bohn posting a link to a medici TV promotional video. The extracts quote here were posted from April 5–10 2017. I apologise that, due to my leaving Facebook at the time of the Cambridge Analytical scandal, I can no longer provide a detailed reference: I'm afraid I'm not prepared to rejoin, even for a footnote. The video can still be found at https://www.medici.tv/ru/concerts/kopatchinskaja-leschenko-webern-schumann-bartok-ravel/. A complete recording by the same performers, made in June 2017, is available on CD: Patricia Kopatchinskaja and Polina Leschenko, 'Deux', Alpha Classics 387. My thanks to Alison Bullock for assisting with translations.

[194] https://www.facebook.com/1081039956 (accessed 20 July 2019)

[195] https://www.macphail.org/faculty/daniel-mcintosh/ (accessed 20 July 2019)

[196] https://voice123.com/judithweizner . See also https://www.americanthinker.com/author/judith_weizner/. (accessed 20 July 2019)

[197] http://www.classicalplace.com/cristian.cimei.html (accessed 20 July 2019)

[198] https://sydney.edu.au/music/about/our-people/academic-staff/ole-bohn.html (accessed 20 July 2019)

[This version is, in my opinion, worthless, and I think she comes across as a very poor musician!]

Dana Chivers [Virtuoso guitarist who also studied with Nadia Boulanger.][199]
I'm afraid that I agree with you Ole. So many of our dear instruments are attacked by tastelessness and egocentricity.

Milan Vitek [Professor of Violin at Oberlin and Chair of the Carl Nielsen International Violin Competition.][200]
This is what Chaplin could have looked and sounded like in concert if he had practiced the violin more!

Tor Frømyhr [Senior lecturer in viola and violin at the Australian National University School of Music and concertmaster of the Canberra Symphony.][201]
Mere Vaudeville. tone quality, musicianship, accuracy, control all taking 2nd place in this comedy circus act where the main objective seems to be to chase the errant violin all around the stage and beat it into submission every time it is caught.

James L. Maley [Australian cellist and teacher.]
This whole piece feels like walking home completely fucking smashed, after a big night. She's quite convincing.

This level of nastiness does not signal a healthy attitude to classical music (still less to teaching it). Against these examples I can happily set others from the same conversation.

Jaakko Kuusisto [Finnish violinist and conductor. Studied at the Sibelius Academy, Helsinki. Director of the Oulu Music Festival.][202]
Criticizing someone's playing based on 'taste' is a very slippery road. The intolerant nature of the majority of the comments here actually highlight what is perhaps the biggest problem in classical music today. We are looking for talents with strong individual qualities, and yet seem to secretly expect every performance to adher[e] to the same rules. Do you really need every violinist to play Tzigane prudently like it is notated, to every detail? I don't think that is the point of that piece…

Assi Karttunen [Finnish harpsichordist. Studied and now teaches at the Sibelius Academy.][203]
I find it interesting that often these disliking comments are about 'how she draws the attention to herself'. In classical music disembodied sound would be preferred and especially by people, who actually only would like to listen to the same recordings again and again.

Reidun Askeland [Norwegian pianist. Studied at the Norwegian Academy, Manhattan School of Music, and Guildhall School of Music and Drama.][204]
Couldn't agree more! Our tradition is in so many ways overflown with rules and conventions.

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[199] https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Bio/Chivers-Dana.htm (accessed 20 July 2019)
[200] https://www.oberlin.edu/milan-vitek (accessed 20 July 2019)
[201] https://researchers.anu.edu.au/researchers/fromyhr-te (accessed 20 July 2019)
[202] https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaakko_Kuusisto (accessed 20 July 2019)
[203] http://www.assikarttunen.fi/ (accessed 20 July 2019)
[204] http://www.reidunaskeland.no/ (accessed 20 July 2019)

It’s easy to see both streams in the conversation calling on the sorts of clichés of WCM ideology that we’ve seen also in the reviews (and in Part 1 here). Mainstream beliefs and training are deeply complicit in the brutality of social media comment and (just beneath the surface) of published criticism. As we’ve seen, it’s training and writing on classical music that have spread and maintained these beliefs. Social media show us what we’ve created, as educators in classical music, in its ugly, unvarnished state.

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9.5 The risk performers take in the face of criticism

Mitsuko Uchida has said, 'You have to risk your life on stage'.[205] I'm sorry to contradict such a rewarding musician; but one risks her life leaving a cellar in Sarajevo or Sanaa in search of water, not playing Mozart in Salzburg: that isn't even 'Grand Piano'; though sometimes one senses that critics would like it to be. That said, relative to most western cultural activities, performing WCM is personally fraught with risk to reputation and psychological health. It's an unpleasant fact that if you play or sing even a moment in a well-known score fractionally louder or quieter, or longer or shorter, or earlier or later, or with more or less vibrato or portamento than the current norm, you risk being labelled a narcissist, egocentric, self-indulgent, preening, vain, irritating, tiresome, distracting, unbearable, intrusive, meddling, gratuitous, wilful, unspontaneous, excessive, capricious, idiosyncratic, personal[!], odd, strange, eccentric, exaggerated, extreme, aggressive, fussy, finicky, sentimental, romantic, theatrical, vulgar, cheap, emasculated, effeminate, affected, arch, mincing, unseemly, or unwanted. (*Gramophone*, *passim*)

This is the language of intolerance. If audiences and readerships are happy with this then it tells us things we might rather not know about the kinds of people WCM serves at the moment. Is this really who we are? Small (1998) thought so, though perhaps without realising quite how far it went.

I hope we are better than this: if we're not yet, then we can be. And heaven knows, WCM performers deserve very much better in return for the huge skill and artistry that they've spent so long acquiring on our behalf. Reviewers surely owe it to performers to think more self-critically about what they write. In saying this I am acutely aware of hypocrisy, both because of the highly critical tone I'm taking in this book, and because of reviews I've written myself in the past.[206] For the reviews I can only apologise again. For the book, I think this is so serious a problem that a mild response won't make the smallest dent in the status quo. Because of what's at stake, we really need to take a stronger stand than is compatible with nice manners.

My case is that musicians would be healthier, happier, and WCM more widely enjoyed and better rewarded—and, within WCM, what could be more important aims than these?—if there were more of the non-normative performances that critics spend too much of their lives trying to prevent.

Continue to 9.6 'The lack of intellectual debate about WCM'

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[205] Interview with Fiona Maddocks, *The Guardian*, 4 December 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/dec/04/mitsuko-uchida-pianist-schubert-mozart-70th-birthday-interview

[206] I've apologised for some of my youthful intemperance in Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2002. *The Modern Invention of Medieval Music* (Cambridge University Press), and also in Leech-Wilkinson (2020), Moral Judgement…, where I have to show myself having done exactly what I criticise.

9.6 The lack of intellectual debate about WCM

Pierre Bourdieu (1966/69) offered an overview of the processes by which an intellectual-cultural field forms and is sustained.[207] The relationships between gatekeepers and performers are easily recognisable in his analysis. Critics and artists form 'mutual admiration societies' of initiates, sharing the same values and aesthetic outlook (Bourdieu 1969, 94). In the larger scheme all are products of the same historical and cultural situation and are dependent on it. Bourdieu's model assumes that both artists and critics are sustained by a shared admiration for the new which sets them apart from the mass. This is only partly true for WCM, needless to say: performance is always renewing itself, because performance style is always slowly changing, but on the whole neither performers nor critics are aware of that, only of how undesirable and counter to their whole notion of WCM it would be; and so they do all they can to prevent it. Yet there must be an underlying, discomforting awareness that change is always in the air, for it's this anxiety that drives critics to an extreme language of condemnation for even the smallest divergencies from the norm. The mutual admiration forms, therefore, around the most convincing performance of the norm, which provides security and stability in the state.

Composers, performers and critics—the initiates—alone know how this music must be; and so the only legitimate role for the audience is to learn what the artists and critics know and to praise what they praise.[208]

> …in the domain of consecrated culture … [the consumers] feel they are subject to objective norms and are obliged to adopt an attitude which is pious, ceremonial and ritualistic. … The existence of *sanctified works* and of a whole system of rules which define the sacramental approach assumes the existence of an institution whose function is not only to transmit and make available but also to *confer legitimacy*. (Bourdieu 1969, 107)

In this the whole system represented by the model in 7.1 cooperates. Bourdieu's model, however, based in the practice of 20th-century art, assumes competition between divergent ideals and artistic movements (110). We don't see that in WCM, barely even in the discussion and promotion of new composition, certainly not in the discussion and promotion of performance. And so it seems possible that one cause of the relative lack of intellectual debate about WCM within wider arts culture is precisely the lack of that opposition Bourdieu assumed between institutions and performers. What is there to debate when everyone agrees on what's proper, and nothing noticeably new ever happens? What room is there for interesting discussion? Only the emergence of HIP in the late 60s (when else?) percolated, slightly and briefly, into general cultural consciousness.

And so we arrive at a situation in which WCM is so marginal in arts culture that a lead editorial in *The Observer* can remind us that the 2012 Olympic opening ceremony 'featured Dizzie Rascal and Rowan

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[207] Bourdieu, Pierre. 1969. Intellectual Field and Creative Project. *Information (International Social Science Council)*, 8:2, 89–119. Translation by Sian France of 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur', *Les temps modernes*, November 1966, 865–906.

[208] Since I wrote this Sir András Schiff has shared similar views with us. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/03/07/sir-andras-schiff-modern-audiences-havent-faintest-idea-listening/

Atkinson, Arctic Monkeys and the London Symphonic Orchestra.'[209] It's a tiny example, but that the name of one of the UK's leading orchestras is only partially known to the leader-writers and sub-editors of one its most culturally sophisticated newspapers gives a measure of the ignorance of classical music, and even its chief international institutions, at the highest levels of the educated liberal elite. (See also Chapter 18.2, on theatre criticism.) Such people no longer see WCM as something that they need know anything about; it's effectively not part of the current arts scene. The UK may be (is) worse in this respect than some countries, but it is not atypical across the first world.

And this is one of the reasons why WCM can get away with running its own police state. No one else is interested.

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[209] *The Observer*, 23 October 2016, lead editorial.

10 Normativities

To behave normatively is to behave in ways that a community thinks good and to which its members adhere, and thus to signal one's faithful membership of that community and to feel at home within it. It sustains what in 9.6 we saw Bourdieu calling a 'mutual admiration society'.

We do not have to look far in any direction to find musical performance norms being strictly enforced. In many cultures musical behaviours tend towards the normative, faithfulness being required in return for musical work. But in few traditions is this more the case than in WCM, despite the fact that audiences are drawn typically from segments of society that enjoy wide-ranging freedoms themselves in most aspects of their personal and, to a greater extent in the west than in many places, their public lives. Christopher Small (1998) treated this at length, arguing that classical music reassures us that 'This is who we are' (43, 134). If he is right then, as we saw in Chapters 7 and 9, we have a lot to concern us. For classical music practice is policed with a narrowness and ruthlessness that hardly sits easily with our self-image as a tolerant society, welcoming of new forms of artistic creativity. Nowhere is this clearer than in the language of performance criticism, as we saw in Chapter 9. There we find ideas about normative musical behaviour expressed using images borrowed from a certain kind of normative thought—decades out of date in terms of social acceptability—in the domains of gender and sexuality, class and race. To behave non-normatively as a classical musician is to risk being labelled deviant (NB not queer, never positively different), a member of an out-group, the deviance measured against a now anachronistic judgement of what is acceptable and normal.

A key aspect of normative behaviour is that it has become internalised, usually to the extent that it is no longer recognised as a defined, stylised practice but is simply taken as natural: it has become 'naturalised'. And so here we are dealing with the fourth of Juniper Hill's four mechanisms for enforcing conformity (chapter 7.4), the internalisation of norms as values.

We saw in chapter 7.1 (modelled there in a circular diagram) how the thinking of adults in all areas of the CM business is broadly consistent not just because of the interrelations shown by the model but also, more powerfully, by the fact that so many of those working within the business as gatekeepers are there because they learned to care about WCM through childhood training as performers. Absorbing beliefs about composers, works and performer obligations from such a young age gives a strength and consistency to their adult behaviour that it could otherwise not have. 'Ideology' is thus not too strong a word for the set of values underpinning the conviction with which members of the WCM business believe.

Max Padison (1993, 53) gives a particularly pertinent definition of 'ideology':

> vested socio-cultural interests masquerading as objective or disinterested attitudes, or claiming to be in accord with 'natural laws' or 'common sense'. … *a lived system of values which are largely unconscious*, which forms our sense of identity, and in relation to which we are normally unable to take a critical and self-reflective position. Ideology understood in this

> way thus serves to legitimize as natural, universal and unchanging something which is .. cultural and historical in origin, and thus subject to change.[210]

In a culture like WCM, defined by a shared ideology, everyone has a vested interest in insisting that its values are natural (cf. chapter 6.5). To suppose that they are not is to exclude one from the protection offered by membership of the group. In a business in which work is mainly given to those one knows and whose musical values one shares, not to subscribe to the ideology is not to work.

To demonstrate one's adherence to the ideology in a variety of modes allows one to accumulate, in Bourdieu's terms, cultural capital. An example would be the privately educated and thus well-connected undergraduate who is able to use their contacts to get occasional work deputising for a music critic, using the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to promote normative values stylishly and effectively, which leads to more commissions from a variety of music publications, then to a staff post, and from there perhaps to the editorship of a magazine, to presenting radio and then TV programmes on classical music, their authority potentially enhanced by authorship of books on music for a general readership, leading to membership of editorial boards, music panels and prize committees, maybe to the directorship of a concert series or festival which brings them into regular contact with leading musicians and gatekeepers from around the world, and from there to seen as a 'natural' for the post of manager of a major opera house. Somewhere near the end of their career there will be a national honour for services to music (*tout court*). Their cultural capital accrues through increasing in every role the power of the ideology. For the individual, a disposition to conform, to promote, to make contacts, to be useful and effective, develops into a habitus in which all these serve the simultaneous promotion of the ideology and the self, legitimating and reproducing the values of the musical state throughout the culture that they exemplify, and serving as a useful template for the young hopefuls who follow them, the most ably conformist of whom they may encourage and promote. One could think of this life as embodying, spreading and reproducing normativity, a perfect example of 'this is who we are'.

How easily, then, an establishment Utopia maps onto a musical one. The perfection and persuasiveness of current performances at the highest level merges with the effectiveness of leading gatekeepers who seem to be responsible for the smooth working of the whole system from which such performances seem effortlessly(!) to emerge. Follow the rules and all will be well in the best of all possible musical worlds. (Just don't mention the sacrifices, the pressures, or the doubts.)[211]

Common to these ideals—of superlative performance and leadership as shining examples of the ideology functioning in perfect harmony—are notions of mastery. The master composer, the servant- (but for the public also the master-)performer, the mastering gatekeepers. Even now, most are men. Which is not to say that women don't also love the composer and seek to promote His works in entirely conventional ways; but the notions of mastery and strength that are so well promoted in WCM training and criticism still assume and ensure that men remain dominant in positions of power. Women as aspiring professionals are still led to accept a degree of patriarchy in WCM training that has consequences for willingness to be subservient to male performers and gatekeepers, to accept behaviour from teachers and conductors, for example, that would be

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[210] Padison, Max. 1993. *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*. Cambridge University Press.

[211] Robert Fink's discussion of Abreu and 'El Sistema' tells a comparable story. Fink, Robert. 2016. Resurrection Symphony: *El Sistema* as Ideology in Venezuela and Los Angeles. *Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education* 15:1, 33–57, esp. 41–2.

rejected in life outside the profession. The extent to which men feel entitled in WCM can only be increased by belief in the dead but godlike male composer. Patriarchy is built into this culture, and with it a host of linguistic practices that place women in subservient and undesirable positions.

As well as quoting similar material in chapter 9.2 above, I've written a separate article on the language of performance criticism, finding it riddled with metaphors of effeminacy and deviance used to label anything a (typically male) critic finds threatening in even the smallest adjustment to normative expressivity. It's not just misogyny that's referenced in these metaphors (coy, fussy, prim, mannered, preening, narcissistic, leering, mincing, etc.) but also homophobia. As I argued there,

> 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. 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…
>
> Normative performance values … have a basis in a discourse of 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.[212]

WCM culture, in other words, provides a comfortable home for various kinds of structural prejudice, reflecting the values of the sorts of people (in terms of gender and class) who in the 19th and 20th centuries shaped, and who still predominantly enforce, its ideology.

For class is another key normativity in WCM. Cost makes WCM a middle-class activity to begin with. As a child you don't get lessons or an instrument unless your parents have money and a sense that these things are part of 'who we are' or wish to be. Exclusive education (of which British 'public' (actually private) schools are the most extreme and divisive examples) has provided fertile ground for indoctrination in homophobia and racism coupled with a powerful sense of class superiority and entitlement. Top-ranking, well-funded universities, with their many opportunities to perform and direct, enable people brought up to be comfortable in charge of others to gain experience running their own groups. It all adds up to easily accepting the thought and behaviour of past eras as self-evidently appropriate for work with WCM.

Guy Rohrbaugh, in a summary of the virtues of normative behaviour by WC musicians, says (quite rightly) that,

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[212] Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2020. Moral Judgement in Response to Performances of Western Classical Music. In *Remixing Music Studies: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Cook*, edited by Ananay Aguilar, Eric Clarke, Ross Cole and Matthew Pritchard (Routledge), 91–111. The references within the quotation are to: Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. [1990]/2008. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Cusick, Suzanne G. 1994. Gender and the Cultural Work of a Classical Music Performance. *Repercussions* 3:1, 77–110.

> Participants in our musical practices are the kind of people who take scores and score-compliance seriously, who accord composers a measure of respect and recognize them as authoritative. They are disposed to take such circumstances as the fact of the notes in the score, the acts of the composer, or the sound of a model performance as reasons to act in certain ways—to play just those notes, to do as told, to emulate what is heard. (Rohrbaugh 2020, 89)

'We think there is some further point', he says, 'in being this sort of person.' It's a 'final good.'[213] And there you have it. Complacency, entitlement, cultural capital, perfect satisfaction. Normativity for WCM.

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[213] Rohrbaugh, Guy. 2020. Why Play the Notes? Indirect Aesthetic Normativity in Performance. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 98:1, 78-91. DOI: 10.1080/00048402.2019.1600563

11 Obligations to the dead

11.1 Piety and the dead composer

Why are classical musicians brought up to believe that the word of a long-dead composer must for ever be obeyed?

Juniper Hill (2018) has called this 'the most profound example' of a 'moral imperative' in WCM.[214] Its basis is the idea that something (some thing) is left behind, something so perfect that it must be exactly reproduced for ever. It's striking how far back the perfection of the composer's work has been a concern, long before (in the 19th century) composers became immortal. Richard Taruskin (2006), building on Lydia Goehr (1992), quotes Nikolaus Listenius (1533/37):

> [*Musica*] *poetica* is that which is not content with either an understanding of the subject [like *musica theoretica*] or with the practice alone, but rather leaves some work [*opus*] behind after the labor, as when music or a musical song is written by someone, whose goal is a complete and accomplished work. For it consists in making or constructing, that is, in such labor that even after itself, when the artificer is dead, leaves behind a perfect and absolute work (*opus perfectum et absolutum*).[215]

What we see in this passage—which presumably was not an idea invented by Listenius but one that already made good sense in his environment—is the same delusion, almost half a millennium ago, that dominates our own thinking; the notion that something is made by a composer that endures, complete and perfect, beyond the death of the author; the feeling that there must be something here, rather than (as I argue) a sequence of experiences that appear to be (appear, not are) remade in each performance. My case, as must now be obvious, is that, for all its emotional appeal (indeed, because of its emotional appeal), this is a delusion. The appearance of a work is produced by repeatedly performing the notes similarly due to a tradition of practice. The practice in fact changes imperceptibly—and listeners' sequences of experiences with it—and could *be changed* at any time if we let it, potentially with many artistic, cultural and economic benefits and without necessarily losing the current local practice alongside.

What I'm interested in in *this* section is the process by which the composer's being dead sanctifies what He's left behind, turning Works into sacred objects that must be faithfully and devotedly reproduced and obeyed, and the dead composer into a Being with whom one can commune in the present. In the context of this part of the book, we may also ask how the composer being dead leads

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[214] Hill, Juniper. 2018. *Becoming Creative: Insights from Musicians in a Diverse World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 161.

[215] Taruskin, Richard. 2006a. Is There a Baby in the Bathwater?, Part 1. *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 63:3, 163–85 at 171–2. Goehr, Lydia. 1992. *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*. Oxford: Clarendon, 116. Taruskin (172–6) offers a history of its development from later 15th-century chansons and brilliantly ties that to the introduction of music printing (which began by publishing this same repertory), the commodification of music, and the increasing sense that some *thing* exists that can be reproduced and sold. For further reading see Steingo, Gavin. 2014. The Musical Work Reconsidered, in Hindsight. *Current Musicology* 97, 81–112. https://currentmusicology.columbia.edu/article/the-musical-work-reconsidered-in-hindsight/

us to police ourselves and one another in the reperformance of His scores. Finally, to get to the heart of the issue, I want to ask what we, the living, owe the dead.

I just described the dead composer as a 'Being'. Similarly, performers of WCM aim to do what the composer 'says'. As the anthropologist Bruno Nettl commented,[216] composers

> 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, 23–4)

We need the composer not to be dead, gone for ever, even though we know that dead is what he is – and note how the language forces that phrase upon us: he 'is' dead, in the present tense as if somehow the dead are not not, but are. Unless one believes in an afterlife—in which case one's view of all these questions will be quite different—we know that to speak of the dead in the present tense is absurd; but this isn't about knowledge, it's about need. We need the dead not to be dead, and composers above all: we need them still to be here watching over us, our musical guide, the reference for our conscience.

It's easy to speak of this in terms of respect. Not to respect the dead, however awful they were in life, seems indecent. Still more, then, do we want to respect those to whom we look up, especially those who have composed scores that give rise again and again to intensely involving musical experiences. We respect their genius. We feel reassured at the thought of respecting their memory. But note how this is about our needs, not theirs. *We* feel reassured, though what we feel makes no difference to them. Yet, to admit that already feels disrespectful. There is a strong urge towards piety in our thinking about the dead, a feeling in which there are surely many ingredients: gratitude, awe, sanctity, thoughts of our own death, the hope that we too will be well thought of; all of which we perform as proper behaviour around the grave and in speaking of the dead. All of it, moreover, raises questions about the depth of the general population's atheism. Residual belief in some kind of existence for the dead seems hard to shake. These feelings surround and permeate our relationship with what has been made and left behind. The idea that these are their 'works' adds a reassuring touch of sanctity to scores and their potential in performance: they are the dead's bequests to us, we like to feel, and we owe them respect for that.

Jeff Warren (2014, 169) seems to be thinking along these lines when he says, 'Two ways to unpack these second level responsibilities to music [first-level responsibilities being to people] are to consider music as an inheritance and as a gift.' And he goes on to argue that these second-level responsibilities are responsibilities because inheritances and gifts are given by people, and a responsibility thus remains to them and their wishes. In other words, they involve first-level responsibilities (to people) just the same. Thus, 'Those who receive such a gift need to use it responsibly…' (170); and '… if we recognise that another person composes music, we recognise that in our performance we are responsible to the composer…' (169). For Warren, the dead composer remains a person.

We are hovering here around the notion that we owe other people respect and kindness. In everyday relationships among the living, respect and kindness are invaluable in fostering

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[216] Nettl, Bruno. 1995. *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

cooperation and happiness; but it's far from clear that the same applies to the dead, to whose wellbeing no amount of respect and kindness makes the slightest difference. Even among the living, people must also be allowed to disagree, particularly in the case of art (most particularly in western art), where expression and interpretation are *supposed to be* personal and individual. We may choose to contradict the composer, just as we may choose to contradict anyone in the interests of promoting a view that differs from theirs. We have to be wary not to fall into the belief that no one should ever be upset by us. We may accept the ethical responsibility and still contradict them, accepting that they will be offended. It's not that we don't care. It's that we think it's worth it for the value of the view we wish to offer. That's a slippery slope, of course, but in the case of art it's not a slippery slope that leads to cruelty or murder, only to alternative visions. We don't kill composers by playing their notes differently. They'll survive the upset if they're alive. And if they're not—unless you believe in a particular kind of afterlife in which composers remain on site, listen to us and are offended—then it's neither here nor there.

A related analogy to Warren's is with a will. 'Typically—and in at least one sense of the word, ideally—composers are dead, and the score is treated, as a matter of reverence and respect, somewhat as one treats a will' (Kingsbury 1988, 167).[217] Here the composer's intentions are a will which we're obliged to execute. But how many times do we execute a will? Once. We do it because if everyone does, then everyone's will will be executed meticulously in turn. It's a contract for a once-only performance. But that's not what composition is. Composition is a *request*, a suggestion, perhaps a hope, but not realistically, for all time, an order. We are not obliged to go on executing this will over and over for ever; still less when (remember Chapter 6.13) we can't actually know the nature of the wishes it fails to inscribe. What other instructions from the distant past do we feel absolutely required to obey forever? However piously we approach them, scores are not, in fact, sacred texts.

Nonetheless, even for the ostensibly non-religious, the attempt that performers make to bring the inner life of the composer *back* to life by making their imagination sound again is well-intentioned and inspirational; and both those qualities count for something. It's a wonderful idea that through sounds we can have that deeply intimate access or something of it. But honestly, is it realistic, given both that that imagination will always be inaccessible and also that, as we've seen, other possible readings of scores normatively are, have been and will be, every bit as persuasive? Or is, as some seem to feel, knowingly to decline the composer's intentions to kill Him again? Is that a worry hovering around the edge of this sense that we owe Him faithful reperformance? As if death isn't really death, in a quasi-miraculous and particularly persuasive way in the case of WCM?

Paradoxically, experience of feeling one is engaging with past composers through playing their music forces one over and over to confront the fact that they are dead. And so death is a constant topic, consciously or subconsciously, as one engages closely with canonical scores. What effects does that have on one's thinking and feeling about what one is doing? Does it make one more inclined to conform to cultural norms (which are deeply influenced by awareness of death: Vail, Soenke and

[217] In 1976 Alfred Brendel wrote, 'In my view, the interpreter should function in three capacities: as curator of a museum, as executor of a will, and as obstetrician', leaving the composer in an uncomfortable position. Brendel, Alfred. 2001. *Alfred Brendel on Music* (London: Robson), 302.

Waggoner 2019);[218] more inclined to cling to the idea of realising the composer's intentions, for fear that others will depart from ours and that thereby a life that might have continued through repetition of some part of ourselves will be snuffed out? Is this another strand contributing to people's anger at non-standard performances, as if they were a personal threat to one's own life after death.

Yet what can one think, in what we imagine as a liberal culture, about a system supposedly geared towards professional, emotional and spiritual fulfilment of a particularly intense kind, that depends for its daily validation and for continuing employment on obeying the every whim of (or really, collectively imagined and currently attributed to) someone who, as often as not, has been dead for several hundred years? Is there not something profoundly unhealthy about this?

And in any case, what are we really arguing over? The performance of a musical score. It's hardly a matter of life and death. Less sentimentality, less sanctimony, less superstition would be more in keeping with the ways in which we mostly try to interact with others in the wider (living) world.

To insist on identifying (impossible) and sharing (impossible) and being faithful to (…) the composer's intentions isn't historical—composers always worked through the mediation of notation and performers—it's at best pursuing the fantasy of being one with a god; at worst (and, I rather fear, to a large extent in reality) subjecting one's self (*sic*) to the financial and political convenience of those who call the tune.

Continue to 11.2 'Philosophical obligations'

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[218] Vail, Kenneth E., Melissa Soenke and Brett Waggoner. 2019. Terror Management Theory and Religious Belief. In ed. Clay Routledge and Matthew Vess, *Handbook of Terror Management Theory* (London: Academic Press), 259–85.

11.2 Philosophical obligations

Before offering (in 11.3) a sensible way of thinking about our obligations to composers, we should consider the philosophy of obligations to the dead. Recent work includes Bob Brecher (2002), who believes that dead people remain *people* (his italics, 114) and therefore are still present members of a community of beings higher than animals who really die (hedgehogs are his example, though what he has against hedgehogs I cannot imagine).[219] His further point is that we result from the dead and from the good things they did for us, and that we owe them for it: our resulting obligation is to remember them. This is nice. But it is a long way from being grateful—say, to Bach or Beethoven, which surely we all are—to having to reproduce their acts. We can be grateful for a score that gives rise—still more if it gives rise in many different performance styles over many centuries—to powerfully persuasive musical experiences. But we're not obliged to remember by going over and over the same ground for ever. It would be, and even over a few decades it too often is, quite tedious.

Liz McKinnell (2007) and Geoffrey Scarre (2012) both offer 'backward signification' to argue that if we wrong the dead once dead we wrong them when they were alive.[220] Both start from the assumption that the long-standing and widespread nature of the intuition that we have obligations to the dead is ground enough to find a reason why we must. For McKinnell it's not enough that the dead cannot know what we do: they could be wronged every bit as much as a spouse unaware that we have committed adultery (109). (I'd have thought it made rather a difference once the spouse was dead, but this is analytic philosophy.) McKinnell also adopts Scarre's argument, which he further develops in Scarre 2012, that 'backward signification'—the observation that the status of events changes in the light of what happens later—allows for the possibility of the dead being harmed by later actions. For example, if our view of Beethoven is changed for the worse by something we do or say about him then he is harmed by us during his lifetime, since the significance of his acts is changed (44–5). The muddle here is very obvious. His life was what it was. Its meaning changes later, and it will go on changing as long as people think about him. None of that changes his life, of which in any case we can know little. It certainly doesn't affect him in 1802. Scarre asserts that past actions are devalued at the time they were performed if thwarted after death; but it is of course the meaning of those actions that he's talking about, not the actions; and the meanings are ours, not his. As they should be. We are here, he is not: we make and use meanings for us, just as he did for him.

Underlying Scarre's contortions is the *desire* to conclude that we owe something to the dead (such as to realise their aims). As we saw above, and with Brecher, this feels good (and reassuring when we apply it to ourselves). But it's not an obligation to behave as people now dead would have wished us to (which is what follows from Scarre's reasoning); or in the case of music, to do only what its composers could have imagined doing or wished to do themselves. If you take that route, then it's your obligation to prevent any kind of change whatsoever: no piano, no penicillin, no coffee machine, no clothing.

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[219] Brecher, Bob. 2002. Our Obligation to the Dead. *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 19:2, 109–19.

[220] McKinnell, Liz. 2007. Do We Have Moral Obligations to the Dead? In Kate Woodthorpe (ed.), *Layers of Dying and Death.* Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 107–15. Scarre, Geoffrey. 2012. Speaking of the Dead. *Mortality: Promoting the Interdisciplinary Study of Death and Dying* 17:1, 36–50.

A more down-to-earth view is offered by Yotam Benziman (2017) who dismisses arguments along the lines of Scarre's and focuses instead on the wish of the living to honour their loved ones now dead.[221] Examples include carrying out their wishes for their funerals, and also remaining interested in their interests as a way of continuing to care about them. We could use this as a guide to understanding our feelings for composers' intentions. We love (whoever we consider to be) the great composers and feel close to them, thanks to the intensity of the experiences we have listening to performances of their scores. We tend, because of the ideology in which we've been trained, to attribute those experiences to them rather than to the performers, and thus direct most of our loving thanks to our imagined versions of them. In this sense we feel for them somewhat as for departed loved ones. We feel we honour them by fulfilling their wishes for the performance of their scores, even though the honour is for our benefit, not theirs: we feel better for it, though they cannot.

This is all fine, as long as one recognizes the delusions along the way (that they are our loved ones, that we know their intentions, that we perform in accordance with them, that it serves their interests). One could equally argue, though, that we can honour them by showing how many other wonderful performances can arise from their scores, quite unlike any they imagined. Given that in no case can they be harmed or helped, it all remains a matter of how *we* feel about what *we* are doing.

The key question has to be, how much harm does our performance do to the living? Here we may well wish to argue—I do, needless to say—that some initial harm felt by listeners who prefer the status quo will in the longer run be more than balanced by the general good that will accrue from allowing more performer creativity and engaging more listeners in more varied and no less satisfying performances, all in a culture that will come to assume that that degree of creativity and variation is to be expected. This seems to me a desirable outcome which does no harm to composers (dead or, because they will become used to the new norm and work with it, living) and much good to everyone else. Others may disagree, though it seems mean-spirited to try to restrict such an evident good as artistic creativity.

If not dead composers, do their texts have rights? This is also a very curious idea. How can a text have a right? Rocco Capozzi (1997) offers a defence of Umberto Eco's view that texts have rights that need to be respected; interpretation can't be infinite.[222] But really this is just a defence of authorial intentions plus a bit (but not too much). In other words, it's still the author who has these rights, not the text in itself, and to have rights (morally, though not always legally: that's another matter (Chapter 15)) you have to *be*.

Continue to 11.3 'Ethical obligations'

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[221] Benziman, Yotam. 2017. Dead People and Living Interests. *Mortality* 22:1, 75–86.
[222] Capozzi, Rocco. 1997. Interpretation and Overinterpretation: The Rights of Texts, Readers and Implied Authors. In Rocco Capozzi (ed.), *Reading Eco*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 217–34.

11.3 Ethical obligations

We need, I think, to take an unsuperstitious and humane approach to thinking afresh about what we might *ethically* owe a composer.[223]

First of all let's consider living composers. Composers are imaginative musicians. They imagine music, and notate what they can. As they notate, they imagine their scores played by performers they know or have heard. So, if they're writing conventional scores, they have expectations. As first performers of their scores, I think we're all interested in hearing what they imagined. Or we are if we have any respect for them as imaginative musicians.[224] It seems a simple courtesy to living composers to try to make the sounds they had in mind. When someone gives you a score on which they're worked hard, and offers you the chance to play it before anyone else, the least you can do, out of politeness and respect, is to try to give them a performance of what they've imagined. I suggest that's a basic obligation of courtesy.

Of course, you may do some things, perhaps many things, that they'd not expected.
And *usually* composers are delighted when that happens and willingly accept your view of their score. It's important to remember that, when we come to think about dead composers. But the main point is that the composer is there, they can be consulted, you can work with them, and in the end you represent them to a wider audience. And all this brings some obligation to please them as well as your listeners. Because this is a human relationship, in which, as in any humane relationship, you try not to hurt their feelings; ideally, you try to give them pleasure, to make them happier. That's what we do for one another when we interact on equal and friendly terms.

But how much of this applies in the same way when the composer is dead? When they've recently died, then there are many friends and admirers, and family, who remember them and think lovingly of them. And to the extent that that love is maintained or enhanced or fed by the way you play their scores, then I suggest there remains an obligation to play scores in ways that please survivors. It's similar to one not speaking critically of the dead to those who knew and loved them. But as time passes, this obligation diminishes. Their closest friends and family die too, and there is less and less need, out of human kindness, to play scores in the same way as before; and more and more opportunity, therefore, to see what else those scores can do. And this is exciting. It's an opening up of possibilities, as time passes, to explore scores in search of new meanings, meanings that perhaps are more interesting and relevant and revealing for new generations. That, too, seems to be an ethical obligation to the living; to make scores sound relevant and revealing.

What is absolutely clear—unless one believes that the dead are alive, and have nowhere else to be—is that dead composers are not harmed by performances of their scores that they might not have liked. And once nobody else is harmed (and I mean harmed, not offended: of course art must be

[223] The following four paragraphs appeared first (with minor variants) in Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2013. What's Wrong with Classical Music? https://challengingperformance.com/dido-belinda/#1511203354013-d73eecc6-d3dc

[224] Sometimes, the composers themselves are using notation to generate new kinds of expressivity. Ian Pace has reminded me that this happens in Cage, but also of course through the ultra-virtuosity required by composers of new complexity, Ferneyhough, Finnissy, and others, which opens up new kinds of expressivity as well.

allowed to offend, and it's high time classical music audiences got used to that idea); once nobody else is harmed, there is no ethical obligation to continue to perform in the original manner. We shall see in Part 3 that new kinds of performances are possible, and we've already seen in Part 1 that they emerge over time in any case. But what I am arguing, and I think on strong ethical grounds, is that new performances can and should be deliberately made. *Because* scores can mean so many different things; because performers can be so innovative in persuasive ways; because the results can offer audiences new kinds of musical experiences from scores rich in potential; because performers and audiences can find delight in unexpected insights, in being creative and in experiencing creativity; because innovation offers a reason to go to concerts, to make and buy new recordings, to maintain a healthy economy of musical performance that keeps classical music lively and rewarding, financially and spiritually; for *all* these reasons, allowing performers to imagine and play scores differently is not just desirable, it is the right thing to do. And that makes it our obligation.

> There is no way that we can harm Bach or Mozart any more, nor any way that we can earn their gratitude. (Taruskin 1995, 24).
>
> …truly we owe nothing to composers, at least the dead ones who overwhelmingly populate our performing repertory… our obligations are to the living (Taruskin 2009, 463).
>
> The only authenticity available to us consists in creating performances which work *now*, not performances which supposedly worked for the composer (Philip 1992, 240).[225]

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[225] Taruskin, Richard. 1995. *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2009. *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Philip, Robert. 1992. *Early Recordings and Musical Style: Changing Tastes in Instrumental Performance, 1900–1950*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

12 Policing and self-policing

12.1 Policing

The model of the classical music profession in 7.1 gives a sense of how oppressed a performer is by many different factors and actors from within and around the music business. Teachers, examiners, adjudicators, fixers, concert planners, managers, record companies (A&R, producers, advertising), music journalists, critics, broadcasters, bloggers, musicologists, and—just as crucially—co-performers: all these are in effect policing musicians' performances to ensure conformity with norms. These, then, are the performance police. Note that, aside from readers of music journalism and musicology, the model in 7.1 didn't make space for audiences, which of course constitute one of the largest factors of all. Performers, rightly or wrongly, feel that audience expectations and responses need constant awareness and attention. Possibly performers are too anxious about audiences. True, the enclosed nature of the culture means concert-goers know what they like and aren't inclined to welcome difference; but it is also possible that, suitably prepared, a fair number would be willing to consider a wider range of performance approaches. And it's certainly possible that a wider range would attract a wider variety of concert goers. But that's not where we are. As things stand, WCM ideology and norms of musical and professional behaviour constitute a considerable weight of oppression, forcing musicians to play and sing scores (within a tiny space for acceptable difference) in whatever is currently the correct way.

Chapters 4 to 11 have looked in more detail at some of the factors that oppress performers and performance. We'll add some of the business pressures in Chapters 15 to 17. And we'll look at the ill effects of all this on musicians in Chapters 13 and 14. Underneath it all is the claim (for many the belief) that the composer is the source of everything that is good about WCM and that therefore the performer's job is perfectly to represent them. But the composer, as we shall see in Chapter 17, functions also as a front for the business advantages of a profession in which performers do as they are told with the least possible paid rehearsal. The police, mostly (but not all) unwittingly, enforce this business model with the simplest possible message: do what we say if you want work. Residual love of music does the rest.

I'm sorry if this seems cynical. But it's not unfair. This is what happens. If you sing or play differently, you will not work.

And that is why WCM can be reasonably understood as a police state. Follow the rules and all is well. Perform the values of the state as persuasively as you can; more persuasively (if you want the best work) than your contemporaries, who are competing with you to do the same.

Interestingly, and unlike a typical police state, most of those who work as gatekeepers would have worthwhile jobs in similar roles in a much freer musical society. We'd still need people to teach, and examine, and promote artists, and manage workloads, and comment on different performances, and make good recordings: it's simply that the criteria would be far more open to, and supportive of, difference and creativity, making much more space for individualities that are claimed at the moment but not actually allowed in any substantial degree. A change of belief and behaviour, in

other words, would be enough to change the State from one that is fundamentally oppressive into one that is fundamentally permissive. Put like that, perhaps, the challenge sounds ideologically considerable. But at least the structure could remain substantially in place and the economics undamaged (as I'll argue in Chapter 17). We just need to think differently about what's good.

One can hear the howls of outrage. For like all police states, the limits placed on freedom are justified by presenting the State as Utopia, a society already so perfect that none must be permitted to alter any of its practices, lest its perfection be compromised. So let's look from the other end of the telescope at WCM as Utopia and see it, for a moment, at its best.

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12.2 Seeking Utopia

With few exceptions (we've all have met some, but they're a small minority) everyone policing WCM has good intentions, musically and personally. While there is a huge amount of expertise here that could be put to far better use than choosing people according to how convincingly they behave as normal, belief in current standards and practices is sincere, and (as I've emphasised in Chapter 2) can readily be justified by the excellence of the music-making that emerges. Ideology plays a controlling part in how we think about all this and act within it, but it's not (unlike that of most police states) supporting a system that is producing rotten results. Performances are often wonderful. And so it's easy to feel that, for all its unkindnesses (cruelties, indeed), it ultimately produces something that's very good.

Intimately bound up with this feeling are some quite fundamental psychological processes. As I'll explain in more depth in Part 4, persuasively performed music can seem to be showing us something about ourselves in a particularly direct and intense way.

At its most basic level music consists of constantly changing frequencies, loudnesses, their relative start-times and their durations. These basic materials, in turn, are perceived by the brain (via grouping into auditory streams) as harmonies, melodies, textures, timbres and densities of sound, the totality of which we experience as music. Through this process, in which all aspects of sound are constantly changing relative to one another, music in performance seems to have constantly varying character and intensity. We can think of this as the changing dynamics of music (dynamics in the fluid dynamics sense of the word), or, if we want to speak more metaphorically, the *shape* of music.[226] (The idea was introduced in Chapter 6.12 and we'll look at it in relation to what makes a good performance in Chapter 22.)

Feeling states also have shape or dynamics, in the sense that they too are constantly varying in intensity and character. And so the dynamics of music—its constantly changing quantities and intensities, its shape—easily, perhaps more easily than anywhere else, map onto the dynamics (or shape) of feelings. Thus music is easily—I think one could safely say naturally—experienced as sounding a sequence of feeling states, indeed of being like a person whose feeling states, as with any person, are constantly changing: one experiences that person's feelings while experiencing the music.[227] This is why and how music engages listeners in empathy as listeners themselves embody the particular sequences of feeling states that their minds generate through finding those particular sequences most closely analogous to the musical sounds they hear. And so we have a sequence of associations that are partly shared and partly individual.

There's surprisingly little research on the shape of feelings. Perhaps the most useful for us is by Daniel Stern, who started out thinking about the experiences of babies communicating with carers through sound, among other things, which led him later to write a wonderful book on the

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[226] Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2018. Musical Shape and Feeling. In Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and Helen M. Prior (eds), *Music and Shape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 358–82.

[227] On this see, among many other studies, Cox, Arnie. 2016. *Music and Embodied Cognition: Listening, Moving, Feeling, and Thinking* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press); Krueger, Joel. 2019. Music as Affective Scaffolding. In Ruth Herbert, David Clarke and Eric Clark (eds), *Music and Consciousness 2: Worlds, Practices, Modalities* (New York: Oxford University Press).

phenomenology of the present moment in individual lived experience, and finally to theorise all this in terms of 'vitality affects'.[228] What he meant by vitality affect was the dynamic content of a sequence of feeling states in the present moment, independent of the events that caused them. So for Stern a feeling state has a cause (a trigger), a content (the quality of the feeling), and a dynamic shape. And by theorising that the brain processes the content and the shape separately—which makes sense in terms of neural networks—he was able to explain how the dynamics of feeling can map easily between different modalities, for example between sound and sight. So a sound can be sharp or dull because its dynamics are like those for a sharp or dull sensation of touch. This is immensely helpful for understanding our responses to music, and the way in which it can seem to be like other things, other sensations, feelings, moods, styles of motion, and so on.

Another important point Stern made is that throughout our waking lives we experience constantly changing feeling shapes, but they're generally in the background behind what's happening, behind what we're talking or thinking about or doing or seeing in the world. In other words the content of a feeling is evident to us, as a response to its apparent cause, but the dynamics are usually not what we're focusing on. The content overwhelms the shape in our conscious perception. And this is precisely where music is so flexible and so powerful in the associations it can make for us. Because music, by providing a template for a sequence of changing feeling states, turning their dynamics into sound, brings the dynamics of these feeling states to the fore: we focus on them and experience them much more intensely than in everyday life, and we focus on the content and causes much less. We're clear about the shape of feeling in music, and hazy about its meaning. Its meaning can be all sorts of things, whatever each of us wants, its shape can't. We all hear its shape clearly.

In a powerful performance these feeling-shapes occupy us, and so we are able to experience, fully and without distraction, the deep subjectivity of this other person whom the music models, subjectivity below the level of a cause or specific meaning. At the same time, this Other is actually provided by ourselves, we construct them through our response to the music we hear; and so the Other may also be understood as ourself. This is empathy about as fully as empathy could ever be. It's another and yet it's us.

Moreover (and it is this that makes the template so valuable, powerful and full of potential for us), music that is well-composed and well-performed always seems, unlike the sequences of feelings we experience in everyday life, to be *ideally* shaped: it models a better self than ourselves, its feelings are more perfectly begun, developed, brought to a close, and followed; and so we learn from it how to feel well (in both senses, how to shape feeling well and how to feel good). Music can therefore help us to handle feelings better, to relate better with others, to understand how they feel, to share their feelings. Music organises feeling states for us, shows them to us and enables us to experience them in an ideal form, and thereby to learn how to accept and experience them well in life. Through music one can practice in a safe space (perfectly formed within oneself) how to have a good relationship with one's feelings and with others'. And through the same means, responding to music in performance, one can experience, in an ideal form, other ways of being.

[228] Stern, Daniel. 2004. *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life* (New York: Norton); Stern, Daniel. 2010. *Forms of Vitality: exploring dynamic experience in psychology, the arts, psychotherapy, and development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

In this sense, then, music is a Utopia.[229] Just as composers arrange musical materials in what they imagine will sound as perfectly formed gestures, lines, harmonic progressions, phrases; so also performers seek to make these sound ideally shaped. Both are aiming for a musical experience in which feelings are perfectly formed and felt. This is how music seems to offer us a better way of being—of feeling, responding and behaving—than we ever quite manage in the world outside.

But here's the catch. How and how well this works depends on how scores are performed. As musicians we are brought up to believe that it only works when pieces are performed in *the* right way. And so this (fully-justified) sense that music can offer Utopian experiences is co-opted by the ideology to support itself. The policing is there to ensure that we never discover that there are innumerable other ways in which the same scores can construct Utopias. In other words, that there are innumerable Others which these scores can model and enable us to understand – to *be*, in fact, for as long as the performance lasts. And so music's most powerful ability is hobbled by WCM belief, making us all much the poorer while leaving the State comfortably in charge. Yes, we feel that wonderful things can happen through performances within the norms. But how many others could happen also if only we were free to discover them?

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[229] An earlier version of this case was made in Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2016. Classical Music as Enforced Utopia. *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 15 (3-4): 325–36.

12.3 Self-policing

Looking back over the previous chapters, the incentives for WCM performers to police themselves are many and irresistible. Norms provide the context, and thoroughly characterise the performance environment; they determine even what is musical, and thus generate pervasive anxiety about whether and how one is. The 'music itself', the 'actual music' are essentially only the norm made mystical.

In training one limits oneself, if one wants to carry on learning with them, to implementing one's teacher's advice as exactly as possible. One carefully follows every mark in the (Urtext) score, resisting any residual temptation to place emphasis where it's not notated. One limits oneself to enacting the composer's supposed wishes. One limits oneself in all these ways in order to pass exams, to succeed in competitions, to get into conservatoire, to get work. And one forces this on oneself however painful and constricting it may feel, however brutal, even abusive a teacher or other gatekeeper may be. Rebellion is not an option, for it leads only to exclusion. One agonises over everything one brings to a performance, however tiny, lest someone with influence finds it excessive.

Only superlative obedience and competence succeed. And so the normative highest standard is the only target at which one dare aim. Whatever the pain and the sacrifices in time, health, or having a life, that need to 'out-play [one's] rivals in fluency, reliability, punctuality, collegiality, health, good looks, and musical affect' (ch. 2) keeps one's view focused on the most perfectly presented norm. One's identity is gradually constructed, and substantially self-constructed, then, as a naturalised practice. One makes oneself the perfect advocate for normativity.

Worshiping the dead composer; performing music as a religious practice requiring self-control, self-abasement, obedience, and self-negation; disappearing as an individual; gradually one becomes remade and revalidated within a Utopian pretence in which all is well, whatever the inward cost.

All the while, the gatekeepers circle, looking for deviance, ready to pounce. The nearest one can get to safety and security comes from using norms to limit the terrifying field of uncertainty created by the underdetermined nature of the score. ('[A]ll these rules and beliefs could be seen as strategies for limiting the vast range of possibilities for performance interpretation, whose variety I suspect musicians subconsciously recognise and, because of the extent and viciousness of performance policing, are terrified by' (ch. 6)).

Foucault (1979) … argues that in modern society social control works less through direct show of force and more through self-regulation motivated by the threat of surveillance. Feeling that they are being watched, individuals anticipate the judgement of others and thus modify or censor their own behaviour accordingly. This is particularly evident in musicians' anticipation of negative feedback. (Hill 2018, 13).[230]

> …anxiety about making mistakes becomes yet another mechanism for social enforcement of conformity (109).

[230] See also Foucault, Michel. 1982. The Subject and Power. *Critical Inquiry* 8/4, 777-95.

> When concepts of correct music are strict and the punishment of musical wrongs is pervasive, influential parties probably are invested in enforcing the socially approved aesthetic boundaries of a given idiom (112).

One can see, then, why self-policing plays such a large role in the construction of our WCM Utopia. The State, by providing so many pressures and punishments, gets much of its work done for it, while the poor musician continues to believe that if only they can be more perfectly faithful they will, on the very best of good days, achieve perfect contentment.

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13 Lack of agency

The best definition of agency[231] comes (again) from Juniper Hill: 'having the ability to make one's own decisions and having the authority to carry them out'.[232] Readers who've come this far will see how pertinent that is. *Creative* agency, Hill points out (Hill 2012), has to have some element of innovation; and an increased sense of agency transfers across domains. If I'm able to act for myself in one area, I'll feel more able to do so in another unless there are specific checks in place there preventing me. In WCM, though, there always are.

As we've seen, many of these checks are disguised by fostering the illusion that agency is valued.

> Because the aim in the music world is to create beauty and achieve the sublime, artistic individuality trumps everything else.[233]
>
> the Western art music performance tradition … places originality and novelty extremely high on musicians' creative agenda (Alessandri, 2014; Alessandri, Eiholzer, et al., 2014; Alessandri, Williamson, et al., 2015; Alessandri, Williamson, Eiholzer, & Williamon, 2016; Clarke, 2005; Williamon, Thompson, Lisboa, & Wiffen, 2006)[234]
>
> As Lehmann, Sloboda and Woody … have noted, 'it can become a matter of huge personal significance, even financial survival, that one way of playing a well-known repertoire piece is unique and recognisable as quite different from another way of playing it'.[235]

That this illusion reaches into the scientific literature on performance only emphasises how unquestioned it is. Georgina Born has emphasised the great extent to which musical performance engages individuals in much larger networks,[236] so that one could argue that agency is co- (indeed multiply-)constructed. But that does little to enable the performer to feel a sense of personal agency in everyday practice. What it does is to draw comfort from the extent to which a sense of belonging to a community defined by shared practices can compensate for a lack of individual agency.[237] To know that one's performance aligns with the expectations and values of the group to which one belongs (or seeks to belong) goes some way to mitigate the frustrations of not being able to be as individual as the ideology claims it is glad for one to be.

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[231] I do not mean lack of an agent. We might look at that under 'Managers' in Chapter 16.
[232] Paper at the conference 'El Sistema and the Alternatives: Social Action through Music in Critical Perspective', London 24-25 April 2015.
[233] McCormick, Lisa. 2015. *Performing Civility: International Competitions in Classical Music* (Cambridge University Press), 5–6.
[234] This whole quote including the references comes from Volioti, Georgia, and Aaron Williamon. 2017. Recordings as Learning and Practising Resources for Performance: Exploring Attitudes and Behaviours of Music Students and Professionals. *Musicae Scientiae* 21/4: 499–523 at 500.
[235] James, Mirjam, Wise, Karen, & Rink, John. (in press). Exploring creativity in musical performance through lesson observation with video-recall interviews. *Scientia Paedagogica Experimentalis*.
[236] Born, Georgina. 2010. For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn. *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 135/2, 205–43.
[237] On the survival value of conformism see de Waal, Frans. 2016. *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?* (London: Granta), esp. 255, 258, 295.

To be seen to belong brings social privileges[238]—being allowed to work, being celebrated for contributing normatively but persuasively—privileges which taking agency for oneself would immediately remove. For many this leads to perpetual self-questioning:

> musicians did not typically seek to resolve their incompatible identities or to tackle their psychological stress. Behaviour instead tended towards Nic Beech et al.'s [2016] concept of perpetuated self-questioning identity work, in which such tensions form a career-long and arguably fundamental aspect of the musician's identity.[239]

We've seen how WCM training discourages a sense of having the authority to carry out one's own decisions. This comes over clearly and repeatedly in the testimony of musicians asked, in a questionnaire for this book, to comment on occasions when they were prevented from being creative:

> I felt unmotivated and uninspired when approaching the material (and subconsciously other material) again as I felt I had no availability to show personality through my performance. The end effects were me feeling incapable of my own ability, something I still worry about when performing my own realizations of canonical works. (Pianist, M, 18–21)
>
> in my first rehearsal with the choir director … he stopped me and said "you aren't qualified to sing ornamentation – you didn't attend the Oberlin Baroque Institute … and you aren't to sing ANY of these ornaments. No ornaments at all." (Singer, F, 40–49)
>
> Most of my career I've experienced being told that particular composers can be played in only one particular way and there is no room for individuality in performance[,] that this is selfish and egotistical. (Violist, M, 30–39)
>
> During a masterclass … the teacher … stopped me and said in an aggressive, critical, and somewhat bewildered way, "you can't do that, you have to sing right through, you can't hover over the note. … Whereabouts are you from, anyway?" (Singer, F, 50–59)
>
> Many [of my] efforts to be musically 'original' or creative in accompanying monophonic songs were often reproved. … The process of learning what we know about performance practice was often linked to a certain sort of discouragement. (Medieval fiddler, M, 30–39)
>
> I was never strongly criticised for being original, even when I wanted to change what the composer wrote (eg dynamics) until I started working as a trainee répétiteur and came into contact with teachers who only wanted me to play "how the music is always played" … The effect of the criticism was to replace my urge to find new ways of interpreting with a fear of breaking norms. (Conductor, M, 60+)
>
> "you should get as close as you can to the way of playing of Ferenc Rados, because his playing represents the wishes of the Composer". (By the way, this teacher criticised the recordings of composers playing their own music.) (Fortepianist, F, 22–29)

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[238] McCormick 2015, 27.

[239] Bennett, Dawn and Hennekam, Sophie. 2018. Lifespan Perspective Theory and (Classical) Musicians' Careers. In: Dromey, Chris and Haferkorn, Julia (eds.), *The Classical Music Industry* (London: Routledge), 122. Beech, Nic, Charlotte Gilmore, Paul Hibbert, and Sierk Ybema. 2016. Identity-in-the-Work and Musicians' Struggles: The Production of Self-Questioning Identity Work. *Work, Employment and Societ*y 30(3), 506–522.

> I am a female singer and … I have programmed many 'male' song cycles in recitals… I have received dozens of complaints after these concerts – over 80% from male members of the audience. (Singer, F, 40–49)
>
> I think most teachers I have had in any instance (lesson or masterclass or coaching) have in the end been about trying to get me to play their ideas, rather than trying to teach me to play my ideas better. (Violinist, F, 30–39)
>
> I had my own feelings about that particular passage but she insisted that I must do the exact musical idea that she heard in her own mind. This happens a lot in chamber music coachings and masterclasses. ([a different] Violinist, F, 30–39)
>
> [In Prokofiev] I attempted to just show the opening gestures with bow pressure[,] and as the sonata is written in a very clear neo-classical style it seemed appropriate given my other education to vary … vibrato. Instead, my teacher strictly enforced … the normal high speed vibrato typical for Prokofiev. Now – this was an interesting and unique issue – on one hand neo-classical style – on the other the composer was Prokofiev. But somehow it felt my teacher forgot the third part of the equation – my own personal ability to experiment and freely engage with the musical material in whatever way I felt would be most authentic to my sense of expression. (Violinist, M, 30–39)

As Izabela Wagner commented, 'The young soloist is enclosed in a sort of cell, built by the parents and the teacher' (Wagner 2015, 72). That lack of agency persists indefinitely. 'Even decades after finishing their lessons, many soloists seek the advice of their former teachers before important events' (143).

The difficulty of exercising agency is, in view of the patriarchal nature of WCM, particularly acute for women. As McCormick noted of the press treatment of Olga Kern when she competed in the 2001 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition:

> her social performance must conform to standards of femininity, but her musical performance must display the desired level of masculinity. (McCormick 2015, 106) … This poses a unique problem for female performers, who must juggle contradictory cultural expectations regarding musical virtuosity and conventional femininity (120-1). … Even in the twenty-first century performers still approach pianism as an object lesson in a particularly masculine form of agency, and it is assumed that the composer's (male) body is inscribed in his compositions (107). … Kern was still remembered as much for her concert attire as for her aggressive athleticism (108).

How much choice does one have in how one plays under these conditions?

But this is, of course, only one specific instance of something we've seen again and again throughout Part 2 of this book. In every space, agency is restricted by policing of one sort or another.

It has become something of a cliché, in the search for musical performance as a model of democratic invention, to look at string quartet rehearsing and playing. Here, it is argued, four musicians have substantial and equal rights to argue for their own visions of how a piece might be realised. Surely here musicians feel a greater sense of agency than in most other situations. Chris Terepin examines this issue in his PhD thesis (forthcoming) and finds that, on the contrary, collective assumptions

about what is proper to quartet playing are inflexible, indeed unbreakable if one wants to be a member. That a group of academics of management consultancy have studied quartet practice as a model for the creation of 'measurable products' by 'self-managed teams' says more than it realises about WCM ideology too.[240]

The universal assumption that composers *allow* performers a certain degree of freedom emphasises how little anyone expects:

> Several composers of the second half of the twentieth century allowed performers to improvise again… (Warren 2014, 91)
>
> It is also important for composers to allow performers some degree of freedom in their interpretation… (ed. Gary McPherson, *Musical Prodigies*, ch 15, Quinto et al., 369)

I'm sure we're all grateful.

The danger that's felt in relation to exercising agency is very clearly reflected in Volioti & Williamon's 2017 study of the ways in which musicians use recordings when preparing a performance.[241] One of the most common uses was to learn or practise 'general expression (e.g. emotional character, musical communication, etc.)' (Table 3, 506, 521), in other words, to ask 'how is this piece *supposed* to go?' Unsurprisingly students use recordings more than their teachers 'early during practising' (511).

> As a 19-year-old female undergraduate commented…: 'Another example is listening to a recording whilst learning repertoire from a genre I am unfamiliar with or uncertain *how it is meant to be performed*.' (511) [my emphasis]
>
> As a 27-year-old female postgraduate student commented…: 'Listening to recordings significantly increases my confidence when performing the piece and gives me ideas of what is stylistically *appropriate*' (513) [my emphasis]
>
> As a 19-year-old female undergraduate wrote: 'Now I spend more time researching and looking for a recording I know will help me the most; one which differs from what I'm being taught to see where variation can be achieved.' (515)

That last is more creative, of course, but see how they rely on the differences documented (and thus authorised) by recordings to see where and how much it's safe to make choices of one's own. Even this relatively creative student feels little authority.

Emily Payne's interviews with performers, which led to her article seeing performance as craft, debated in Chapter 6.16 above, noted: 'A theme that emerged from my interviews was performers' disavowal of innovation in their practice.'[242] And yet in other WCM performance environments (specifically in Finland, rather than the UK) we find something rather different: a clearer realisation

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[240] Tal-Shmotkin, Malka, and Gilboa, Avi. 2013. Do Behaviors of String Quartet Ensembles Represent Self-Managed Teams? *Team Performance Management: An International Journal* 19, 57-71. With thanks to Chris Terepin for this reference and for his discussion of it in his forthcoming thesis.

[241] Volioti, Georgia, and Aaron Williamon. 2017. Recordings as Learning and Practising Resources for Performance: Exploring Attitudes and Behaviours of Music Students and Professionals. *Musicae Scientiae* 21/4, 499–523.

[242] Payne, Emily. 2016. Creativity Beyond Innovation: Musical Performance and Craft. *Musicae Scientiae* 20(3), 325–344, at 340.

of where the problems lie and a range of responses, from distress at what cannot be to a determination not to be constrained.

> I was not putting my whole personality or whole soul, or heart into it, because I was trying to play perfectly …All the time I was putting this kind of big mute on myself … You're so afraid of missing something that you miss the music. (Hill 2018, 108)

> I try to keep myself open and not have too criticizing an attitude toward myself. That's hard because that criticizing attitude is something that I learned from a very young age and it's destructive, it does not help me play well at all. (Piainist Kristiina Junttu quoted in Hill 2017, 226)

> I don't see any point in doing a gig to do something correctly. I don't feel good afterwards, I feel like a prostitute, that I'm selling something that is not the real thing, that I'm cheating the audience. They believe that we are doing art. (Singer Päivi Järviö quoted in Hill 2017, 228)

Many, though, are fully socialised to accept the status quo. One of Hill's participants speaks at length about her sense that she can and must divine the emotions a composer intended her to express: 'I do not think, ever, that I create' (Hill 2018, 161). While my own questionnaire produced this, from a leading orchestral violist who, asked for an example of an occasion on which they'd been prevented from being creative answered, 'never'. They added:

> Bowings are dictated by the leader of the orchestra and phrasing is dictated by the conductor. Your only freedom is in fingerings which actually allow you to express yourself in a surprisingly wide way.

One takes one's creative opportunities where they're to be found.

Pertinent here is Emlyn Stam's quoting Slavoj Žižek on forced choice:

> In the subject's relationship to the community to which he belongs, there is always such a paradoxical point of *choix forcé*—at this point, the community is saying to the subject: you have freedom to choose, but on the condition that you choose the right thing.[243]

Indeed. Of course it's very possible that performers who happily conform feel a greater sense of agency than performers who don't. If you accept that you can only change things within a narrow range you feel ownership of that range; if you resent its narrowness you feel stifled by it, perhaps even that it owns you. Mary Hunter, in an exceptionally perceptive reading of *The Art of Quartet Playing: The Guarneri Quartet in Conversation with David Blum*,[244] notices

> that the players gladly claim agency over the minutiae of music-making (minutiae that make all the difference to the effect of a performance) but that this powerful sense of agency is deployed in the service of something — namely some combination of the work and a never-

[243] Stam, Emlyn. 2019. In Search of a Lost Language: Performing in Early-Recorded Style in Viola and String Quartet Repertoires. PhD thesis, University of Leiden, 24–5. Žižek, Slavoj. 1989. *The Sublime Object of Ontology* (New York: Verso Books), 185–6.
[244] Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.

> articulated sense of acceptable performance practice — over which they have little control, and which, indeed, imposes powerful obligations on them.[245]

But she also notices a strategy that counteracts this:

> This is closely related to the obligation-discourse phenomenon where performers express the duty to bring about an "inherent" musical effect *that they themselves have in fact posited* [my emphasis], having elided their desire for that effect into a sense of the composer's own intentions. ("The character **is** mournful and melancholy, and **needs** a[n] … ethereal timbre".) [her emphases]

In other words, they turn their musical taste into an obligation to the dead and thereby give themselves the agency they can't allow themselves knowingly to take. This is very characteristic of the sorts of beliefs that we examined as delusions in Chapter 6. It shows how far one has to muddy one's view of what one does in order to make any space at all to contribute anything of oneself in performance. A strange kind of agency, but about as much as can be found under existing conditions.

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[245] Hunter, Mary. Forthcoming. Classical Performer-Talk: Obligation, Affordance and Strategic Vagueness. Many thanks to Professor Hunter for sharing her typescript and allowing me to quote it here.

14 The damage to musicians' health

Altenmüller and Jasusch (2010) report a shocking finding:[246]

> The musical genre of the overwhelming majority of patients suffering from focal dystonia is classical music. [Focal dystonia is a neurological disorder causing muscles to spasm, not uncommon in instrumentalists.] In contrast to pop or jazz music with improvised structures and great freedom of interpretation, … classical music … requires a maximum of temporal accuracy in the range of milliseconds, which is scrutinized by the performing musician as well as by the audience at any moment of the performance. This, as a consequence, combines the situation of public performance in classical music with a high level of social pressure; the gap between success and failure is minimal … (4)

Moreover,

> a pattern of anxiety and extreme perfectionism was observed in musicians that had already been present before onset of dystonia… This pattern was not observed in healthy musicians. … [T]he association between highly skilled movement patterns and the development of focal task-specific dystonia is highly suggestive of an environmental contribution from prolonged repetitive use under conditions of high demand on temporal-spatial precision in the context of reward and punishment. (4–5)
>
> [T]he unyielding reward and punishment frame in the classical music performance scene provides a fertile ground for these stresses in musicians. This in turn could explain why, for example, improvisational jazz musicians are much less likely to develop musician's dystonia. (8)

Altenmüller and Jasusch identify here a toxic combination of factors that harm musicians. To what extent is this due to the stresses and constraints we've been looking at? Might a more liberal approach to performance, which allowed more creativity, improve musicians' health by removing some of the stress caused by the obligation to perform 'properly' and by anxiety over the ever-present danger of transgressing narrowly defined (often undefined and thus unpredictable) interpretative norms?

A recent study—tellingly entitled 'Psychological Strain, Burnout, Perfectionism, Optimism, Pessimism and Recovery Skills in Professional Singers' (Hodapp, 2018)[247]—sets out some alarming statistics.

> The prevalence and self-assessment of mental disorders in professional opera singers (*N* = 169) was examined in the study by Hannig (2004). Hannig was able to show that in more than a quarter of the singers examined (27%) there was a suspicion of the presence of a mental disorder. Younger singers under the age of 40, and female singers and interviewees with an insecure job situation, seem especially at risk. Nearly 40 percent of opera singers in

[246] Altenmüller, Eckart, and Hans-Christian Jasusch. 2010. Focal dystonia in musicians: phenomenology, pathophysiology, triggering factors, and treatment. *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 25/1, 3–9. My thanks to Lukas Fierz for drawing my attention to this study.

[247] Hodapp, Bastian. 2018. Psychische Belastung, Burnout, Perfektionismus, Optimismus, Pessimismus und Erholungskompetenz bei professionellen Sängerinnen und Sängern, *Jahrbuch Musikpsychologie* 28.

> this investigation reported having mental health problems (39%) and over-exertion (37%). Also nearly 40 percent of the professional singers interviewed have already considered changing their job because of psychological stress.[248]

Instrumentalists are no less affected.

> An investigation with 2,536 orchestra musicians from Germany revealed that more than 90 percent of the professional musicians interviewed currently suffer from stage fright in their musical performing (Gembris & Heye, 2012). In an investigation with 2,212 orchestra musicians from the USA, the following picture emerged: 21 percent of professional musicians stated that they were suffering from acute anxiety, 24 percent suffered from depression, 19 percent had sleep problems and 40 percent suffered from performance anxiety (Fishbein et al., 1988).[249]

In this connection Anna Bull reports that

> orchestral musicians have recently been exposed as experiencing high levels of drug and alcohol addiction, bullying, boredom and low job satisfaction (Price 2013; Lander 2014).

Hodapp identifies a selection of causes that will be familiar to readers here:

> It is clear that the activity of a singer is a profession whose practice is accompanied by a number of potential stressors. Examples include internal and external demands on performance, competitive pressure, job shortage, scope of the repertoire to be learned, rapid workload during rehearsals, artistic constraints imposed by the conductor, expectations of the audience, and stress due to constant practice (for an overview see Hofbauer, 2017). For Hannig (2004), there is hardly any other professional group "exposed to such high on-the-spot stress" (p. 1).[250]

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[248] 'In der Studie von Hannig (2004) wurde die Prävalenz und Selbsteinschätzung psychischer Störungen bei professionellen Opernsänger/innen (*N* = 169) untersucht. Hannig (2004) konnte zeigen, dass sich bei mehr als einem Viertel der untersuchten Sänger/innen (27%) ein Verdacht auf das Vorliegen einer psychischen Störung ergab. Besonders gefährdet scheinen jüngere Sänger/innen unter 40 Jahren, Sängerinnen sowie Befragte mit unsicherer Arbeitsplatzsituation zu sein. Fast 40 Prozent der Opernsänger/innen gaben in dieser Untersuchung an, unter psychischen Problemen (39%) und Überanstrengung (37%) zu leiden. Ebenfalls fast 40 Prozent der befragten Profisänger/innen haben schon einmal darüber nachgedacht, den Beruf aufgrund psychischer Belastungen zu wechseln.' For a wider recent review of musicians' health see Matei, Raluca, Stephen Broad, Juliet Goldbart, and Jane Ginsborg. 2018. Health Education for Musicians. *Frontiers in Psychology* 9, 1137. https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01137

[249] 'Eine Untersuchung mit 2 536 Orchestermusiker/innen aus Deutschland ergab, dass über 90 Prozent der befragten Berufsmusiker/innen angaben, aktuell bei ihrer Musikausübung unter Lampenfieber zu leiden (Gembris & Heye, 2012). Bei einer Untersuchung mit 2 212 Orchestermusiker/ innen aus den USA zeigte sich folgendes Bild: 21 Prozent der Profimusiker/innen gaben an, unter akuter Angst zu leiden, 24 Prozent unter Depressivität, 19 Prozent hatten Schlafstörungen und 40 Prozent litten unter Auftrittsangst (Fishbein et al., 1988).'

[250] 'Fest steht, dass es sich bei der Tätigkeit einer Sängerin/eines Sängers um einen Beruf handelt, dessen Ausübung von einer Reihe möglicher Stressoren begleitet wird. Als Beispiele können innerer und äußerer Leistungsanspruch, Konkurrenzdruck, Stellenknappheit, Umfang des zu erlernenden Repertoires, rasantes Arbeitstempo während der Proben, künstlerische Einschränkung durch die Dirigentin/den Dirigenten, die Erwartungshaltung des Publikums und Belastungen durch ständiges Üben genannt werden (für eine Übersicht vgl. Hofbauer, 2017). Für Hannig (2004) gibt es kaum eine andere Berufsgruppe, „die solch hohen punktuellen Stressbelastung[en]" (S. 1) ausgesetzt ist.'

As Chapter 7.6 suggested, these problems begin in childhood. Izabela Wagner (2015, 76) was quoted there reporting an increase in anxiety, among the aspiring soloists she observed, during their teenage years; an increase reported also by Bull in one of her participants:

> …internal self-critique had increased exponentially as soon as she started a music performance course at university… Patterns of hard work and repetitive practice could easily turn into obsessive perfectionism, fear, and anxiety (Bull 2019, 141–2)

Young students, Wagner noted, are brought up to feel guilty if they don't practise enough. The workload 'helps the teacher maintain the student's dependence on them' (Wagner 2015, 121).

In Chapter 7.5 we saw Juniper Hill quoting a student who after studying for seven years with a teacher was unable to make any decisions of his own. He describes (Hill 2018, 60) how after graduating he went into bible study and then the army. '[T]he students from his teacher's studio often had problems; having had "no space for growing personality, as musicians they were somehow lost"' (Hill 2018, 95). Looking over her study as a whole, Hill reports that

> The most significant psychological inhibitors of creativity reported by musicians in this study are related to self-image, anxiety, self-criticism, and attitude (Hill 2018, 114)… excessively negative feedback and past experiences of negative feedback and anticipation of future negative feedback…(115) … The most restricting attitude reported across all sites was an overemphasis on perfectionism … fear of making mistakes, leading to anxiety. In some cases destructive self-criticism and lowered self-confidence… (116)

Biasutti and Concina (2014)[251] found that advanced performance students suffered more from musical performance anxiety than professionals. In other words, peak anxiety occurs in music students, presumably created by anxiety over being 'good enough' (i.e. accurate, reliable, convincing enough) to get work.

Tim Patston (2014) very reasonably considers this as an indictment of music education.[252]

> Musicians appear to be significantly more anxious in their 'workplace' than the general population. These levels of prevalence are of major concern. *There is no other condition in the anxiety disorders where such a high proportion of a population report functional impairment* [my emphasis] … Anecdotal evidence suggests that music teachers do little, if anything, to dispel that notion that MPA [Musical Performance Anxiety] is somehow a normal part of being a musician. Qualitative research, based upon formal and informal interviews, indicates that around 30% of musicians who leave the profession because of debilitating MPA become educators rather than continue as performers. It seems logical to assume that MPA may be reinforced in the education sector. … Despite being unable to manage their own MPA, faculty members feel able to manage this condition in their students. It is not surprising that their students do not have effective coping strategies. (Patston 2014, 90)

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[251] Biasutti, Michele and Concina, Eleonora. 2014. The Role of Coping Strategy and Experience in Predicting Music Performance Anxiety. *Musicae Scientiae* 18/2, 189–202.

[252] Patston, Tim. (2014). Teaching stage fright?: Implications for music educators. *British Journal of Music Education, 31*(1), 85-98.

Recent research (Moretz & McKay, 2009; Patston, 2010) has identified that perfectionism has a key role to play in the development of MPA. If, over time, a musician is convinced that musical perfection is their goal, their search for the unattainable may lead initially to frustration and ultimately to anxiety, as they fail to reach these self-imposed standards (92).

Again, the statistics tell a shocking story. According to Perkins et al. (2017),[253]

> Kreutz et al. (2008) reported on musculoskeletal and non-musculoskeletal problems amongst 273 music students drawn from two United Kingdom conservatoires. Their analysis revealed that over 10% of students reported above average or severe sleep disturbance, inappropriate tiredness, weather sensitivity, concentration problems, or headaches requiring medication. Additionally, 48% of the sample reported above average to severe musculoskeletal pain in at least one bodily site. Indeed, that musculoskeletal pain is a frequent experience for conservatoire music students is supported by a number of other studies (Spahn et al., 2002; Hagberg et al., 2005; Ackermann et al., 2011; Steinmetz et al., 2012). … Hildebrandt et al. (2012) … reported that fatigue, depression, and stage fright increased significantly over the 1st year of higher education in three Swiss music hochschule, while Kaspersen and Gotestam (2002) found high levels of music performance anxiety (MPA) among Norwegian conservatoire students, particularly for pianists and string players. Similarly, Papageorgi et al. (2013) found that musical performance anxiety was a concern for the majority of the 244 United Kingdom-based undergraduate student and professional musicians they sampled and that musical genre differentially impacted upon musicians' experiences of performance anxiety, with those identifying as Western classical musicians reporting the highest levels of performance anxiety. … Demirbatir (2015) argues that the environment of studying music "can be considered as a stressful place because of high competition, isolation, failure to achieve career goals, authoritarian teaching style, and intolerance against errors caused by stress or anxiety and financial uncertainty." … [O]f almost 200 music students surveyed in Germany, half had actively sought professional help due to playing-related health problems (Spahn et al., 2002)
>
> The most frequently reported challenge was associated with perceived *comparison and competition* (sub-theme 3.3, *n* = 15, 75%), which seems to be a feature of the conservatoire environment in a way that the majority of students report to be emotionally challenging … Additionally, the students also described challenges with feelings of *pressure and stress* (sub-theme 3.4, *n* = 14, 70%) … Just over half (*n* = 11, 55%) of the students reported direct or indirect experiences of *psychological distress* within the conservatoire environment (sub-theme 3.5). Six students (30%) directly described an experience of mental illness.

This is a dreadful situation: it says nothing good about the classical music business that it appears to be considered by many as a necessary price for professional performance. No profession should do this to its workers; no society should be content with it or celebrate hearing its results.

Altenmüller & Jasusch (2010), whom I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, conclude with recommendations; essentially, avoiding from the very start teaching perfectionism, avoiding

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[253] Perkins Rosie, Reid Helen, Araújo Liliana S., Clark Terry, Williamon Aaron. 2017. Perceived Enablers and Barriers to Optimal Health among Music Students: A Qualitative Study in the Music Conservatoire Setting. *Frontiers in Psychology* 8, 968. https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00968

excessive practice (excessive for good health, that is), not seeing recordings as models of perfection to be equalled, focusing instead on 'the joy of emotional communication shared with the audience and musicians.' (9)

In the light of these grim data and conclusions it may be slightly less surprising that Allmendinger et al. (1996, 201–2) found that, in terms of job satisfaction and opportunities for growth, orchestral musicians score below US federal prison guards. Orchestras from the UK show overall the lowest general satisfaction, job security satisfaction, pay satisfaction, management satisfaction and growth opportunities satisfaction. For regional orchestras (in UK, USA, ex-W. and ex-E. Germany all together) almost as many leave the profession as leave for another orchestra (table on p. 203).

All this in an art form (if that's what it is) that purports to touch people in uniquely deep ways.

Katherine Liley, in order to get some perspective on the numerous types of injury suffered by pianists today (documented in her thesis), offers an imaginary Martian's view of piano playing:

> Perhaps his main impression would be that playing the piano is a dangerous activity and that it takes place within an unhappy environment. Human piano players face a high probability of sustaining injury, with 93 possible factors that could plunge them into a nightmare of horrifying symptoms and even more horrifying consequences. All this takes place in a world of demanding and unsympathetic teachers, families, peers, composers, educational institutions, and exam syllabuses… He may ask himself why any human being would play the piano at all, perhaps wondering if some sort of conscription system was in operation…(157).

Her dataset, she says,

> conjures up a vista in which physically and emotionally damaged pianists inhabit a morally wanting environment filled with pushy parents, uncaring teachers, reckless composers and irresponsible peers (159).

Much attention has been devoted in recent years to the treatment of musicians' illnesses through the field of performance arts medicine (PAM).[254]

And yet, so far, treatments often appear to be of limited effectiveness. Partly this must be due to the fact that success in this area consists in being able to send the musician back to resume their duties in the same damaging environment that produced the problem in the first place. When it's a problem of technique, that can perhaps be worked around if another technical solution can be found. But when it's also about what the situation does to one's sense of self then it's no good just alleviating clients' symptoms and then sending them back on stage. In that situation PAM is just a proxy or an agent for the system, making musicians (perhaps only temporarily) fit to continue to be harmed.

You don't have to be a Marxist to see that musicians are disposable, given the ready supply of superlatively able young players eager to take their place. One gets a vivid sense of this in the defence offered in court by the Royal Opera House, sued by Christopher Goldscheider, a member of its orchestra, for hearing damage sustained during a rehearsal of *Die Walküre*. ' …the ROH claimed the artistic value of the music produced by the orchestra meant that some hearing damage to its

[254] A good starting-point for further study is MacDonald, Raymond A.R., Kreutz, Gunter, and Mitchell, Laura (eds). 2012. *Music, Health and Wellbeing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

players was inevitable and justifiable'.[255] So it's fine, and to be expected, that musicians will suffer hearing loss in the interests of the organisation and its paying audiences. This is entirely in keeping with WCM ideology, where the composer's wishes are to be realised as vividly as possible, whatever the human cost. 'The music' is simply more important than the people making it.[256]

It's in this kind of context that performers' ill-health is economically acceptable and need not be effectively treated. So a training that produces it, even in quite high quantities, and a PAM that has so far managed to be of only limited help, isn't an obstacle to the efficient working of the business. Another question might be whether, if it could be much reduced, that would benefit or challenge the business model. It's not impossible that performer illness functions partly as a means of maintaining an attractive turnover, with familiar faces being replaced by fresher, younger ones.

At any rate, there is good reason to suspect that much of this illness is caused precisely by the intolerance of individuality that we've noted throughout the increasingly distressing Part 2 of this book; so that after many years of apparent success even experienced and well-known musicians find themselves unable to recognise the eager young player who longed for nothing as much as for a lifetime's professional music-making. After long enough performing the same repertoire in the same way, they come to wonder who they are when they play or sing: themselves or simply a functionary for the system? Some face this earlier: you may recall one of Wagner (2015)'s interviewees who gave up at the last stage of training as a virtuoso to study medicine because 'When she played, she said, it was only her teacher playing through her.' Similarly, Hill (2018, 37) quotes one of her participants: 'I had just so much schooling in all around the violin and everything, and I just couldn't tap into where my voice was anymore.'

With all this very much in mind, in 2018 I wrote to a psychoanalyst, Monia Brizzi, who works partly under the aegis of BAPAM, the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine, treating performance artists for performance-related conditions. I was interested to learn whether she encountered in her work musicians with physical or psychological problems related to a lack of agency or opportunity to bring individuality or creativity to their performing. It seemed possible, in theory, that the constraints forced on creativity by the profession might cause some of the problems that PAM was reporting. Here is part of her reply.

> I am so pleased you decided to get in touch – the issues that you have identified are of great interest to me and do directly resonate with the predicament of past and current clients I've been working with. … Performance requires an active attitude of participation and existential commitment involving the whole being, not just some form of half-hearted cognitive adherence to external standards. When the alignment of performer and human being is missing, art loses vividness, fulness and integrity – and so does individuality.
>
> I see performers that have left themselves behind in this way, so when they engage with people, who can these people see? There is nobody there to see. They need to find a way to

[255] https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-47965734

[256] William Cheng finds the same in his important book *Loving Music Till It Hurts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), esp. pp. 4 & 6: 'Plenty of internal and external forces—stubborn personal habits and loyalties, or powerful institutions and creeds—can seemingly present us with a choice between loving music and loving people.'

> reach out to the person they left behind and bring it to the art and on stage with them. But the consequences of doing this are uncertain… When performers have emptied themselves, their art and other people in their world respond to them as these empty beings – they respond to this emptiness in empty ways and they respond to themselves as these empty beings. To feel that they are someone again they need to bring that someone that they left behind. Yet as you say they get censored and penalised for doing so. If they can't be themselves, who are they now? They might like the story that they have 'changed' but this doesn't often ring true or fit their experience. Blanking out one aspect of their life so often results in 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. Breakdowns and illness are ways of "discovering the self to whom one can be true", as you eloquently say, and escaping their trapping.[257] This needs to be recognised and worked with avoiding to pre-empt things prematurely by indoctrinating them with yet another system/trap to reproduce or hide behind, rather than allow an opportunity for true becoming, creativity and artistry.[258]

Violin teacher John Crawford makes a similar case in an article in The Strad (9 Sept 2020):

> There will always be the very gifted whose natural flow can survive almost anything, but many find themselves gradually losing their love and enjoyment of playing because, often without their realising it, they are being asked to do something which doesn't come from their own voice or conception, so they end up viewing performance as a kind of obstacle course. In such a situation energy cannot flow 'from the inside out', and this is undoubtedly one of the main factors in the increasing number of our students needing physiotherapy and suffering from blockages of various kinds. Often the poor student is then given the impression that there is something wrong with their 'body', apparently a thing separate from them, which needs to be 'fixed' through exercises. If I have nothing genuine to say, to express, my energy doesn't flow: in fact it may well move in the wrong direction – inwards, the opposite of expression, which by definition is a sending out. We call this wrong direction 'tension' – a player pulling in on themselves in a desperate attempt to follow someone else's idea and try to 'get it right'.[259]

Given, then, that the very low level of agency and creativity permitted to classical musicians does seem to be a notable factor in the extraordinarily high levels of illness among performers, it seems

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[257] Liley independently makes a similar point about performer injury as transformative in forcing confrontation (Liley 2018, 267).

[258] Extracts of emails to Daniel Leech-Wilkinson from Monia Brizzi, 23 & 27/08/2018. My sincere thanks to Dr Brizzi for her cooperation and collegiality in many subsequent discussions, and for allowing me to quote her here. I discuss this email also in Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2021. Secure and Insecure Bases in the Performance of Western Classical Music. In *Rethinking Music Through Science and Technology Studies*, edited by Antoine Hennion and Christophe Levaux. (Abingdon: Routledge), 67–87 at 77–8.

[259] Warm thanks to Mai Kawabata for this reference.

only reasonable to hypothesise that the changes to musical practice justified by and modelled in this book would reduce the extent of the problem in worthwhile ways. **There's a clear ethical case based in performers' physical health and psychological well-being for the changes I'm proposing.**

A remarkably original and interesting case has been made by horn player Martin Lawrence for using musicians' performance anxiety to generate more creative readings of scores.[260] Martin has written about this, with examples, as Chapter 23.4 of this book, within Part 3 which is where we look at musical solutions to many of these problems.

Continue to 14a: the personal testimony of clarinettist, Mandy Burvill

Continue to Chapter 15: The legal constraints on performers

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[260] Lawrence, Martin. (2020). Music Performance Anxiety as Hidden Desire and Emerging Self: the Development and Exploration of a Conceptual Lens for Performers and Practitioners. PhD thesis, City, University of London.

14a Musical Creativity and Performance as Relational Practices:
Mandy Burvill in Conversation with Monia Brizzi

Introduction

Daniel Leech-Wilkinson

As part of the research underpinning *Challenging Performance* I've held a series of private interviews with professional musicians so as to explore their attitudes to and experiences of performance creativity and its suppression. Uniquely—and I'm extremely grateful to her for this—Mandy Burvill, a clarinettist with rich experience of both orchestral playing and more creative interactions outside the mainstream, agreed to speak publicly about these issues. The interview took place during a study day held at King's College London in November 2019 for the Society of Existential Analysis and the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine. Monia Brizzi, who is a psychologist for performing artists, explored with Mandy some of the difficulties that musicians face in reconciling beliefs that on the one hand musical performance should reflect something of themselves while on the other it should be faithful to what are believed to be the composer's wishes.

What follows here, after some thoughts from Mandy and Monia, is a transcript, only lightly edited for style, of their conversation in which they explored some of Mandy's experiences as a musician both within and outside standard orchestral life. A factor that emerges strongly is the vital role of *relationships* in making music: relationships between players obviously, especially between those with power (conductors, section leaders) and those without; but also the complex relationship between each musician and the music they are making. The music emerging from their body and instrument is experienced in important respects as another person with whom they negotiate an understanding. This other person seems to have needs of their own, to be understood and sounded in particular ways, ways one has learned through decades of study and practice. On a good day, when a performance seems unusually satisfying, it's possible to feel that a deep mutual understanding has been achieved, closely akin to a feeling of love (see also Chapter 12.2, 'Seeking Utopia'). And yet these apparent needs of the score are very strongly shaped by the musician's beliefs learned from teachers, institutions, and the many gatekeepers (managers, critics, producers, etc) who are ever-present in a musician's mind, warning them not to be too personal, but rather to reproduce a normative reading of the musical text. It's not easy to have a loving relationship when it's subject to such tightly controlled rules of behaviour. In this conversation we can sense at several points this tension in Mandy's comparison of her love of music and the realities of professional life. Musical performance could offer powerful opportunities to encounter many different Others, negotiating varied relationships, developing aspects of self that currently must be rigorously suppressed if one wishes to continue to fit in and to get work as a classical musician. A healthy musical environment may require not just counselling but more radical, structural change.

Reflective Analyses

Mandy Burvill

My conversations with Monia gave me the opportunity to think more intensely about my experiences and ideals as a musician. In reading the transcript of our conversation, the most important point for me was the need for an environment in which a musician can feel safe enough to be authentic, thus enabling meaningful music-making for performer and audience alike. Where the arts become professions, the opportunities for these safe environments become rarer due to time and financial restrictions limiting opportunities for experimentation or re-thinking of the working culture. It is my intention through my teaching to create that safety for my students to explore themselves in tandem with the music, encouraging meaningful and authentic interpretations. Young musicians at the early stages are often heavily influenced by the perceived rules and norms of the orchestral world; students at tertiary level often, to me, seem overly concerned about technical brilliance, forgetting that technical facility should be a means to achieve musical ideals. The pressures of continual 'perfection', brought about partly by the prevalence of recordings, adds to the restrictions on musicians feeling enabled to take risks or even to do anything authentically creative which may risk being 'different'.

Talking to an audience about these fundamental (but little discussed) issues was empowering, liberating and cathartic in itself. Sharing my deep feelings with others is why I became a musician after all! I was interested to be speaking with a room full of many non-musicians, which further emphasised the commonality of human-ness. Music for me is a conduit for human connection. Through music we can connect with each other (performing colleagues and/or listeners) in a way that surpasses language. The impact of an audience cannot be over-estimated, and it is always my aim to enable the listeners to feel part of a performance, and to join me on a "shared feeling voyage" (Stern, 2004). This sharing can enable a feeling of connection between listeners, which can be extremely positive, particularly in therapeutic settings. I believe the power of music to be immense when approached with care, generosity, honesty, and authenticity.

Monia Brizzi

The dialogue with Mandy clearly highlights both the importance of opening up the conversation on the relational aspects that ground performance and also the urgent necessity for a broader conception of musical practice and intentionality. The dialogue foregrounds performance as an experiential totality continuous with everyday life, rather than separate from it. Despite consistent disproof on evidence-based grounds, conventional interpretations of flow in musical practice continue to rest on individualist and exceptionalist assumptions and the corollary binaries they produce: individual/group, producer/receiver, composition/performance, text/context and exceptional/everyday (Cook, 2018), where each half of the pair is considered as quite separate from the other. The implications are very serious and problematic as these splits hinder the creativity, agency and wellbeing of musicians (Leech-Wilkinson, 2019-20). The health and vitality of performance and of performers calls for a fluid co-ordination of individual *and* collective, i.e., a movement from dividedness and dichotomy to interaction and reciprocity in musicians' relation to what grounds them, a systemic balancing of continuity and difference. Sustaining generative practice in the performing arts requires crossing the boundaries of old yet still-dominant myths, in order to

situate music within a wider creativity-culture nourished by the creative and reflective practices of everyday life, rather than in narrow domains of exceptionality.

Creativity, in music like in everyday life, is not the product of the individual but of relationship (Gergen, 2009; Rink, Gaunt and Williamon, 2017; Clarke and Doffman, 2017; Cook, 2018). Working across barriers between roles and specialisms is key, for participation and collaboration augments the creative capabilities of groups (Sawyer, 2007). The future of musical performance depends on whether we can continue to extend dialogue beyond hierarchical or pyramidal structures to generate that type of genuinely polyphonic relational process that is foundational to the experience of shared meaning and to fully engaged musical collectives. This is what vitalises the potentials of co-action, what breathes life into musical creativity, and it begs the question of how we might best cultivate not only tolerance but the cherishing of ambiguity and complexity, as well as the trust, responsiveness, openness to the other and to difference that are so fundamental to the empathic listening and caring communication that constitute the basic animating elements of musical creativity. As social psychologist Kenneth Gergen puts it: 'The practical challenge is to generate conditions in which participants are free to express a full range of views and values, even when contradictory' (2009: 325). This directly connects to the guiding principles and wellbeing framework of the Healthy Conservatories Network and its commitment to facilitating multidisciplinary dialogue and advancing the health and ethical dimensions of musical practice.

Deep reflexivity and critical thinking through a variety of experiential, emotional and narrational approaches centred on embodiment, metaphor and image should feature in conservatoire curricula and in orchestras' practice routine, in order to support interpretation, ownership, agency and artistic responsibility. It is here that the collaborative and explorative stance of phenomenological psychology, psychology's complex systems approach (Spinelli, 1994), becomes particularly relevant to musical practice. Explicitly centred on embodied, felt experience and intersubjectivity, it is optimised for opening up the more difficult-to-access dimensions of the lived sense of practice and sound, making them available to awareness, description, reflection and to a more nuanced understanding, so that they can be considered relationally in the contexts of musicians' life in both the music world and the wider world. The unfolding interaction with the music, with oneself and with others constitutes the present moment of emergence of experience and creativity – ambiguous and uncertain because they cannot be pre-given. If things are too set in advance, the interactive element of performance risks decaying into mere reproduction, intersubjectivity stultifies into self-enclosed individuality and emotional activation into disturbance and performance anxiety.

Conversation transcript

Daniel Leech-Wilkinson: We're going to be witness to a conversation between Monia Brizzi and Mandy Burvill, who I'm very happy to introduce and welcome. Mandy is a professional classical clarinettist with a lot of experience as a professional orchestral musician and more recently working in all sorts of different kinds of environments which I think we may hear a little more about in a moment. So thank you Mandy, it's quite brave of a musician to be interviewed like this in a public forum and I really, really appreciate your coming here.

Mandy Burvill: Thank you. It was strange to be packing to come away without my clarinet but sort of working!

Monia Brizzi: Mandy, can I ask you what has called you to music?

Mandy: I grew up in Norwich with non-musical parents, but I had a very, very, very lovely grandad who played an electronic organ, not very well but I really felt very close to him; and so I used the organ as a way of kind of connecting with him, I suppose, and I basically taught myself, with a bit of guidance from him, how to read music. Then I got the opportunity to learn an orchestral instrument – in the 1980s, when there was free instrumental tuition at primary level – so I took up the clarinet then, aged 8. And I wasn't pushed in any way. My grandad took an interest, my parents took an interest and supported me but it was always my thing and from the very beginning; I used it as a sort of therapy for myself. When I was struggling with things at school, or things happened in my family and I felt angsty, my first thing to do would be to go up to my bedroom and pick up my clarinet and play some stuff, and it felt really sort of cathartic, I suppose, for me to use it in that way. I had teachers who were obviously good enough to get me to the level that I am, but I didn't feel they were very pushy or demonstrative. It wasn't really until I got to college that I experienced what Daniel was saying, about the unwritten rules about interpretation and what's acceptable and that kind of thing, so I was quite kind of free in the way that I was using music right from the start, just through situation really. And in school, I experienced some opportunities to play some jazz and it was great. You know, on paper it doesn't sound like a good musical education but I think it was in many ways for me because I think it set me up with quite a kind of liberated approach maybe, and not so restricted.

Monia: Mandy, you say on paper it doesn't sound like it was a good musical education. How come?

Mandy: Well, I didn't do National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, I didn't go to a Saturday morning music school, you know, Junior College or whatever, I just sort of did my little thing in Norwich, and it wasn't very high powered or anything, so I think in that way I felt a little bit kind of embarrassed, I suppose, by my background; but I think with hindsight, I can see that actually it enabled me to approach music differently to a lot of my colleagues, I think.

Monia: And you played in the orchestra for about ten years?

Mandy: I went to Trinity Music College, and then fairly soon after that I got a job in Liverpool, in the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra which was amazing and I was absolutely delighted, and I know that that's what you're supposed to want. I did want it and I did like it quite a lot for a while, and then I didn't like it so much because I realised that, actually, I found the lack of opportunity for creativity restricting. People that I spoke to about what I did would say "Oh, it must be so lovely, I'd love to be creative like you" and I would think "Well, if only I could be more creative". I was second clarinet so, compared to somebody in the back of the second violin section, I did have an opportunity for a voice of some description, but it was a very small opportunity and I felt quite strangled, I suppose. I wasn't deeply unhappy but it wasn't like I hoped it would be, and I found the working pattern difficult, particularly once I had a family and my girls started school. I felt like it wasn't really working for me. I wasn't loving it and I didn't want to do music and not *love* doing music. It took me a while to come to the decision to leave but I did leave and once I'd made that decision it was great and I never, ever looked back. I've never regretted that, and that was ten years ago when I made that change.

Monia: What do you think were the main issues? What was getting in the way?

Mandy: I was frustrated that there wasn't enough connection with audiences. It didn't feel like I was communicating something about myself to other human beings. I think it's partly the formality and the size of a symphony orchestra, you know. Many concerts would have eighty people on the stage. And it just felt like it was just too – it was kind of unreal really, it wasn't sort of raw. It's difficult to explain… it wasn't kind of proper.

Monia: There was a sense of disconnect?

Mandy: Yes, I think so.

Monia: The way you described, when you enjoyed the playing and practising, there was a sense of, I think you used the word 'connection'….

Mandy: Absolutely. Connection with myself and connection with other people. When I was at college, so going back a little bit, when I was nineteen, I started going to this amazing music camp which was mostly amateur musicians who get together and play music because that's what they want to do, but because everybody loves and trusts and supports each other, wonderful, wonderful music happens. I've felt most proud of some of my performances there and certainly some of my most powerful listening experiences have been there, when somebody who seems very mousey and insecure will stand and just sing a folk song on their own in a big kind of barn, just standing there, just so real, so true, so authentic, so honest. Having experiences like that and then going back to the orchestra, I could just see the disparity and I found that really hard to kind of accept.

Monia: I think that really came through in our conversation on the phone when you mentioned how, in a way, when – let me know if I understood you with any degree of accuracy – when you play from the heart, when you're really playing in that way you are enjoying it and it makes you feel at ease and liberated, there is a sense of connectedness but also of risk-taking, and there is also a fear there, there is also some form of something painful?

Mandy: Yes, I suppose. In this lovely music camp, the fear and the pain is about opening yourself up too much for yourself. So not about exposing myself to other people but about exposing myself to myself, getting too deep inside myself.

Monia: Yes.

Mandy: In terms of the orchestra, I had the comfort of a permanent contract so I wasn't worried about being booked again or anything like that but still, I felt very vulnerable in terms of relationships with colleagues, and expectations. I was 25 and really excited and I desperately wanted to fit in, so I did compromise myself to some extent probably, to try and be what they wanted me to be. I certainly wasn't very conscious of this compromise at the time but I think it stems from the appointment procedure. With orchestras in this country, the appointment procedure is that you have an audition and then you're invited to trial with the orchestra (my trial went on for about eighteen months, I think). And then the transition to having a job, I think, didn't set me up well to genuinely be me, or to feel comfortable with that. And so I think that brings about with it a vulnerability if you then do try and be authentic.

Monia: So it's a sense of the whole you being involved, of performance not being just a technical process or a professional enterprise that you leave behind but that involves your own self, and it

affects your entire life, your sense of yourself, the sense of who you are and why you're playing but also outside of it, that it isn't clear-cut…

Mandy: No, it's not separate, it shouldn't be separate.

Monia: And maybe, are you saying that if it is separate that then it can become problematic or banal?

Mandy: Yes, it doesn't feel – it feels like you're missing something and I think audiences are missing something. I went to see Björk in concert and her kind of fragility and honesty was just so powerful, and I want to replicate that.

Monia: In your experience as a professional musician, what is needed to enable that, to enable that risk-taking, that vulnerability? I think you mentioned about the importance of feeling safe enough to experiment, to let go in this place that is wonderful and is simultaneously also difficult. What is needed?

Mandy: Orchestrally, I think it's a really difficult one to shift, I think the shift needs to be a massive cultural shift because it's partly to do with relationships within the orchestra and the environment as a whole, plus the management and how they interact with the musicians. I think what Daniel's talking about – having more opportunities for exploring interpretation and for making it more about the actual people that are on stage rather than the kind of roles they're fulfilling – I think could have a massive difference, and that might be enough in fact to alter the culture. It would be amazing. Obviously in Britain we have the big time constraints and financial constraints where we often have just one or two days of rehearsal for a concert programme, and that's not enough to see what people want to do, you know – "Mandy, you're second clarinet, how do you feel this should go?". And there's not time – the conductor's just got to be there and dictate, and sometimes that's wonderful and other times it's really hard to kind of fit yourself into that box where you don't really fit.

Monia: Did you mention authenticity?

Mandy: Yes, so I think being in the orchestra, I found it very hard to be authentic. When I left the orchestra, as I say, it was a difficult decision to come to, but I was really fortunate in that I became involved in some really lovely outreach work that RLPO do. It's a partnership they've had with a mental health trust in Liverpool which they're expanding, and I was able to go into mental health units with my clarinet. I was given free rein, which was terrifying to start with but actually became quite liberating because I could just be me. I could work intuitively and it felt so much more worthwhile, so much more creative. It feels a real privilege, actually – it's just wonderful to do something meaningful that feels right to me on that day and hopefully to the people that I'm playing to on that day too, rather than playing a programme that's been decided, you know, two years before for whoever's got enough money to turn up to the concert hall and then clap politely.

Monia: Is this a way that you assisted your own students, by…

Mandy: By making it more, yes, more sort of person-centred. Yes, so I do teach now: I used to teach at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and I teach at Liverpool University and at home, but I try really hard to find out who it is that I'm teaching and nurture their musicianship rather than having a sort of stamp that I put on. I don't have a method and sometimes I feel a bit

bad about that, I feel that maybe I'm being a bit lazy not having a method but actually, I think it's really about…

Monia: It is the opposite?

Mandy: I think, yeah, I really want to know who that person is and what they can bring to music.

Monia: Because once you have a method, it can be one-size-fits-all and so you can go about it unquestioningly, whereas if you approach the person with care…I think you mentioned also care, caring for them?

Mandy: Yes, definitely. In going back to the orchestra, sometimes the conductor's asked by an orchestral member, "Are you going to be in two or four there?": well, you know, why should we need to know? Why can't it just be something that's more authentic and organic?

Monia: You said the conductor doesn't have time to ask Mandy about how she feels, should this be challenged?

Mandy: Maybe.

Monia: I'm sure there are really good reasons that you know much better than I do, who am I to say, but what are the consequences of the conductor having no time, do you think?

Mandy: I recently finished a masters in music psychology and for my dissertation, I interviewed conductors to find out what they believe they do to enable orchestral players to play at their best, and I went through a bit of a journey on that one because I started off and I was feeling quite sort of angry about it all, and then, when I talked to them, they did have good hearts. They're all good people but there is this notion, I suppose, that the conductor is the leader and needs to have this sort of power over the orchestra, and quite a few of them talked about the need to be believable but also to be authentic, to come across as authentic to the orchestra. There is that difficult balance, I think, between enabling and directing.

Monia: So they are themselves within this ideological position that constrains them?

Mandy: Yes.

Monia: Do you feel that this ideological position is addressed enough? We can become complicit within the ideology and the blame can get on performers not being resilient enough, instead of taking a more reflective and questioning stance. What is that all about?

Mandy: Yeah, I wonder, I don't know if BAPAM can help. I don't know if you're ever represented at the ABO [Association of British Orchestra] conferences and you can talk to orchestras about this? I think it is a cultural thing but it's also the way orchestras are set up and the constraints made on them, probably by Arts Council grants and stuff, that they have to do a certain number of concerts. Within these time constraints, I think it must be really difficult to find the opportunity to experiment or make changes.

Monia: I think this has been overlooked for a long time. Do you think things are changing?

Mandy: I don't know because I've seen things differently since leaving the orchestra. I still go back in to Liverpool and freelance with the orchestra, and players come up to me now and say how they wish they could do what I've done and how it's really challenging playing in an orchestra full time. I

can't really say whether it's changing or not. It's changed from my perspective, but I think that's because people see me as somebody that they can come and talk to about their gripes within the orchestra and stuff.

Monia: Could I ask you at last – I don't know if it makes any sense, I'm just wondering – what would you think would be a viable definition of 'resilience'? Because resilience is a notion that is emphasised so much in the industry, about performers having to be resilient, and usually resilience is taken to be individualistic assertiveness. What is resilience?

Mandy: I think maybe it's about trying to retain some ownership over what you do, and unfortunately, in order for me to do that, I felt I had to leave the orchestra. I'm sure there are ways of doing it within…

Monia: Maybe.

Mandy: Yeah. But going back to the conductor interviews, I was really heartened that one really great conductor said how important he feels it is for the musicians in his orchestra to go and do other stuff, and to do stuff where they actually can have a creative outlet, where they can make decisions and use music in a different, in a more meaningful way for them. Then they can bring back something to the orchestra, and I've got a hunch that if more players did more of this kind of outreach stuff, the concerts would benefit from this, from not being in this kind of crazy bubble that orchestras become part of. It's very introspective.

Monia: Is there any space for training in creativity and in what creativity in art might be about in the training of musicians and in the training of the trainers and in the training of the other stakeholders? Lots of the things that you've talked about resonate so directly with what creativity and artistic processes are about…it seems that currently the system tries to enclose them within a type of mould that runs counter to what art and creativity are all about?

Mandy: Isn't creativity about connecting with humanity? Connecting with yourself and connecting with other human beings, and so to explore that as a musician, I guess that's one path.

Monia: Yes.

Discussion

Dan Hayhurst (BAPAM): It's seems like many of the structures of the orchestra, for instance, are designed to alienate you precisely from that process, and I agree completely that that's what creativity is for or could do.

Monia: I get it from clients that I work with all the time. They say "If only this, what we do here, could be done in the conservatoire – if only we could have this type of more experiential, more dialogical encounters, in a way to allow that, if that could happen instead of just waiting to have to go to therapy to do it". The more human and relational aspect, which is so important to the arts, gets under-played and we need to put that much more forward. What do you think?

Dan Hayhurst: I think that current research is very interesting and useful but it's taking place within a particular institutional structure that is not necessarily always going to do that: they still want to produce… the product they want at the end of it is an employable classical musician so, do you know what I mean?

Monia: This raises the question of how profitable it is to have a workforce you're not taking care of, as managers, as employers?

Dan Hayhurst: My background in music is not classical, it's from bands and club music but you still see – you feel exactly the same. It's like, you've tried to look right, you've tried to wear the right clothes or whatever, just at the basic level like that, play the right things, know the right people, you know, and I think that these things get in the way of authentic communication.

Mandy: And audiences are so hungry to see any sort of aspect of human-ness.

Dan Hayhurst: Yes, even if you make a mistake, they actually do tend to love it, it's like an instant connection?

Mandy: Yes, or a string breaks or something: and suddenly it's a kind of leveller, isn't it?

Dan Hayhurst: Yes.

Monia: Thank you so much to all.

Biographical Notes

Mandy Burvill studied at Trinity College of Music with Keith Puddy and Hale Hambleton, and subsequently spent 10 years as 2nd and E-flat clarinet in the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. She is currently pursuing a varied freelance career, working regularly as guest principal with orchestras including the RLPO, Manchester Camerata and Northern Ballet.

Since leaving the RLPO Mandy has been able to concentrate more on outreach work. She has been heavily involved in the RLPO and Mersey Care's award-winning Musician in Residence programme, leading weekly sessions with adults and older people with mental health problems, dementia, learning disabilities and brain injury. In addition to teaching clarinet at the University of Liverpool and a busy private teaching practice, Mandy has recently completed a Masters in Psychology for Musicians. Mandy has made a number of concerto appearances with orchestras including Manchester Camerata and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, and has performed chamber music with artists including the Fitzwilliam Quartet, the Liverpool String Quartet, James Clark and Anthony Marwood. She is also a member of the classical improvisation group w h i t e l i n e s. She lives on the Wirral with her husband, the composer Ian Stephens, and their two lovely daughters.

Monia Brizzi is a Counselling Psychologist Chartered with the British Psychological Society and Registered with the Health and Care Professions Council. She is an Assessing Clinician at the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine in London and has been the consulting psychologist on several large cross-disciplinary projects.

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15 The legal constraints on performers

This chapter is not intended as a guide to your legal rights! It's about how IP law keeps performers in their place, as servants to the composer.

It's taken for granted that composers have legal rights that allow them to own their compositions and to be paid when they're performed. We see throughout this book that performers are doing much of the creative work that makes the music experienced by the listener. Why is that not recognised in copyright law? Why does the law suppose that the composer is the only creator, and the performer merely a reproducer?

A simple answer, probably close to the complete truth, is that the men who wrote the law grew up and lived within standard WCM ideology, believing that only composers are creative.

The problem surfaces again and again in popular music. We all know that much of the creative work on a popular music track is done in the studio, by members of the band working together, and then by the producer in the editing suite. It's not a simple case of a composer 'writing' the piece and everyone else helping to perform it. But that is what the law demands; and many cases come to court as a result, with musicians other than the nominal composer claiming, quite rightly, that they made an important contribution that should be rewarded by a share of the royalties. They succeed only very rarely, when the court is willing to be persuaded that they were in effect a co-composer. The way creativity actually happens is not recognised in law. In law, performers cannot be creatives. What could be more oppressive of performers' creativity? Why bother to contribute under these conditions?

How performers are seen in IP law

The best way to understand the disadvantaging of performers by IP law is to read Mathilde Pavis's 2016 thesis, *The Author-Performer Divide in Intellectual Property Law*.[261] Most of the rest of this chapter is drawn from her work.

Pavis identifies three key assumptions underlying the privileging of composers. The first is that they create from nothing: this is essentially the composer-genius tending towards the composer-god idea that we've seen doing so much damage in previous chapters. The second is that their work is intellectual whereas performers' work is bodily, and that only intellectual work deserves reward. It's easy to see why this idea might appeal to lawyers, but it misrepresents the nature of music-making by both composers and performers. The third is that, nonetheless, performers' work is impersonal: performers do no more than 'lend their body' (Pavis 2016, ii/52) to the sounding of the composer's work. This is, of course, exactly what WCM ideology maintains, while also insisting that performers bring something individual to their reading of the composer's text. We've seen already that that individuality is narrowly policed; and here, in IP law, we're reminded that it is too small to be recognised as creative.

[261] Pavis, Mathilde. 2016. The Author-Performer Divide in Intellectual Property Law: A Comparative Analysis of the American, Australian, British and French Legal Frameworks. PhD thesis, University of Exeter.

IP law turns the notion of a Work into a marketable commodity; but having done that it has no choice but to insist on the existence, identity and integrity of a Work. All of these Work claims, as we've seen, are undermined by recognising the role and nature (especially the changing nature) of performance. Thus everything about IP law, from its underlying concepts, though its construction and expression, to its enforcement and effects, oppresses performers. It prevents them being recognised and rewarded for their contribution to the making of music in real time, and it discourages them, therefore, from any significant personal investment in their work beyond what they can do to express their own identity in music without being criticised; which, as we've seen, is very little.

Pavis offers a number of powerful counterarguments to the law's assumptions and diktats. She points out that works can be protected before they have been notated, while still in the composer's imagination, and therefore it's not reasonable to claim that performances are too intangible to be copyrighted (Pavis 2016, i/56). Copyright reifies the intangible and can therefore reify performance if it wishes (i/62). While a recording is protected by copyright, the performance it embodies is not: other performers can copy yours and there is nothing you can do about it (i/92); a situation that copyright exists to prevent, one might have thought. But, as Pavis points out,

> any step taken by policy-makers to improve performers' protections is simultaneously hindered by the necessity to maintain the authority of authors' rights over the realm of intellectual property laws. (Pavis 2016, i/110)

Yet,

> copyright laws were purposefully designed to foster the dissemination of creative works. How can such agenda be achieved if the key players in the dissemination of dramatic, musical and choreographic works are left out of the equation? (i/171)

Of course, the idea that composers create *ex nihilo*, from nothing, making work that is wholly original to them, is laughable; and yet it is essential to the working of IP law (i/221). As Pavis puts it,

> This conception of the author as the solitary intellectual genius is outdated, inaccurate and has been disproved by a long-standing body of empirical research in creativity. Yet, the legal narrative framing contemporary copyright still embraces it. (ii/13–14)

Faced with evidence that performers have made contributions to a work, the courts (in both the UK and USA) have argued that composers foresee any interpretative variations, and therefore any that occur belong to them, not to the performer who makes them (ii/95–6).

Why such desperation, sustaining an unfair legal system based on absurd claims? First because the men (usually) who judge these cases, like the men who framed the legislation, are the sort of people who are brought up in this culture, people who go to the opera, whose children and grandchildren take music lessons, who know enough, just enough, to know that composers are the foundation and *raison d'etre* of WCM, but not enough to know that composition is a mix of intertextuality and imagined performance along with variable amounts of creativity, nor how much performance brings to the identity associated with a score that makes it seem to be a work. Second because it makes the distribution of money so much simpler if only one person has to be paid, and that suits the employer, with whose requirements lawmakers find it much easier to identify than with those of musicians.

How performers' options are limited by moral rights

But the situation for performers is worse than this. For the law also discourages them from being creative in performing scores as long as they are covered by what are (ironically, one might think) called moral rights,

> which were introduced to curb performative practices taking what was considered as too much liberty with the works artists interpreted on stage. (Pavis 2016, i/118–9)

Thus according to the UK's Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, section 80

> The author of a copyright… work … has the right … not to have his [sic] work subjected to derogatory treatment. … "[T]reatment" of a work means any addition to, deletion from or alteration to or adaptation of the work, other than … an arrangement or transcription of a musical work involving no more than a change of key or register… [T]he treatment of a work is derogatory if it amounts to distortion of mutilation of the work or is otherwise prejudicial to the honour of reputation of the author…

In principle this allows a composer, or their estate for as long as their scores remain in copyright, to object to any performance that they can persuade a court damages the honour (?!) or reputation of the composer. In a famous case the estate of Samuel Beckett sought (in some countries succeeding) to prevent the performance of *Waiting for Godot* by women actors (and in the USA black actors) on the grounds that it contravened Beckett's expressed wish.[262] A musical case might not be too hard to construct, given the highly detailed instructions contemporary composers often put in their scores, and it would be fascinating to see it argued in court. In practice, if one follows the ethical principles proposed here in Chapter 11.3 of courtesy to the composer and their immediate family, a case might never arise. Nonetheless, one can see how careful the law forces performers to be for as long as scores remain in copyright. Any act of non-normativity could be construed as derogatory: to judge by the language of record reviews (Chapter 9.2) you might think that a great many performances already are. Do we really wish, even when doing our best to reproduce the wishes of living or relatively recently-dead composers, to be constrained from any difference from past practice save transposition?

In French, Italian and Spanish law (and that of many non-EU countries), moral rights remain with the author or their descendants *for ever*, even if they transfer all the economic rights in their work to others. So even if, for example, the estate of Francis Poulenc (d. 1963) were to sell me the rights to one of his scores, so that I received all the economic benefits of authorship, they could still pursue me for damages if they didn't like my performance; and they and their descendants could do that for all eternity. Mathilde Pavis comments,

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[262] Further reading can usefully start with Pavis, Mathilde. 2018. ICH and Safeguarding: Uncovering the Cultural Heritage Discourse of Copyright. In Charlotte Waelde, Catherine Cummings, Mathilde Pavis and Helen Enright (eds.), *Research Handbook on Contemporary Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Cheltenham: Elgar), 296–340. Note that courts in Italy and the Netherlands, however, both rejected the Beckett estate's claim. Also, Pavis, Mathilde. 2014. Is There Any-*body* on Stage? A Legal (mis)Understanding of Performances. *Platform: Journal of Theatre and Performing Arts* 8/ii, 11-41.

> Once the author is dead, the estate would have to prove that the way you perform the music would have been objected to by the composer. This can be done by producing writing (any writing) of the composer not liking certain styles or types of performance of their work(s), or witnesses (e.g. former student or performers having worked under their direction) confirming that this or that style of interpretation for this or that work would have contravened their perception of the work's integrity.[263]

As time passes, of course, there are unlikely to be any listeners alive who don't feel that contemporary performances are appropriate, provided that they're consistent with current general performance style. (Recall the discussion in Chapter 4 of the Barber *Adagio*, whose character has radically changed while still in copyright without anyone minding; though note that in this case it's been hugely to the advantage of Barber's estate.) We've seen already that, because of the way performance style, practices, values and tastes change so much over longer spans of time, performances that one generation thinks perfect come eventually to be seen as distortions or mutilations by another. Thus performances may always be violating moral rights for all except contemporary scores. All that saves performers from the courts is that, because general style has changed, nobody seems to mind. As long as you don't do anything that's currently unusual.

The law, then, puts you the performer in exactly the same place that all other gatekeepers put you. That's to say, in your place.

Sensible IP law (we're back in Utopia, now) would prefer freedom of expression and accept performers' right to perform a score as they wish, seeing their performance as just as creative and original as the composer's own, and understanding musical production in WCM as a process in which many people (listeners included) contribute at different times and with varying ideals. But, as we see, the sensible approach is not always available within the law. So although the grounds for complaint differ from one country to another—and although in most cases it would be difficult for complainants to show that (e.g. in France, as asserted by a composer or their heirs) a 'work's' integrity had been compromised or (in the UK, in the view of a 'reasonable person'[264]) a composer's honour and reputation damaged—performers, who already live with a sense of artistic inferiority and with a fear of professional censure, may be still less comfortable about being seriously counter-normative when performing a score before copyright has expired and/or the first few owners of the deceased composer's rights are themselves safely dead.[265] The law may pose only modest risk in practice, then,[266] but its mere suggestion, under the circumstances, may be enough to deter innovation, at any rate for a generation or two.

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[263] Personal correspondence, 4 May 2020, for which many thanks to her.

[264] We would be wise to assume that in the courts a reasonable person would be considered to be one who was familiar with the normal practices and values of WCM, not a potentially more open-minded layperson.

[265] Details of the duration and nature of moral rights are summarised usefully in Bird & Bird. 2020. Moral rights in Europe: a comparative study. *Practical Law UK* Articles 2-385-0803. https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/2-385-0803 .

[266] Mathilde Pavis writes that, 'One of the few examples [to come to court was] Confetti Records v Warner Music (2003). … In the case, the composer complained about the fact that the (rap) lyrics superimposed on his work referenced violence and drugs. The court rejected the claim on the basis that the lyrics were incomprehensible upon listening, even at slow speed.' https://www.bailii.org/cgi-bin/format.cgi?doc=/ew/cases/EWHC/Ch/2003/1274.html: the pertinent arguments begin at para 145.

Continue to Part 3, Chapter 18 ‘Allowing Creativity’ (Chapters 16–17 will be inserted in due course)

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PART 3: Allowing Creativity

After so many chapters outlining problems—illusions, delusions, myths, ways in which WCM falls short (especially for performers) of what it's imagined to be—it is more than time for us to start to look at solutions.

We can begin by reminding ourselves—in view of the extraordinary skills that are now taken for granted throughout the profession—how richly performers deserve to be respected and celebrated for *their own* musicianship; to have rights and opportunities to offer insights and to have those heard and valued, praised and properly rewarded. But these opportunities will only become routine once many persuasive examples of performers being more creative with scores are available in live and recorded performances. And so the purpose of this Part 3 of *Challenging Performance: Classical Music Performance Norms and How to Escape Them* is to offer a route to that desirable destination, where truly creative performance of canonical scores becomes exciting for many listeners and for many in gatekeeping roles across the profession.

In Chapter 18, therefore, we look first at creativity in principle, and see how it's become taken for granted in another major performance artform, classical theatre. Chapter 19 brings together key points made in earlier chapters about the ethics of performance and what we owe to composers, performers and listeners, so that we can be clear about what really matters when we make music using a score. Chapter 20 summarises why it's so important to begin to perform classical scores differently, and then looks at some simple techniques we can use to get started. Chapter 21 pulls together previous examples from early recordings showing a variety of historical approaches to singing and playing differently. Chapter 22 looks at the essential criteria for a successful performance and at how we might evaluate performances that are more varied.

Then in Chapters 23 and 24 (24 on opera) we look at a variety of recent experimental approaches to performing scores creatively. These examples are made by a variety of performers, each taking a different approach and with different motivations and aims. Their purpose is to show how much more might be possible, and how each musician can take scores in new and genuinely individual directions.

Continue to Chapter 18.1 Introduction to creativity

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18.1 Recapitulatory introduction after Juniper Hill

Parts 1 and 2 have argued that there could and should be much more creativity in WCM performance, and Part 2 has shown why and how it is prevented. But what do we mean by creativity? Isn't it all relative? Many performers believe themselves to be highly creative, and, in the very narrow space allowed to them, indeed they are. It'll be clear by now that by 'creative' I mean much more. Perhaps it's best defined in Juniper Hill's book, *Becoming Creative* (2018), already quoted in Chapter 7.4 (on 'conservatoire and creativity'). She proposes six ingredients: '(1) generativity, (2) agency, (3) interaction, (4) nonconformity, (5) recycling, and (6) flow', where 'generativity' is the ability to make something, 'agency' the sense that one has the authority to do so, 'interaction' the ability to work with others and others' material, 'nonconformity' the freedom to differ, 'recycling' the new use of existing ideas, and 'flow' the ability to produce persuasive and engaging continuity (Hill 2018, 4–9). For Hill, 'realizing pre-existing works should only be considered creative when the process also involves other components of creativity' (Hill 2018, 4), although not all are required all the time. Hill warns (12) that 'it is the component of nonconformity that threatens to make creativity socially undesirable. Powerful social mechanisms encourage conformity and work as adverse motivators against individuals' intrinsic desire to be creative.' And thus (13) self-esteem and courage are vital for creativity to be fostered in WCM. Skills needed to enable creativity are instrumental or vocal technique (of course), sufficient aural skills to turn something into something that sounds; memory is used to call up things done before (by oneself or others), practical knowledge of musical syntax to make material that flows well; real-time decision-making is also essential (there's a limit to how long one can doodle wondering where to go next); and finally, Hill suggests, self-assessment allows one to refine and improve (Hill 2018, 15–16). Listed like this, the requirements may seem daunting, but in fact many are in use already to a smaller degree in normative performance. What creativity requires is simply that one takes (and feels empowered to take) them further.

This is not to say that classically trained musicians face no initial difficulties when asked to be creative (Hill 2018, 31–2): they certainly do, for noticeable creativity is specifically trained out of them in early years. But it can be let back in and developed, and with it comes renewed delight in making music. It should never have been discouraged in the first place, needless to say.

18.2 Comparison with theatre

Biranda Ford, in 'a comparison of music and acting students' concepts of preparation, audience and performance' (2013),[267] comments on how differently acting and music students approach performance. That cannot be surprising to anyone who goes to both theatre productions and musical performances of classic texts. That difference between production and performance is itself telling. For musicians the idea that one might 'produce' a score seems shocking; for actors the idea that one might correctly 'perform' a text is bizarre. Why are these traditions of practice so unalike, especially given that these are the two major live-performance arts dealing in the shaping of feelings over time? Should they not have more interests in common?

It's helpful to try, for a moment, to see each in the light of the other. Writing of theatre practice Richard Schechner (2013) presents the interrelationships between 'sourcers' (authors, choreographers, composers, dramaturgs etc.), producers (directors, conductors, coaches, designers, technicians etc.), performers, and partakers (spectators, fans, juries, the public etc.)—which together he calls 'the performance quadrilogue'—as interactive and potentially varied, according to the preferred way of working for each producer.[268] Whatever the interrelationship, though, the artistic outcomes are worked out collaboratively to a much greater degree than in WCM, where even *dia*logue in the preparation of a performance is a luxury to be savoured. At the most basic level, the kinds of skills that students learn as technique are startlingly unalike in principle (quite apart from the obvious differences between speech and music). Actors learn to speak a commonplace phrase in many different voices and characters; musicians learn to play a phrase, to all intents and purposes, in just one. In acting there is a performance to be made; in music a performance to be given.

(Take a look at this acting exercise. https://youtu.be/Ohbh3bo5HDA?t=25. Then try to perform a musical phrase in as many significantly different characters as you can. It's salutary.)

I don't suppose we think that Shakespeare is a lesser artist than Beethoven. But relatively few, I imagine, think that Shakespeare still minds how we perform his plays; or that we owe him a duty of faithfulness to perform them in full and in the manner he expected; or that actors must be trained in *the* correct way of speaking his words; or that if they speak them in a novel way they are being unfaithful or disrespectful; or that they should read a text just as their teacher recommends; or that creativity must be limited to small details of intonation; or that performance norms need be so strictly drawn that a play can be staged on one rehearsal, or as traditionally as a religious ritual.[269]

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[267] Ford, Biranda. 2013. Approaches to Performance: A Comparison of Music and Acting Students' Concepts of Preparation, Audience and Performance. *Music Performance Research* 6, 152–69.

[268] Schechner, Richard. 2013. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. 3rd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge). Until recently music studies have been quite oblivious of this field of 'performance studies'; as Nicolas Cook and Richard Pettengill observe at the start of their introduction to the first collaborative collection of essays in these fields (2013, 1), 'The wonder is not that music and performance studies come together in this book, but that they ever needed to be brought together.' Cook, Nicholas and Pettengill, Richard. 2013. *Taking It to the Bridge: Music as Performance*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press).

[269] Patricia Kopatchinskaja, in an interview with Laurence Vittes (*Strings* no. 254, June 2016, p. 19), says: 'When you attend a play, for example, you hear the director's view, whether it's Shakespeare in costumes of our time, or different spaces and times. In classical music, however, it's been prohibited to think like that. It's like we're

Looked at from the perspective of theatre, and its high public profile and widespread appeal, these beliefs seem quite mad.

A telling reflection of these differences can be found in newspaper theatre reviews compared to the kinds of things we saw music critics saying in chapter 9.

> In 18 years as the *Observer*'s theatre critic I have totted up 24 productions [of *Hamlet*] – although I may have forgotten a couple. Some are barely recognizable as the same play.[270]
>
> "To be or not to be" is more of a "to do or not to do". The speech is now delivered well into the action, though a little earlier than usual. I would have been curious to see it open the play, as it did throughout most of the previews. It might have given the production an extra touch on the tiller, and helped to make director Lyndsey Turner's whirling ideas coalesce.[271]

It is impossible to imagine any classical music critic writing in those terms of a symphony, or even that the notion of reordering its constituents might cross her mind. And yet, why not? If it works for Shakespeare, bringing fresh insights that help the play to live, then why not for Beethoven? Is this why a theatre production can sell enough tickets to sustain a run of repeat performances while few concerts sell out once?

The nearest we come to this is in opera, needless to say, where what happens on stage—determined by a theatre director who comes from this kind of creative (*Regietheater*) tradition—is fresh and often revelatory, while what comes from the singers and the pit, wonderful as it may be, is almost exactly the same as every other recent performance. So you have two productions running simultaneously, usually contradicting each other. Holly Champion (2016, esp 400–01) has called this the 'fidelity dichotomy',[272] where musical production tends towards strict fidelity to normative views of the composer's intentions or imagined historical practice, whereas for theatre fidelity is hardly an issue: the question there is what kinds of light the text can shed on current concerns. For opera performance in which staging and music are anywhere near the same page one has to look either to supposedly 'historical' productions of early opera, which aim to recreate period performance style and period staging, or to the so far tiny number of productions in which the music is reinterpreted along the same lines as the staging. Helios Collective's 2016 'Dido & Belinda', which we'll discuss in chapter 24, is perhaps the most thoroughgoing example of that. This is surely the direction in which it would make sense for opera performance to go.

Who is opera for? Anyone who'll pay the high ticket prices, is the most obvious answer; and for the reasons we've seen over and over, that means those with status and a status quo to protect. But so is theatre, on the whole, and there these same people are perfectly happy (perhaps more than

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in a robot world in which everyone has to achieve a certain level of playing, which is polished, shiny, perfect, beautiful—and that's it. Everything else is considered a disturbing element.'

[270] Susannah Clapp, Genius, coward… or madman? Why Hamlet gives actors the ultimate test. *The Observer*, 9 August 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/aug/09/hamlet-ultimate-actors-test-benedict-cumberbatch

[271] Susannah Clapp, *The Observer, New Review*, 30 August 2015, p. 23. Clapp is interesting and informative on female Hamlets in 'To be a she or not to be', *The Observer, New Review*, 21 September 2014, p. 21. Online with different title: https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/sep/21/hamlet-maxine-peake-royal-exchange-review-delicate-ferocity

[272] Champion, Holly. 2016. Dramaturgical Analysis of Opera Performance: Four Recent Productions of *Dido and Aeneas*. PhD thesis, University of New South Wales.

usually happy) to see Hamlet or Henry V as a woman. But not Siegfried. The much admired theatre director Robert Icke, on directing Ibsen's 'The Wild Duck', said:

> I'm interested in somebody who goes to opera and loves classical theatre and knows their classics, but I'm just as interested in someone who's watched 'Gogglebox' coming to see 'The Wild Duck', you know, and I want to give that person the same quality and intensity of experience that I give to somebody who already knows the rules. I sort of feel like, if you've watched TV, if you're alive in the world, and you speak the language that's being spoken, you should be able to participate in an act of theatre, and if you can't then I think the act of theatre's got something wrong.

Could that not be true of WCM, and if not why not? There's a difference between dumbing down and being comprehensible and accessible. 'Try and make it as natural as possible', Icke says; and that's a good guideline, I think.

> None of these plays were designed to be performed as museum theatre, and so I feel very strongly that I don't want to be alive at a time where all we do is go, 'Oh god, didn't they write great plays 200 years ago?'
>
> Every single decision that you make is a now decision by a now group of creatives with the goal, I guess, of speaking to a now audience. And I think sometimes to pretend otherwise is actually disingenuous. … It's necessary to update. (Robert Icke, Radio 4, 'Behind the Scenes', Weds 15th May 2019)

What this foray into theatre practice shows us, I think, is that there is a perfectly good model for performing classic texts that's highly successful as an artistic and commercial practice and that provides all the precedent one needs for a more creative approach to WCM. All that prevents it is the beliefs of those brought up to it.

We have only to imagine for a second how dreary theatre would be if every performance of 'Hamlet' used the same staging, the same costumes, the same gestures, the same intonations—all enforced by an ideologically-driven community of actors, directors, producers, theatre managers, owners, critics and scholars—to see how disastrously WCM has backed itself into a corner where no one else feels much inclined to go.

Just apply some of the critics' comments quoted in Chapter 9 to a performance of 'To be or not to be' in which the pause between 'be' and 'or' was slightly longer than usual, or 'not' was just a little higher in pitch or a little more drawn out—the actor damned as egocentric, narcissistic, intrusive, exaggerated, mannered, distracting, vulgar, or coy—and you will immediately see how deathly that would be to a lively theatre culture, and how deeply damaged WCM is.

It's more than time for a new approach.

Continue to Chapter 19 'The ethics of musical performance'

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19 The Ethics of Musical Performance

19.1 Ethical recapitulation

In Chapter 11 above we looked at obligations to the dead and particularly, in 11.3, at ethical obligations to composers, alive and dead. The gist of the argument there was that we have social obligations of courtesy to living composers which may transfer for a while after their deaths to their close family and loved ones. But that apart from those, we have none to composers who are dead. Our obligations, rather, are to the living. This chapter is concerned more with ethical relationships among performers and listeners as they make music, and between them and employers, promoters and critics.

It's been axiomatic throughout that music is made not only by performers (certainly not only by composers) but also by listeners, whose minds make music from sounds as they listen. We've seen in every chapter how the making of music by listeners (including performers) is affected by their beliefs about what music (and performances of particular scores) should be like. Ethical questions loom large in that process. We've seen (especially in Chapters 7, 9 and 13–14) how beliefs about what's proper can mould and damage musicians and limit what's offered to listeners. If those beliefs are groundless, as Parts 1 and 2 of this book have argued, then—and perhaps in any case, given the damage they do—there is a strong moral case for abandoning them. Part 3 argues that, once we do that, a great many new possibilities for making music starting from scores ('western classical music') become available to us.

An ethics of classical music needs a consistent vision that guides the training of musicians, their employment, critique of their work, and also—interwoven with these issues of behaviour—an understanding of the empathy that performances of WCM model, foster and enhance, all considered together with a view of options for performance. Some of those questions of modelling were set out in Chapter 12.2.

These chapters provide us with bases for considering what an ethical practice of WCM might involve. And so I suggest we accept here, as a foundation, that we have no obligations to dead composers to reproduce their wishes indefinitely. (If you don't accept that then you probably gave up reading many chapters ago.) And in that case we stop forcing young musicians (because they are forced) to learn to perform scores in one, narrowly circumscribed, widely-approved manner. We—even those of us who in an ideal world would still prefer to hear what the composer imagined—do this also because we now admit that we cannot know what composers expected until the dawn of recording. And because we recognise, from the wide differences in musical practice documented by recordings, that there have already been many different yet highly successful approaches to making music from the same scores, and therefore there are likely to be many more waiting to be found. Opening teaching to more creative music-making leads in turn to more varied careers and a more diverse musical culture, speaking to larger and more diverse audiences.

At the same time, music gains the ability to model a much greater variety of Others. We've already seen something of the ways in which music does this by modelling the dynamics (loosely, the

shapes) of feeling states. It's tempting to say that in this sense we have an ethical relationship with music; but I find that that misses the rather crucial point that, while it may be like a person with whom we form a relationship, and thereby teach us things about forming and maintaining relationships, music is not a person.[273] It is at best virtual, which means that we can use it as a test-bed for seeking and testing limits without doing harm to anyone. And this is another respect in which creating new performances from old scores can be productive and helpful, a respect in which ignoring indications from the composer may allow us, ethically as well as practically, to learn much about how relationships can change, or be radically other, and still be profoundly satisfying.

When we perform in this way, I think we should be able to expect, for all the same reasons outlined above, that employers, promoters, critics, and all kinds of gatekeepers will show a related understanding of what we're doing and why. This involves a large part of the music business, which has been used to ruling on what is acceptable according to the old assumptions, rethinking its premisses. That's a tall order and it won't happen quickly. But it will happen gradually once musicians insist on making new kinds of performances, regardless of the wailing and gnashing of teeth from the stalls, where those who feel entitled to rule on musical performance are mainly to be found. An ethical approach to others is, after all, most threatening to the very class that currently funds and oversees most WCM. They regard it as their music. That has to change if it's to have any role in the future.[274]

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[273] Here I agree with Jeff Warren's criticism (Warren 2014, 159–60) of Naomi Cumming's (2000, 284) claim that music's person-like qualities give it some of the same rights and demands that a human being has. Warren quotes Levinas (1981, 41) calling this a 'misleading anthropomorphism or animism'. Warren, Jeff R. 2014. *Music and Ethical Responsibility* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Cumming, Naomi. 2000. *The Sonic Self: Musical Subjectivity and Signification* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press). Levinas, Emmanuel. 1981. *Otherwise than Being* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press).

[274] Bull (2019, 192) writes: 'Against the discourse in policy and music education practice that classical music education just needs more investment in order to open up this cultural practice to everyone, I am arguing that classical music has stronger links with the middle class than just the economic — that the practices themselves are associated with key traits of bourgeois identity. This does not mean that this music cannot be reclaimed or resignified, but that both the practices and the aesthetic of classical music have to change if classed, raced, and gendered hierarchies are not to be reproduced alongside musical ones. This requires a loosening of musical boundaries in order to open up the social boundaries.'

19.2 Ethical coda

Almost thirty years ago Philip Bohlman (1993) pointed to some of the ways in which essentializing music—as 'the music'—evaded questions of politics (i.e. who uses it to achieve what on behalf of whom and at whose expense).[275] Many of those questions have arisen here, where we've seen WCM performance ideology used to ensure homogeneity of belief and practice. Even those scholars who have most vigorously challenged beliefs about music's identity and ontology have not often asked the questions that clearly follow about the ways in which performances of scores are currently constrained. Which simply goes to show how deeply these beliefs are ingrained, surviving in the area of musical taste even when removed from that of discourse. This was the very same self-contradiction that bedevilled Adorno's attempt to write about performance in the 1950s.

Several recent studies have addressed music and ethics in other ways that touch on those considered here, and it may be helpful to comment on some of these.

Marcel Cobussen and Nanette Nielsen in *Music and Ethics* (2012) point out that philosophical treatments of the relationship between works and performances have mainly been concerned with 'the sense of "doing justice"' and have been hamstrung by being rooted in the work concept, the notion that musical works somehow exist.[276] They argue tellingly that the fact that music is socially situated and contributes to the construction of social identities (as DeNora (2000) so effectively showed) gives it power over us.[277] But we have to remember alongside this point that the performances that help to mould identities, both for performers and listeners, are themselves policed, by our training as well as more immediately by other kinds of gatekeeper. In that situation where are the ethical obligations? In the policing every bit as much as in the performing. And the more 'faithful' the performance the more the responsibility lies in the gatekeeping that determines faithfulness. If, as Cobussen & Nielsen argue following Frith, music forces itself on bodies that have no choice but to respond, then those who set the rules for acceptable performance owe the rest of us a powerful justification for the constraints they impose. So if someone is going to tell us how to play the Moonlight sonata we need to know why. And "because the composer said so" is not a good enough reason. Someone would be ethically obliged to convince us, if they wanted to insist we play it as they think the composer wanted it to go, both that they know how that was, which they certainly don't, and, much more relevantly, that that way is the best way it can possibly go. As we've seen now from many angles, it's not possible to come anywhere near showing that. There is no 'the music' to which we should be doing justice. What 'the' music is depends on what *we* do with the score.

Jeff R Warren (2014) has considered some of these questions. In relation to 'proper' performances:

> Views that argue for an unchanging meaning of music are not ethically neutral. Imposing a single meaning is an exercise of power that is closed to negotiation and discussion with others, and thus closed to ethical responsibility. (65)

[275] Bohlman, Philip V. 1993. Musicology as a Political Act. *Journal of Musicology* 11/4, 411–36.
[276] Cobussen, Marcel, and Nielsen, Nanette. 2012. *Music and Ethics*. Farnham: Ashgate.
[277] DeNora, Tia. 2000. *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

And in relation to the responsibilities that go with recognising music's modelling of an Other:

> … ethical responsibility is not to music itself, but a responsibility to other people who may be influenced by the trace of my encounter with music. (162)

This is easy to agree: music may cause me to behave differently towards others, and I need to be sure that that behaviour is ethical. Music is not special in this way: the same could be true of going to the cinema, or reading a book, or responding to anything at all that seems to exhibit qualities of other people in such a way that I might react differently to other people after reacting to it.

> We contact music, experience the trace of others and leave a trace of ourselves. Music is thus never completely our own. Encounters with music involve traces of others that we must respond to. (164)

Thus as performers we have ethical responsibilities, not to 'the music itself',[278] nor to the long-dead composer, but rather to others whom our performances may influence. This is not to say that we are responsible for their consequent actions, but it is an injunction to be careful of what we may cause them to feel. That said, we cannot allow listeners to feel entitled not to be challenged by a performance. That is the situation that currently exists. WCM performance has so completely failed to see itself as a critical artistic practice that audiences do feel entitled to be pleased and reassured when they go to a concert. This explains much of the hostility to modernist music, although it has also to be admitted that modernist composers felt equally entitled to be performed as they wished. HIP briefly challenged normative taste, albeit from a fundamentalist position wishing to replace one norm with another. But essentially the idea that it could be both desirable and ethical for a musical *performance* to offer a radical challenge to norms and values is otherwise new.

What constraints should there be? I suggest there is only one ethical obligation on musical providers, including performers: not to cause serious harm, not to use music cruelly.[279] Beyond that, it's hard to see that musical performance requires any constraints of principle, aside from basic economic issues like paying fees and royalties.

One may *choose* constraints in practice, to give focus to a performance style, for example, or to make decisions easier (see Chapter 6.19 on this): but one's choices should be one's own, not another's or a culture's unless accepted after free, critical thought.

For what is abundantly clear is that any position that privileges the composer or 'the music' leads quickly to an environment in which 'the music' is valued more than its performers.[280] And from that follows the very poor treatment of WCM performers which we see all around us, and which we've considered most closely in chapters 7 (teaching), 9 (criticism), 13 (agency) and 14 (ill-health).

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[278] Mary Hunter offers a fine survey of the process by which music philosophy arrived at the belief that performance must recreate the imagination of the composer, in Hunter, Mary. 2005. "To Play as if from the Soul of the Composer": The Idea of the Performer in Early Romantic Aesthetics. *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 58/2, 357–98.

[279] See for example Cusick, Suzanne G. 2008. "You are in a place that is out of the world…": Music in the Detention Camps of the "Global War on Terror". *Journal of the Society for American Music* 2/1, 1–26.

[280] See also chapter 14 and the important recent book by William Cheng, *Loving Music Till It Hurts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), esp. pp. 1–10.

To put it at its most direct, the Moonlight sonata may be Beethoven's composition, but it is not his music. It's ours, in performance and in individuals' experience of performance, and it exists nowhere else.

Finally under this topic, it's important to say a little about a value that has figured importantly many times in this book, and that is crucial in the examples that follow here in Part 3, the persuasiveness of a performance. I have presented this repeatedly as the one value that is required of a successful performance, that it persuades the listener of its worth. There can be any number of views as to how it does that. For me, it's vital that it makes engaging musico-dramatic sense, that's to say it generates a deeply involving sequence of models of human-like feeling states which I can follow intuitively while also enjoying and admiring the use the performer makes of the details in the score. Others will have different ideals for their experience of music. But we all, I think, wish to be persuaded by performers that the music they make finds something latent in the score, even if (for some of us, especially if) it's never been found before. Otherwise there's no point in starting from a score. And indeed, it is not essential to do so. But if one is going to, then doing something with the score that seems to 'work' with the syntactical relationships between its notes (to the debatable extent that that can be separated from how they are performed) is what we want. I'll say more about making music work in Chapter 22.

For now, the issue is about the power of persuasion. Attempts to use music to persuade people to act differently are part of our everyday lives, in video, in advertising, in politics and war, as well as in meditation, religious practice, music therapy, and any number of other activities. Indeed, in a sense it's what music always intends to do. We don't need reminding that it can induce us to do things that are not in our best interests. But perhaps that is worth bearing in mind as one advocates an approach to the performance of classical scores that is not constrained by convention or by indications in the score. Because clearly this opens up even more possibilities than are already exploited to use performances of WCM to mis-lead. And so it places more responsibility onto performers to think carefully about what their work may be able to do. That does not seem an unreasonable burden. It's easy to see how musicians have long been infantilised by having their music-making determined for them by authority figures and institutions. Taking responsibility for it in ethical as well as artistic respects only accepts agency restored to its rightful place.

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20 Why and How?

20.1 Why?

Why is it so important now to start to perform classical scores differently? In sum:

Because (Part 1 above) to believe that there is broadly one correct way to perform a classical score is mistaken ethically, historically, and factually.

Because (Part 2 above) the policing of conformity by gatekeepers that is required to enforce this mistake—to prevent it being noticed, exposed and challenged—denies performers full credit for their arguably equal contribution (with composers) and a just financial reward for their contribution; and denies them the right and ability to be innovative or even significantly creative.

Because as a result of that policing

– many musicians are made ill, psychologically and/or physically, through stress, anxiety, uncertainty, tension, strain, and other symptoms of abuse
– many young musicians give up music in frustration in their teens or early 20s and are disappointed for life by the narrowness forced on them by teachers and exams
– those who knuckle under and continue to obey experience a career in music increasingly frustrated by performing the same scores in the same ways year after year
– audiences consist largely of those who enjoy the security of knowing what they like and liking what they know, reducing classical music to comfort for the already comfortable
– the economic and the social potential of classical music are limited to the barely viable and the irrelevant
– and because classical music could be so much more than this if all this superfluous, damaging and indefensible policing were removed

Because, therefore, we owe it to musicians and potential musicians, and to audiences and potential audiences, to expose the mistaken beliefs that underlie classical music practices; to open up new options for musicians and audiences; and to begin to offer models of how one might re-read classical scores in a more creative and innovative and more rewarding and fulfilling artistic, economic and social environment.

20.2 How?

How are we to begin to get these scores to work differently and variously?

Stop asking permission

The main requirement is to ditch the composer- and work-centred belief system (chapters 1–6), which means not looking to them for permission, and instead to teach creativity and improvisation

(chapter 7). While this still creates hostility amongst gatekeepers (inside and beyond the conservatory) we need to provide safe spaces for students to experiment (on this see Hill 2018, 177–82), not just soundproof rooms in conservatoire corners, but safe spaces where musicians can come together from far and wide, spaces such as summer schools and festivals for alternative performances, where ideas can be exchanged and developed enjoyably with encouragement, leading to a chance to share the results. There are enough young professionals and advanced students keen to develop new approaches for such events to be popular and productive, now, I think. (It would be good to hear from people who'd like to do this.)

Think theatre

On the broader stage we need to start to treat concert-going like theatre-going, and treat performing somewhat more like acting in the sense that a performance of a canonical score begins to involve asking what else its notes might do,[281] and what we can learn from them that's pertinent to current concerns. Performing WCM needs to involve discovery: going to concerts one needs to risk being surprised, perhaps even to go in the hope of being surprised; at any rate, changed.

What does this mean for performers? How are performers to generate new meaning from apparently well-known scores? (For a historical example see Daniel Barolsky's Chapter 20a.)

Performance indications

The first task is simply to experiment, to take risks, to sing and play in ways one 'knows' are 'wrong'. As a first exercise it can be revealing to do just the opposite of performance indications in score. We did that here with the Moonlight/Erlking pair already discussed in Chapter 5, exchanging their usual characters. As the sound examples show, we discovered parallel universes for those scores. Perhaps the greatest benefit (though I think the expressive musical results in each case are pretty interesting) was to enable us to appreciate the extent of the interpretative space that is available if only one has the courage to step into it. If performances as different as these are possible, what else might be?

Technique and posture

Along the same lines it may be productive to do just the opposite of what one is supposed to do technically or with one's body. For some musicians 'correct' technique or correct posture are not those in which they feel most relaxed and able to focus on being musical with a score. Training may prevent one from ever discovering that; which is why a deliberate attempt to work differently, exploring other ways of making sound with one's body and one's instrument, can sometimes be revelatory, the more so because they 'shouldn't' be.

Performance style

Although the speeds changed in our Moonlight and 'Erlkönig', and many other details changed with them in order to make sense of them, the performance style remained unaltered. But there is much to learn from past performance styles as documented on the oldest recordings. There, as well as differences of tempo and character, the rules of musicianship—what is ensemble, what is tempo,

[281] 'Performance is not about revealing what a piece of music is expressively, but about what it could be.' Doğantan-Dack, Mine. (forthcoming 2021). Aesthetics meets the performing body: Re-thinking Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto. In ed. Garrett Michaelsen and Chris Stover, *Making Music Together: Analytical Perspectives on Musical Interaction*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

what is phrasing, what is line?—are very unlike our own, sometimes almost opposite. Again, we can see a huge space around what's been done in the past century, a space that must have room for many other performance styles, many other views of how to sound the basic constituents of a score musically. If these underlying styles can be so unalike in just a century, how many more may be possible that have never yet been made, and how much different musicianship must already have been practised in the past that is now lost to us? These models should be inspiring. It can be highly productive to copy past recordings; not mindless, as one might imagine, but revelatory in teaching one's body to be differently musical.[282]

Narratives

We can learn from acting, too, by working more with character and mood, choosing a character for a passage in a score and playing or singing it as specifically as possible. There's nothing novel about this as an approach to expressive performance: it's simply a matter of trying more characters, not seeking 'the' one that's 'correct'. We need to tell new stories with scores. When there are texts to be sung it's relatively straightforward to use the voice to suggest quite new meanings (listen to some of Diana Gilchrist's ten 'Ave Maria's). For instrumental music, bringing a cultural or political commentary to a performance simply through sound is a lot more challenging. But it's always an option to explain to an audience what a performance is aiming to suggest. We need more interaction between stage and hall in any case, involving audiences in finding meanings together. It's often easier, and for an audience fascinating, to suggest stories via associations with other kinds of sounds. There's a lovely example of this in Daniel Barolsky's Chapter 20a where Chopin's *Berceuse*, with the great Josef Hofmann in 1937, gains a tolling bell.

Genres

We can also question orthodoxies about the character of different forms and periods of composition. Why must a 'Baroque' piece have one dominant Affekt? Bach is a wonderful example here, music in which there is so much subtle change from moment to moment, even though a figure may look unchanged melodically and rhythmically. Why not respond to that much more fluidly? Or 'Romantic' music, for which the choices at present seem to lie between clean/straight and clean/straight with rather more vibrato and loudness. What happened to the salon? How about a little vulgarity in the mix? Must the movements of a piece always come in the same order? What happens if you change not only the character but also the sequence of sections? Omit some or insert some? Improvise (see David Dolan's and Bobby Mitchell's work)?

Beware categories that sanitise

Although there's no reason in principle not to—in principle there can be no limits other than avoiding serious harm to the living—I'm not for now suggesting drawing on other musical genres such as jazz. This is only because of the danger of one's work being labelled 'crossover' and thereby being put into a safe-box where it's felt no longer to threaten mainstream practice. That's the danger of any position that has a readymade category to slot into. Anything that can be put into it no

[282] For three remarkable examples see: Slåttebrekk, Sigurd and Tony Harrison. 2010. *Chasing the Butterfly: Recreating Grieg's 1903 Recordings and Beyond…* http://www.chasingthebutterfly.no/. Scott, Anna. 2014. Romanticizing Brahms: Early Recordings and the Reconstruction of Brahmsian Identity (PhD thesis, University of Leiden). Stam, Emlyn. 2019. In Search of a Lost Language: Performing in Early-Recorded Style in Viola and String Quartet Repertoires (PhD thesis, University of Leiden).

longer challenges the norm. My whole intent here is to demote the norm so that it becomes simply one further option, equal with any other: that's to say, it's no longer 'the' norm. That's what we should be aiming to achieve for current performance styles and habits. So for the same reason as avoiding crossover, because it can be filed away and leave the norm untouched, it's sensible for now to avoid work that can be labelled 'arrangement', or at any rate to resist the label vigorously. That too makes a variant version safe. For now, let's try not to be safe. Similarly, a performance that reworks a classical score through the lens of modernism can too easily be labelled 'New Music', which again takes it safely out of the mainstream as far as mainstream performers are concerned: they needn't think about it again. We mustn't let them get off so easily!

Behaving badly

And so, if I may: a key piece of advice. Don't be afraid of causing outrage; as long as it's outrage among conventionally constrained gatekeepers, audiences and normative performers. Well-justified fresh approaches are perfectly entitled to outrage people. Serious harm is something else, and one should always try to avoid that, but a bit of outrage in the right place can be highly productive.

Courage

Finally (for now), safe spaces are all very well for rehearsal, but there have to be public performances and published recordings. It's the public practice and understanding of WCM that we need to change. That means getting up on stage and doing it. It only takes a few strikingly successful performances by obviously excellent musicians (and anyone coming out of conservatoire these days qualifies as that) to change everyone's ideas about what might be possible and desirable.

Continue to Chapter 20a: Going beyond the text, by Daniel Barolsky.

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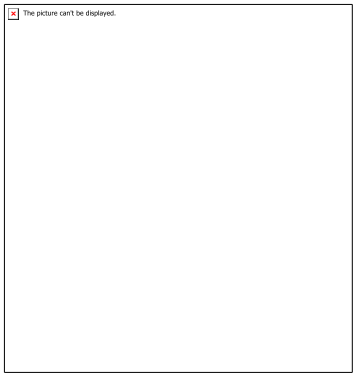
20a For Whom the Berceuse Tolls: Josef Hofmann going beyond the text

by **Daniel Barolsky**

“How are performers to generate new meaning from apparently well-known scores?”, Daniel L-W asked in Chapter 20. For some it takes an imaginative perspective on what the notes in the score *can* allow, rather than feeling burdened by what they *should* require. There are musicians, inspired by programmatic images or narratives, who project unexpected sonorities or internal relationships, often evoking poignant spatial images and associations for listeners. These performers, thus, go far beyond notation or draw attention and give meaning to details that most might otherwise pass by.

I wish to present one such performance, that by Josef Hofmann. This performance of a well-worn work demonstrates, first and foremost, the incomplete nature of any composition and the ability of performers to create unexpected meaning from notational scripts. So doing, Hofmann not only presents a rendition of impressive virtuosity, subtitlety of touch, and sensitivity of dynamic balance, but also challenges interpretive norms (both of its time and today) by reorienting conventional hierarchies that exist between melody and harmony, tone and noise. Above all else, this performance opens up the musical possibilities for future musicians who choose to revisit compositional works with the desire to co-create them anew or position them in imagined spaces.

In his Golden Jubiliee Concert in 1937, the pianist Josef Hofmann performed Chopin’s *Berceuse* Op. 57, a pianistic warhorse if there ever was one. One of the most distinctive features of the composition is the figure in the left hand that is repeated throughout the work and that one can hear from the first measures.

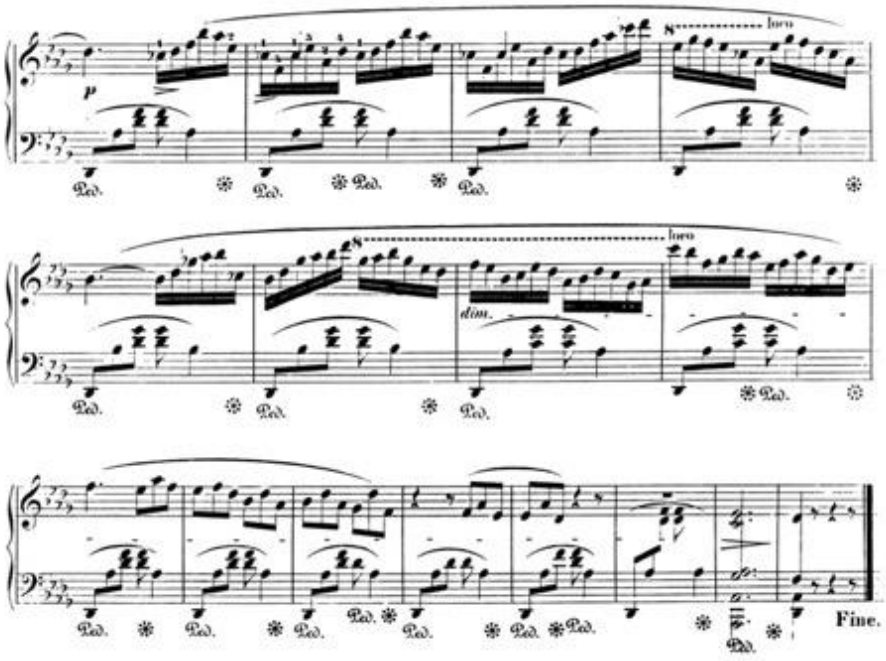


Except for the final two cadential measures, these bars maintain exactly the same rhythmic configuration throughout, each phrase initiated by a low D-flat, a pedal note that grounds us in D-flat major. From this low bass note rises a kind of asymmetric arching figure of 8th notes that moves up slowly before falling back down to a resting quarter-note, like a boat gently rocking in the waves. This quarter note falls on the 5th beat, pausing for a hesitant moment, before the swaying figure repeats itself.

The harmonic framework of this figure remains largely unchanged throughout, as it moves back and forth between the tonic and dominant. The most significant change to this passage comes in m. 59 when the A-flat that so regularly falls on the second and fifth beats of the bar, rises up to a B-flat at the same time that the harmony shifts to the subdominant, G-flat major. This slight adjustment holds steady for two measures before the B-flat falls back down to A-flat and the harmony moves through the dominant back to the tonic, D-flat major. (See **Example 1** below)

For all this description, this gesture in the left hand might appear to be one of the most insignificant qualities of the composition. More striking and foregrounded throughout the short work are the delightful, decorative, passages of arabesque. Here we find the most magical, colorful, and inventive pianistic play, melodies woven around virtuosic gestures, twisted between trills and, at times, swallowed up within changing rhythms and textures. For most pianists, the right hand is the star, the rocking left hand nothing more than a harmonic foundation and a rhythmic pillar above which the right hand can shine.

In Hofmann's performance, the pianist's right hand absolutely astounds. Rarely do we hear the ease with which triads in mm. 35-36 ascend so lightly and daintily into a series of increasingly complicated 32nd-note passages. But the pianist's virtuosic *sprezzatura* conceals any hint of difficulty and, instead, weaves a gossamer that increasingly glimmers but never explodes. As the energy recedes and the right hand slows, with a few hesitations and circuitous triplets, Hofmann calms the listeners, preparing them for the cadential slumber to come. As Chopin introduces a C-flat in the right hand in m. 55 (**Example 1**), generating a secondary dominant that prepares the G-flat major harmony, Hofmann singles out the C-flat. Its repetitions resonate above the meandering 16th notes from which the note emerges. Four measures later, as the harmony slides down to G-flat, so, too, does the C-flat descend melodically to the B-flat, which continues to ring out. Two measures later, the harmony descends further to the dominant and one might expect the descending line to conclude, from C-flat to B-flat to A-flat:



Example 1: Chopin Berceuse Op. 57, mm. 55-end.

And it does…but, by Hofmann, in the most unexpected of ways. Instead of foregrounding the melodic permutations in the right hand, Hofmann lets ring the A-flat on the second beat *of the left hand*, a note almost lost into obscurity by the dozens of repetitions. Three beats later Hofmann does it again, and again, and again. Nothing in Chopin's score indicates a modicum of significance to this note. And yet for Hofmann, the sonorous A-flats give shape to the soporiferous conclusion. As the dynamics of the melody and harmonic foundation fade away, the A-flat on beats two and five toll above everything else. The chiming of the A-flat positions us in such a way that we hear the melody and accompaniment pass into the distance until it becomes nothing but a passing memory. All we're left with is the resonance of the tolling bell that, upon concluding, dissolves into the slumberous final chords.

What's remarkable is how Hofmann transforms this mere accompaniment, nay, two single notes within the accompaniment, into an entirely new, nostalgic landscape that continues to exist within Chopin's musical script but also escapes it at the same time. Within the world of functional tonal harmony, the A-flat could serve as either the root of the dominant (as a tension building pedal) or the 5th of the tonic (a weak reinforcement of D-flat). But in the hands of Hofmann, it serves neither of these purposes. Hofmann's A-flat fits into the surrounding notes on one hand, but never quite joins them in directing the melody or guiding the harmony. They neither lead nor resolve. They simply chime, like a clock announcing the new hour (16 o'clock?). Rhythmically, the tolling bell sounds on the off-beats within the 6/8 meter. Yet as everything else, both in the left and right hands, becomes more dynamically distant, the melody fragments, and the tempo slows down, the syncopated tension of the bell dissipates and, by the end, beats to its own time.

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21 Historical examples on record

There are few things as eye-opening as the past practices of one's own culture. Many of us have experienced recently the translation of collective delusions about the past into current government policies, institutionalising national fantasy once again (as if that hadn't been tried before). Facing up to what our predecessors really did, as opposed to what we tell each other they did, can be difficult. But in a sense that is what this book is about: escaping institutionalised fantasies about musical tradition and attempting instead to make something new and healthier – physically, psychologically and spiritually. As early recordings have once more become easily available—first on CD, now on YouTube in particular—WCM has had to make far-fetched excuses not to take them seriously as models, despite all the standard rhetoric about performing composers' intentions.

As you'll have noticed, I'm not arguing in this book for historical performance (see, e.g., Chapter 6.7); but I do think that there is much to learn about ways of being musical from historical recordings.

In Chapter 3, 'Performance changes', we listened to Mary Garden accompanied by Debussy in his chanson, 'L'ombre des arbres', recorded in 1904, and we looked at the performance-stylistic features in it that might cause palpitations today.

Listen again here: https://youtu.be/LObpqz7JP_k

Early recordings provide a large number of revelatory examples that are quite unfamiliar to us now. They are excellent sources of models if we want to experiment with performing scores differently, for they present styles that we know were thoroughly successful in their time. They worked. And it's certainly the experience of those who listen to a lot of early recordings that they work now too, once one gets used to them. And so the purpose of this chapter is to recommend listening to early recordings of one's own repertoire (or of whatever is closest among the repertoire they used) in search of approaches to tempo, rubato, portamento, vibrato, phrasing, structure, technique, ornamentation, extemporisation, synchronisation, and other aspects of style, that are as unlike our own as possible, approaches one can borrow, sample, or copy. As I suggested in chapter 20, 'It can be highly productive to copy past recordings; not mindless, as one might imagine, but revelatory in teaching one's body to be differently musical.'

Chapter 3 included a recording by Ilona Eibenschütz, who was close to Brahms at the end of his life and whose playing he admired: here is another, whose rubato is impossible for us to accept and yet is broadly compatible with what can be discerned of the surviving recording of Brahms playing.

Listen again here: https://youtu.be/XV6ji84-8IA

You can read about Anna Scott's copying of Eibenschütz, and hear a performance in which she pushes that historical Brahms style even further, separating the parts even more, in the page about her work here on the Challenging Performance website under 'Interviews and Recordings' which we'll look at in Chapter 22. Compare Scott's Brahms Op. 119 no. 1 to the score, if you wish, but don't miss how much sense her performance makes in itself, however much appears to be missing or in the 'wrong' place.

Chapter 3 also included one of Carl Reinecke's Mozart recordings which, because Reinecke was born in 1824, takes us nearer in time to Mozart than any other. We can't be sure that it takes us nearer in style, but it seems more likely than not. There is much to play with here for anyone who wants to rethink their performance of Classical-period scores.

Listen again here: https://youtu.be/ADxuDONsguY

Also for pianists, *but not just pianists*, Chapter 6.9 discussed a performance of Liszt's 12th Hungarian Rhapsody, by his pupil Bernhard Stavenhagen, which adopts Liszt's practice of rewriting his scores in performance. Why only in Liszt, though? Why not anywhere at all where the results seem interesting? It's not as if we didn't have enough recordings of the scores as printed.

For another example, unconventional to us for its speed and extensive decoration but within the range of 19th-century norms, listen to Raoul Pugno playing the much-loved Chopin Nocturne in F-sharp, Op. 15, No. 2. Pugno was a grand-pupil of Chopin.

Chapter 6.8 included Lilli Lehmann singing Wagner, who coached and admired her as a Rhinemaiden and a Valkyrie in the original 1876 production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. There's little room for doubt that what we hear on her recordings worked well for quite some time and in repertoire we can hardly imagine sung like that at the moment. But why not? There's lots to be learned from her and her contemporaries.

Also on this site—tucked away in an essay that this book supercedes, but let's bring her out again here—is Elena Gerhardt singing Schubert's 'An die Musik'. I've written about this in another online book, *The Changing Sound of Music*,[283] where there are many more examples that are worth hearing as potential models today.

Chapter 4 of *The Changing Sound of Music* focuses on early recorded singing; chapter 5 on violin playing; chapter 6 on piano playing. And there are more early examples in chapters 2, 3 and 8, all with at least some indication of what might be interesting to listen for.

Also on the CHARM website, which hosts that book, is an online library of almost 5000 recordings newly transferred from the original 78rpm discs. Not many are really early, but they certainly offer a wide variety of repertoire and sounds. A valuable complementary resource, with more multiple recordings of particular scores, is the BL (British Library) Sound's Classical Music page.

But in any case, there is so much available now online that readers will have no difficulty finding models from which to learn something new about alternative ways of being musical.

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[283] And at greater length in Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2010. Listening and Responding to the Evidence of Early Twentieth-Century Performance. *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 135, Special Issue no. 1, 45–62.

22 Making Music Work

22.1 What makes a performance work?

In Chapter 7.5, on 'conservatoire and conformity', I made a distinction between a performance that 'works' and a performance that is 'correct'. Correct performances, at professional level, always work because the performer's job is to ensure that they do; but performances that work need not always be correct. I've said a lot in earlier chapters about what's thought to be correct. But what do we mean when we say that a performance 'works'?

[If in doubt about the meaning of 'work' here see this note on terminology]

In 7.5 I spoke about a performance that 'works dynamically'. What I was referring to was the way in which a sequence of musical sounds feels well-formed. Conventionally we credit this to the composer. But, as we've seen here again and again, performers are more directly responsible for sounding a score convincingly. So performers are adjusting all the parameters that their instrument allows them to adjust (note lengths always, loudness for many instruments (not harpsichords), pitch for some (singers) more than others (brass)). And they adjust these parameters in order to group notes coherently and engagingly—giving emphasis, forming phrases—so that the performance generates in listeners a sequence of well-formed feeling shapes. Often this is described as 'shaping' or simply being 'musical'. These adjustments to what would otherwise be a mechanically literal sounding of the notation in the score involve the 'dynamics' of sound, dynamics not in the simple sense of loudnesses (piano, forte) but in the more multifaceted sense of changing quantities—speeds, densities, directions, energy—that lead us to perceive music as in motion, alive. (More about this in the next section.)

A performance that works dynamically is one in which this sequence of changing shapes engages us as performers and listeners through its feeling good as we listen. (More about this in Chapter 12.2 on musical Utopia.) The performer moves from note to note in a way that carries us along, occupies our attention, fills us with desire to hear what happens next.

Whether a performance works, in this sense, is partly to do with familiarity, with our being used to a particular approach to performing scores: it's not so deeply rooted in human psychology that everyone will feel it regardless of their experience or their frame of mind. But it is rarely dependent on performing *particular* notes (and no others) or (except when belief intervenes) on performing notes in a particular way. A performance can change notes in a score, or use a non-normative performance style, and still make a performance that works (feels) brilliantly.

Mary Hunter, analysing performers' rehearsal talk, has shown how the notion of 'working' in performer discourse is 'often inextricably tied to the feel of playing'; 'the "working" locution … almost always occurs in close conjunction with a description of how a particular choice feels, physically or emotionally, to the performer.'[284]

[284] Hunter, Mary. (Forthcoming). Classical Performer-Talk: Obligation, Affordance and Strategic Vagueness. I am most grateful to Professor Hunter for sharing her typescript with me.

To say that a performance works, then, is to say that it feels good to make and to hear.[285] Feeling, not thinking. That the shaping of sounds feels good matters much more than whether that shaping outlines a particular formal scheme, or reproduces a particular historical practice or a particular composer intention, unless one is determined for reasons of principle that it must not. It takes a particular intensity of prejudice against a performer or performance approach to override one's musical response to well-shaped music-making; although that intensity is very widespread, as chapter 9 (among others) showed.

So we can (and must) separate 'working' from being 'correct'. Thus Ji Liu's Moonlight sonata performance, with movement tempi exchanged, works very well while also being very incorrect.[286]

A performance, however radical (perhaps especially if it's radical) must work. A wonderful historical illustration of this is provided by Harry Plunket Greene's 1934 recording of Schubert's 'Der Leiermann'. None of the words is original, most note values in the vocal line have been changed, the singer can no longer sing. It's still, I think, a very wonderful performance in which what works is not just the sequence of dynamic shapes but encompasses the associations brought by this elderly voice to the text and the notes Schubert wrote. Nothing about that relationship, either, is 'correct', for here the person being sung about becomes also the singer.

Continue to 22.2 'Musical dynamics and musical shape'

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[285] A related and very interesting perspective from theatre studies is offered by Roesner, David. 2021. Making Sense of Performance. A New Approach to Performance Analysis. *ACT – Zeitschrift für Musik und Performance* 10, esp. pp. 26–7. https://www.act.uni-bayreuth.de/de/archiv/202108/08_Roesner/index.html

[286] Cf the discussions of it in chapters 1 and 5 above and 23 below. It works 'remarkably well as a storm' (chapter 5); and 'the piece still works as a sound sequence with melodic and harmonic coherence and dynamic shape' (chapter 1).

22.1b A note on work terminology

English can be so confusing… Here's some clarification from the Oxford English Dictionary, and some possible equivalents from other languages.

Chapter 6 (e.g.), the Work:

Work, noun, II.16.a., 'A literary or musical composition, esp. as considered in relation to its author or composer.'

Fr. l'oeuvre; Ger. das Werk; It. l'opera; Sp. la obra

Chapter 22.1, making music work:

Work, verb, I.4.b., intransitive, 'To … be effective or successful.'

Fr. marcher; Ger. funktionieren; It. funzionare; Sp. funcionar

Chapter 22.4, the work that music does:

Work, noun, I.11.b, 'Without connotation of purpose or intention: the effect, consequence, or result of the action of a person or the operation of a thing, agent, etc.'

Fr. le travail; Ger. die Leistung; It. il lavoro; Sp. el trabajo

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22.2 Musical dynamics and musical shape

Quite a few researchers over the past century have thought about musical dynamics in the sense in which I was using the word in the previous section; but yet the notion has not become part of everyday musical talk. This may be partly because we've used the word in English to mean loudness, which is confusing – it's not a particularly good word for loudness (nor is 'volume'). Or perhaps it's because the quantities that contribute to musical dynamics are easier to discuss as qualities (timbre, intensity, tension, shape). Woody (2000, 15) summarises some of this research:

> Truslit (1938)… believed that the dynamics of inner motion are acquired through extramusical life experiences, and that these dynamics 'can be described in rules, but simple application of these rules does not result in living expression'.
>
> Clynes (1977) theorized that there are characteristic brain patterns associated with basic emotions which are manifested as similar patterns or 'shapes' of expressive music performance devices… Sloboda (1996) [proposed that a] repertoire of templates is acquired, using analogies borrowed from a number of domains, 'the most plausible being those of bodily and physical motion, gesture, speech and vocal intonation, and expressions of emotions'.[287]

Clarke (2002, 67) notes that

> other researchers have demonstrated that performers' spontaneous timing patterns follow the temporal curve of objects moving in a gravitational field, suggesting that a natural-sounding performance mimics the behaviour of physical objects moving in the real world.[288]

In other words, the sense that music moves, is lifelike, and is like other kinds of changing feeling states and other everyday experiences (more in this in Chapter 12.2), may be rooted in more basic experiences and responses to the world around us.

Musicians frequently talk of these aspects of musical experience in terms of 'shape'. In our book about *Music and Shape* (2018) Helen Prior has looked at this kind of talk,[289] and I have suggested some mechanisms by which music may seem to have shape, looking especially at the ways in which musical shapes seem to model the shapes of human feeling states.[290] Music's shapeliness seems, therefore, to be vitally connected with the ways in which it moves and engages us as performers and listeners. This means that when we speak, apparently informally and loosely, about the shape of a passage of music, we are speaking of important and fundamental features of it; and what we say

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[287] Woody, Robert H. 2002. Learning Expressivity in Music Performance: An Exploratory Study. *Research Studies in Music Education* 14, 14–23.
[288] Clarke, Eric. 2002. Understanding the Psychology of Performance. In John Rink (ed.), *Musical Performance: A Guide to Understanding* (Cambridge University Press), 59–72. Clarke here references Todd, Neil P. McA. 1995. The Kinematics of Musical Expression. *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 97, 1940–9.
[289] Prior, Helen M. 2018. Shape as Understood by Performing Musicians. In Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and Helen M. Prior (eds), *Music and Shape* (New York: Oxford University Press), 216–41. See also the Introduction to the same volume, pp. xxv–xxxiii.
[290] Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. 2018. Musical Shape and Feeling. In Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and Helen M. Prior (eds), *Music and Shape* (New York: Oxford University Press), 359–82.

tells us much more about what matters in a performance than the informality of the language might suggest. How a performance is 'shaped' and how it feels are inextricable, and are vital (essential and lifelike) in ways that its historical or philosophical or biographical relatedness are not.

Continue to Chapter 22.3 'Expression is dangerous'

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22.3 Expression is dangerous

If how music feels matters more to our biology and psychology than how obedient it is—to traditions, rules and norms—then this only adds to its danger for those who feel entitled to rule on how it should sound. But this clash illustrates something essential about music in the way, and the intensity with which, it engages our culture as well as our biology. As Tim Hodgkinson has noted (2015, 8), when we think about this,

> a new way of describing our human identity is called for. We are no longer where biology and culture converge, but where biology and culture collide.[291]

It seems fairly evident from all we've seen in previous chapters, and especially in Part 2 on policing, that musical culture, like culture *tout court*, is a way of constraining biologically-driven tendencies to shape music in ways that most powerfully reflect processes of feeling and acting that we recognise from life. This filtering and censoring function of culture does present special problems when faced with music, for music is rather good at bypassing cultural constraints because of the way it engages feelings without going via language, bypassing concepts. That in turn explains partly why musical gatekeepers are so keen to constrain it: it's in constant danger of avoiding *them*.[292]

A more specific danger, from the musical State's point of view, is closely related. It is perhaps the fatal flaw that we can use to bring the whole system of policing to its senses. It's simply this, that expressive performance necessarily requires momentarily confounding expectations. Leonard B. Meyer famously noticed how composers use this device;[293] but performers do it too, as I think is now increasingly well understood. You delay or hurry through or louden or soften or vibrate or scoop or colour or make plainer a note or a musical gesture in order draw attention to it and thereby to make it more expressively powerful. And each of those possible moves is pushing towards the boundaries of the norm. That's the whole point. No one expects the non norm; and the nearer you get to it, the more expressive the result. But *where* is the boundary, that's the question? One is always in danger of crossing it. Hence, the very mechanism by which performers make music seem meaningful is the very process that puts them in most danger of censure. The system needs an army of gatekeepers to control that, to keep performance expressivity within the tightest constraints possible without losing it altogether.

What I'm proposing, and illustrating in this Part 3 of *Challenging Performance*, is precisely a means of crossing over that boundary and exploring what lies beyond, perhaps (I hope) far beyond. Music

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[291] Hodgkinson, Tim. 2015. *Music and the Myth of Wholeness: Toward a new Aesthetic Paradigm* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press)

[292] 'When we listen to music, the normal model of agency (who is speaking to whom) is suspended, and this allows the subjectivity inscribed in music to come toward us as a formative "other" to be engaged with. But this is not for us to read the composer's own subjectivation from the music or to reproduce it in some way. Rather, when we perform our listening of the music, we are sharing in the formative risks taken by its maker(s). more than musical structure per se, what most deeply shapes the listening experience is the spread or accumulation of this aesthetic risk in the work… Aesthetic risk is explicitly present in improvisation, but implicitly present in all kinds of music…' Hodgkinson 2015, 13.

[293] Meyer, Leonard B. 1956. *Emotion and Meaning in Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. See also Huron, David. 2006. *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

out there, in the unknown, can work just as brilliantly as it works in here, the tiny space within which all respectable WCM performance is confined.

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22.4 Music as social action

Before we look in a much more practical way (in the next section) at assessing non-normative performance, it's important to remember that how music works, and (using the word in a different but not unrelated sense) the work that music does, are not just aesthetic issues, nor only a matter of how one feels internally as one performs and listens. Musical performance is also a social praxis. In performance one seeks to accomplish many things as well as moving and engaging listeners; and these include creating benefits of various kinds, practical, social, financial, psychological, health-related, even in a broad sense political. Performance is skilful, transactional, intentional, occasional (in the sense of occasion-related), as well as being more obviously communicative. How a performance fulfils some of these needs and possibilities accounts for some of the sense that it works more or less well.[294]

How music is used in these ways matters very much. Often it is for good. But sometimes not. Part of the trouble that this book exposes and aims to counter is precisely the way in which certain musical practices oppress performers in order the more to reassure certain groups of already very privileged listeners and also to minimise costs for employers. Constraining performers' creative freedom works for them, just as it pays the bills for critics and others who police it.

So when we think and talk about music working, and use that notion as a measure of the success of a performance, it's important to be conscious of the extent to which, and the ways in which, music may be working for us in these other dimensions, over and above its sheer dynamic power and beauty. Is it improving lives, and whose, and at what cost?

When one takes this wider view it becomes even clearer how important it is to allow performers the freedom to make music in as many ways as are able to generate whatever we agree are good ends. Performance can do much more than it does now, and in many more ways.

Continue to Chapter 22.5 'Assessing non-standard performances'

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[294] As further reading see Regelski, Thomas A. 2016. Music, music education, and institutional ideology: A praxial philosophy of music sociality. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 15 (2): 10–45. act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Regelski15_2.pdf. (Also discussed in Chapter 7.3.)

22.5 Assessing non-standard performances

In Chapters 7.3, on exam boards, and 7.8, on competitions, we looked at problems with the evaluation of WCM performance: in a sense much of chapters 7 and 9 was about just that. Seeing all the problems that come from assessment and evaluation of the mainstream one might be tempted to think that evaluating transgressive, non-normative performances would be even more fraught. But because we are setting aside so many of the yardsticks by which performance is measured for correctness, in fact the opposite is the case. Assessment becomes very much simpler.

While ultimately, once people expect creative performance of WCM scores (if that happy day ever comes), performers can simply advertise a performance of a canonical score, walk on stage and perform, at the moment it seems sensible to let an audience know that what they are going to hear is not going to be what they expect. One can, and probably should, do that in the advertising of the concert, if only to avoid noisy walk-outs by outraged patrons interrupting the performance. An option I've used is slightly to alter the title of a well-known composition: hence 'Dido & Belinda', which tells everyone that something slightly different is to be expected. Arguably this flies in the face of my case that these are legitimate performances of the score. But I think that the concession to expectation is a useful one until this legitimacy is generally accepted. Alternatively performers can speak to the audience, taking the opportunity to explain something of what they will be doing and why (see also chapter 6.11). All this seems helpful and courteous to people who've paid to come to something that may not be what they thought they'd be getting. Just as importantly, it gives everyone the best chance of having the performance experienced and evaluated for what it aims to be, while (as ever) leaving open the option for listeners to experience it quite differently.

What of more formal critical responses to transgressive performance? How are they to be made? I suggest that in the much more varied performance culture envisaged here, evaluation of performance need be no harder than it has always been: performances are made to engage, to stimulate, to excite, to fascinate, to challenge, to move, as ever. That is what music is for. How persuasively they do that is the measure of their success. One of the many beauties of setting aside the pseudo-historical and dubiously philosophical moralising that characterises WCM assessment and criticism at the moment is that one's response can focus more fully—as fully as possible, given all the personal, social and cultural factors that will always be in play—on the simple question of how and how much a performance engages one's mind and senses in whatever ways one likes music to engage them. It's nobody's job to try to limit that. If evaluation becomes more personal, what of it?

If our responses are allowed to be our own then so are our judgements that follow from them. This may well make collective agreement harder. Good![295]

[295] Lisa McCormick (2009, 7–8), writing about competitions, explains how multiple are the constituencies that need to be satisfied at the moment. And yet the performer is somehow expected to please them all. Once we accept that music is supposed to engage us personally, that we don't need all to agree, the whole business of assessment and criticism looks quite different, potentially much more humane. If that makes competition judging more complicated, so it should. The problem lies in the notion of competition, not in the approach to thinking about value. (McCormick: 'In a setting that closely resembles the recital ritual, the performer is challenged to demonstrate that they are the embodiment of the performance community's ideals by enacting

But for all the reasons I've set out in this chapter—to do with prioritising one's response to musical dynamics at the expense of ideology, as far as one can—it seems far more likely to me that evaluation will remain relatively simple. When we remove questions such as 'are they using the right edition?', 'are they following every mark in the score?', 'are they using the right period style?', 'are they sounding the composer's intentions?', 'are they doing what I told them?', what remains is a focus on what really counts: am I moved, am I gripped by this performance, do I care more than anything right now about the sounds this performer makes next?

Or, if not, then 'what else can these notes do?' is the most exciting and constructive question one can possibly ask.

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a multi-layered performance that simultaneously displays different meanings to a fragmented audience. Each segment of this audience – judges, critics, peers, musical public – is differently engaged and differently positioned to interpret competitors' performances. It is perhaps for this reason that it is not unusual for segments of the audience to disagree about which performer is most deserving of first place.')

23 Examples from challengingperformance.com

The Challenging Performance website began in 2016—before I had any thought of writing an online book here—as a place to collect and present the alternative performances of canonical scores on which I'd been working with friends and research students for several years. I'd like to use this chapter to highlight and discuss some of the examples you'll find elsewhere on the site—mainly under 'Interviews and Recordings', and 'Dido & Belinda'—as well as some contributed by other musicians. Please do offer more!

I begin, though, in Chapter 23.1 with the Beethoven 'Moonlight' sonata and Schubert 'Erlkönig' examples mentioned several times already in the book, because they were the first examples we tried out in practice after I'd been thinking for some time about the implications of early recordings for current performance, and because they remain among the most strikingly innovative and thought-provoking.

Continue to Chapter 23.1: 'Exchanging the Moonlight and Erlkönig'

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23.1 Exchanging the Moonlight and Erlkönig

I provided some background for these performances in Chapters 1 and 5. From Chapter 5:

> … with the pianist Mine Doğantan-Dack and soprano Diana Gilchrist, in a workshop in 2013, … we exchanged characters of the first movement of Beethoven's 'Moonlight' sonata and Schubert's song 'Erlkönig', whose meters and rhythmic profiles are similar but whose traditional characters are opposite. … [W]e did this principally by swapping their conventional tempi, taking 'Erlkönig' to dotted crotchet = ca 56 and the Moonlight to ca 120; but of course when you do that you change a lot more than just speed: the very different mood that the speed suggests also requires different articulation, … vibrato (for the singer) and timbre. … The Moonlight works remarkably well as a storm, and 'Erlkönig' recovers the full horror of a song about child abduction that we've lost in nicely-behaved Lieder recitals.

Mine performed the Moonlight movement in joint talks we gave in London in June and July 2013 and at the University of Surrey in October 2013. There was an unsurprising mix of strong reactions, for and against, tending to align with age. I offered it as an imaginary example of transgressive performance in an article, 'Classical Music as Enforced Utopia', in 2016.[296]

1. **Erlkönig**

Diana recorded 'Erlkönig' with pianist Shelley Katz in 2019, especially for this book, now at around crotchet = 68 (though with a dramatic tempo shift towards the end). That performance was included at the end of Chapter 5, and I place it here as well.

Schubert, 'Erlkönig': Diana Gilchrist (sop.), Shelley Katz (piano) -- rec. 2019.

For us a particularly fascinating detail was the varied rhythmic profile of the Erlking's verses which it's now possible to hear for the first time, and which in this performance gives him an insinuating social veneer, suggested by the dance accompaniment to his first stanza and the mock-innocent figuration around his second, which only makes him the more loathsome. Diana's tour-de-force of vocal characterisation carries the whole performance irresistibly, so that the tempo (to which one quickly adapts) seems essential, as if it could not be other. It's a virtuoso demonstration of the extent to which the performer makes the music through shaping our experience as listeners, which seems to us to arise inevitably from the notes. It takes a performance as different as this to show properly just how illusory that impression is. But the whole performance is highly disturbing, as it should be, given the subject-matter.

Be sure also to hear Diana's and Shelley's 'Ave Maria' recordings, no less remarkable when compared to anything else one can hear from that embarrassingly hackneyed score today.

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[296] 'Classical music as enforced utopia', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15/3-4 (2016) 325-36, at 334.

2. **The New-Moon(light) sonata**

In August 2019, we recorded the whole of Beethoven's Op 27/2 score with Ji Liu as pianist. The sound engineer and co-producer was Andrew Hallifax. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the enthusiasm of both, and to thank Ji in particular for his courage in making this recording, courage which every performer who hears it will recognise.

Ji started from my very broad suggestions for speeds and characters, which he then developed into performances that are his own. The first movement is much faster than in 2013, faster even than proposed here in chapter 1; and (as ch.1 envisaged) it convincingly describes a storm that is as opposite to the usual moonlit night as it's possible to imagine. The first movement runs straight into the second, usually an Allegretto but here an almost Mendelssohnian slow movement using rubato to accentuate its dreamlike quality. The final movement, at a medium pace as opposed to the usual mad rush in which details and contrast are lost in a tempest of sound, becomes more unsettling, perhaps threatening, matching upward melodic direction with surges in loudness, and it makes space for much more rhythmic characterisation in the interludes. The whole sonata, in other words, is utterly changed; and yet it works. It's another example of extraordinary performer creativity, every moment of it inconceivable within current WCM culture whose only response can be to condemn, marginalise and if possible exclude it. Because it's disobedient to the score.

What does this tell us about Beethoven's score? About potential it has that no one, surely not he, had envisaged? About our relationship with scores, composers, traditions, audiences, a musical public, with those who 'know' about music and those innocent of assumptions? About what music can do with us and we with it? About our relationship with musical Others, that's to say with the virtual personae, potentially unlike ourselves, that a musical performance creates? If you've not read earlier chapters, now may be the moment to do so, before engaging more intensively with these questions. (Chapter 11 on obligations to composers may seem particularly relevant if this is your first encounter with transgressive performance.)

For now, simply enjoy!

Beethoven, Piano sonata op.27, no. 2, complete: Ji Liu (piano) -- rec. 2019

Continue to Chapter 23.2: 'Ave Maria'

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23.2 Schubert/Gilchrist/Katz: 'Ave Maria'

In Chapter 18.2, comparing WCM and classical theatre's approaches to performing texts, I included a link to an acting exercise in which the question 'would you like a cup of tea?' is asked in 24 different ways in (slightly under) one minute. Wondering how many different performances a classical musician could give of the same score I asked friends and colleagues what they thought might be possible. I was astonished but also delighted when Diana Gilchrist (soprano) and Shelley Katz (piano) responded by producing, among other things, this remarkable cycle of ten very different performances starting from Schubert's 'Ave Maria' score. In so doing they demonstrate the case I've been making all along in this book; that it is possible for realisations of canonical scores to be much more diverse than we have imagined, and therefore that musical life could be quite different and a lot more varied, *aiming* to offer significantly new readings of texts, not simply to make even better performances of the reading that's currently approved.

In Chapter 20.2 ('How?') I suggested that a good way to generate fresh views of a score is to think in terms of character and narrative, as musicians often do, but taking those images and stories away from the norm so as to see what's possible. Here Diana imagines ten different stages of a woman's life from childhood to old age, each a moment of autobiography for the character who is singing this prayer, picking up on hints in the text and also in the ways in which we've used this song in various cultural contexts: hearing, then learning it as children, using it in various ways in adult life. These moments are characterised by a state of mind, which acts as a heuristic—a quick means for the singer to conceptualise and actualise what would otherwise be impossibly complex combinations of technical moves.[297] In the analyses that follow each sound file below, Diana has identified these technical moves in some depth, which helps to focus attention on the kinds of details that, together, do metaphorical work in expressive performance. You'll see there how systematically she has varied the parameters of each performance.[298]

It's a tour-de-force of performance planning and expressive singing, and offers (I feel) a wonderful model for the extent of difference that might be possible, even for one musician today, without straying beyond current performance style.

Text

Ave Maria! Jungfrau mild,	Hail, Mary! Maiden mild!
Erhöre einer Jungfrau Flehen,	Oh listen to a maiden's pleading;
Aus diesem Felsen starr und wild	From this rock, unyielding and wild,

[297] For more on this see Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel, and Prior, Helen M. 2014. Heuristics for Expressive Performance. In ed. Dorottya Fabian, Emery Schubert and Renee Timmers, *Expressiveness in Music Performance: Empirical approaches across styles and cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 34-57.
[298] The same details will also be found in Diana's own page at challengingperformance.com, accessible via 'Interviews & Recordings' in the main menu.

Soll mein Gebet zu dir hinwehen.	My prayer will go to you.
Wir schlafen sicher bis zum Morgen,	Safe may we sleep until the morning,
Ob Menschen noch so grausam sind.	Though men be so cruel.
O Jungfrau, sieh der Jungfrau Sorgen,	Oh Maiden, see this maiden's sorrows.
O Mutter, hör ein bittend Kind!	Oh Mother, hear a pleading child!
Ave Maria!	Hail Mary!

1

Schubert, 'Ave Maria' 1. Diana Gilchrist (soprano), Shelley Katz (piano). (Rec. 2015)

- Age: ~3
- Location: outdoors, happily playing alone (dancing, skipping)
- Pure, straight, light tone, with occasional breathiness
- Almost no vibrato
- Fastest, steady tempo (skipping)
- Don't sing perfectly in tune
- p/mp dynamics
- Don't breathe in all the right places, break words
- Drop text, hummm, Sprechstimme, mix up the text
- No portamento or rubato
- No ornaments
- Light-hearted, innocent, happy

2

Schubert, 'Ave Maria' 2. Diana Gilchrist (soprano), Shelley Katz (piano). (Rec. 2015)

- Age: ~8
- Location: public, in church (first communion); very focused – don't move
- Light, mostly straight tone, but occasionally breathy forward placement
- Occasional vibrato betrays nervousness
- Moderately slow, earnest tempo
- Pitch accuracy slightly laboured
- p/mp range
- Slightly jagged rhythm, occasional very slight rubato
- Mostly clean, legato phrases, one breath in wrong place
- Serious in "grausam" and "bittend kind"
- No ornaments
- Serious, awed
- Relief in last phrase (made it!)

3

Schubert, 'Ave Maria' 3. Diana Gilchrist (soprano), Shelley Katz (piano). (Rec. 2015)

- Age: ~ 15
- Location: private, alone (bedroom), teenager
- Light, young sound, occasionally slightly breathy
- Fast vibrato
- Fast tempo
- Accurate pitch
- mp/mf range
- Accurate rhythm, occasional early entrances, especially first one, very slight rubato
- Flowing legato, complete phrases, feathered phrase-ends
- Consonants very early, clear, impassioned
- Most ornaments, very little portamento
- Joyous, impetuous

4

Schubert, 'Ave Maria' 4. Diana Gilchrist (soprano), Shelley Katz (piano). (Rec. 2015)

- Age: ~20
- Location: not alone (possibly confiding), bride
- Lyric tone, no 'colorations'
- Fast vibrato
- Moderately slow tempo
- Accurate pitch
- mp/mf range
- Sing triplets correctly, occasional early entrances
- Wall-to-wall legato, arching phrases, no micro-phrasing, very slight rubato
- Very few word accents
- Most ornaments, very little portamento
- Joyous but solemn, proud

5

Schubert, 'Ave Maria' 5. Diana Gilchrist (soprano), Shelley Katz (piano). (Rec. 2015)

- Age: ~25
- Location: home, not alone (with other women), young widow
- light, emotional, occasionally breathy tone, neutral placement
- Fast vibrato
- Very fast tempo
- Accurate pitch
- mf range

- Rhythm more text-driven
- Mostly legato phrasing
- Highlight important words: “flehen”, “starr”, “sorgen”
- Most ornaments, slight cries, tiny scoops, occasional portamento
- Horrified, fearful
- Piano: micro-pauses before each beat, right and uneven rhythm (hesitancy) no pedal

6

Schubert, ‘Ave Maria’ 6. Diana Gilchrist (soprano), Shelley Katz (piano). (Rec. 2015)

- Age: ~25
- Location: private home alone, rape victim
- Tone colourless at first, then almost sobbing
- Almost no vibrato at first, then uneven emotion induced
- Fairly slow tempo
- Inaccuracy in pitch related to emotion
- Very wide dynamic range
- Total rubato – disregard rhythm, emotion- and text-driven
- Several broken phrases
- Slurred words: “sicher bis zum Morgen”, repeat “schlaffen”
- Sprechstimme, sobbing, extreme glottal attacks, screaming on “sieh, sorgan”
- Disbelieving, numb

7

Schubert, ‘Ave Maria’ 7. Diana Gilchrist (soprano), Shelley Katz (piano). (Rec. 2015)

- Age: ~30
- Location: public, angry
- Harsh, edgy tone
- Not much vibrato
- Moderately fast tempo
- Emotion-related inaccuracy in pitch
- mf range
- Jagged, uneven rhythm, emotion- and text-driven
- Exaggerated text, some dropped
- Sprechstimme, exaggerated glottal attacks, text-driven pitch glides
- Angry, disillusioned, sardonic

8

Schubert, ‘Ave Maria’ 8. Diana Gilchrist (soprano), Shelley Katz (piano). (Rec. 2015)

- Age: ~ 40
- Location: private home alone, resigned
- Straight tone, almost detached, occasionally breathy
- Very little vibrato except in final “Maria”
- Fairly slow tempo
- Mostly accurate pitch
- p/mp range
- Rhythm a little uneven, emotion- and text-driven
- Occasionally broken phrasing
- Painfully sensitive awareness of text
- Some ornaments, very occasional portamento
- Resigned, weighed-down

9

Schubert, ‘Ave Maria’ 9. Diana Gilchrist (soprano), Shelley Katz (piano). (Rec. 2015)

- Age: ~50
- Location: public (convent), rededication
- Warm, natural tone
- Natural, free, uncontrolled vibrato
- Moderate tempo
- Accurate pitch
- mp-mf crescendi and decrescendi
- Smoothed rhythms except proper rhythm on “Ave Maria”, some rubato
- Sustained legato phrasing, driving ends of phrases to early consonants
- Vowels pure and distinct
- Ornaments, graceful portamento
- Quiet, joyful, earnest, hopeful

10

Schubert, ‘Ave Maria’ 10. Diana Gilchrist (soprano), Shelley Katz (piano). (Rec. 2015

- Age: ~80
- Location: public (hospice/hospital), end of life
- Occasionally slightly darker tone
- Wider, inconsistent vibrato
- Very slow tempo
- Age-related pitch inaccuracy
- p/mp range, small crescendi and decrescendi
- Every note and pause has meaning, not a second of failed concentration
- Smoothed rhythms, lots of rubato

- Very long legato phrasing, occasionally broken
- Word painting/shaping; “ob menschen noch so grausam” (quietly: compassion, sadness, regret)
- Most ornaments, portamento, slight glottal attacks
- Serene, peaceful, wise, quietly joyous

Continue to Chapter 23-3: Further transgressive performances

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23.3 Further transgressive performances

This website has a growing collection of different kinds of non-standard performances, by artists who all have different reasons for rejecting norms and who all have individual ways of working. You can access them from the menu at the top by selecting 'Interviews and Recordings'. So here I'll simply summarise each and offer a direct link. You'll get a vivid sense of what's already possible. Here I'll arrange them by common features.

Using historical recordings

Abigail Dolan (flute)

Abigail's ten performances starting from the Debussy 'Syrinx' score mix historical and transgressive approaches. She gets her historical evidence from early recordings which document contrasting national schools of flute playing (German, Dutch, British, French, perhaps also American) all but one of which were lost when flautists gravitated to French style for their international norm during the first decades of the 20th century. There's an introduction to Abigail's practice here. But you can get much more detail on her own website.

Eszter Osztrosits (violin) and Imre Dani (piano)

Eszter and Imre, while studying in László Stachó's doctoral class at the Liszt Academy in Budapest, developed their performance of Grieg's Violin Sonata No. 3, Op. 45 through listening to Grieg's own recordings and those of some of the great violinists of the early-recorded era. In their commentary they provide helpfully detailed discussion of particularly important moments, bringing insight into the kinds of options and choices that early recordings can inspire. It's exciting to hear such good 'Recordings Informed Performances' emerging from conservatoires now, and ideally—rather than becoming a new niche—filtering through into the mainstream.

Anna Scott (piano)

Anna devoted years to studying the recordings left by the pupils of Clara Schumann, pianists who knew Brahms well in the 1880s and 90s, who played his scores to him and to whom he played. Their performance styles are very far indeed from (in some ways opposite to) what is now considered proper Brahms playing. Anna learned first to play like them, and then she extended their techniques to go even further from modern norms. Her page here has samples. For the full set ask me for a link to her PhD. It's very important work and essential reading and listening if you want to learn from the past as it really was, rather than as gatekeepers would like it to have been.

Improvising

David Dolan (piano)

David teaches a widely-admired course in classical improvisation at London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama. You can hear an interview with him in the third Challenging Performance podcast. On the website here are varied examples of his own performances including Schumann, Mozart and (yes) Webern. Improvising was a historical practice, of course—common in performances of scores until about 100 years ago—but it has the potential to bring far more into performances in the future, both in itself and for the way it frees one up psychologically to play scores with more confidence so that even when one's not improvising notes one can still improvise—not simply reproduce ready-prepared—interpretation.

Bobby Mitchell (piano)

Bobby also uses improvisation, also inspired by historical practices but not confined to them. And again it's because it's such a powerful way of freeing one's mind of preconceptions about how a score 'is supposed' (how often do musicians say that?!) to go. Bobby has developed a suite of techniques for finding new readings of moments in a score, outlined in his page here with examples from the Liszt sonata, Chopin, Haydn and Brahms.

Playing with character

Mine Doğantan-Dack (piano)

Mine has been taking risks with scores for some years, now. She was the first to perform the allegro 'Moonlight' sonata and largo 'Erlkönig' which you can hear in later performances in Chapter 23.1. On her page here she offers a Rachmaninov prelude also at a very non-standard tempo. The result, of course, is a very different character emerging convincingly from the same notes. It's easier, in fact, to start by choosing the character and then allowing all the musical parameters to do whatever they need in order to create that character in performance. It sounds like a rather traditional approach, often used in lessons and practice to approach the norm more persuasively. And so it is. But it can do a whole lot more, as Mine repeatedly shows!

Diana Gilchrist (soprano)

Under this heading, 'playing with character', we could also place Diana's amazing set of ten Schubert 'Ave Maria' performances which you'll find in Chapter 23.2. Again, each was created by sounding a state of mind, alongside (though this is optional) analytical thought about how that state was made into sound.

Experimental techniques

Shelley Katz (piano)

Shelley is exceptional, it seems to me, in his ability to escape conventional ways of making scores work in search of others that ought not to but somehow do. You can hear ten alternatives in an innocent little Bach prelude on his page here. And in due course there'll be more to come! Listen, for example, to no. 8 reminiscent of Glenn Gould; to no. 3 which asks how hesitant a performance can be without falling apart (the answer is fascinating, because of the way the tempo keeps shifting in order not to fall over the constantly moving edge of what works in the changing harmonic and melodic situation); and to no. 1 which asks how dislocated the hands can be without the counterpoint failing. These are such good questions to test in one's own playing.

Aisha Orazbayeva (violin)

Aisha draws on modernist experimental music to find extended techniques of violin playing that she can get to work with a score by Telemann. It shouldn't; but it does! So much more is possible than we've ever imagined. It's simply a matter of looking and listening and thinking and experimenting, without worrying about what's proper, concerned only with what works.

Martin Lawrence (horn)

Martin has written a separate chapter—Chapter 23.4, immediately following this—illustrating his strikingly original work using performance anxiety as a stimulus for developing new approaches to playing, including examples of Mozart and Schubert.

Beyond the norm

More to come!

Continue to Chapter 23.4: Using Anxiety Creatively (by Martin Lawrence)

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23.4 Using Anxiety Creatively

by Martin Lawrence

Musicians often feel the need to be someone else on stage. The whole musical training demands not only conformity to particular musical styles, but also to a stage etiquette that allows a certain amount of external emotion, but not too much, and for an orchestral player, none. Yet there is often a lot of emotion there. Such emotions may be a reaction to the music, but may also arise from anxiety about performing, often caused by the need to conform to performance norms. Performance anxiety is suffered, by some counts, by 70% of professional orchestral players (James, 1998).[299]

My doctoral research explored what might happen if performance anxiety is shown instead of hidden (Lawrence, 2020).[300] Could something authentic about what a performer is feeling be expressive for an audience, and could expressing it help the musician with their nerves?

The research concerned an idea that music performance anxiety might be considered not only a reaction to the pressure to conform, but also as a riposte to it, or (to put it another way) as the emergence of a 'forbidden' desire about performance: forbidden, that is, by teachers, or indeed by any of the other 'gatekeepers' referred to in this book. In my work with musicians this idea was borne out. Most had realisations about what sort of musician they wanted to be through expressing, rather than suppressing, their performance anxiety. Often these desires were contradictory to current performance norms.

For example, one of the participants had a severe physical shake when nervous. When this was encouraged, she had a realisation that she had always wanted to play with an extremely pronounced vibrato, but this had been forbidden by teachers. When she performed a piece to me with this vibrato, she felt an enormous sense of relief that she could play in a way that felt authentic to herself. The performance was unconventional in modern terms, but personally expressive and moving. Furthermore, when playing like this she felt no nerves and had no shake. There was no anxiety about needing to conform, she could just be herself.

As I continued with my research I began to love these transformations, and especially the performances that emerged that did not fit modern performance traditions and seemed so individually expressive. Could this be a way of opening up the Western classical tradition to new possibilities, as well as preventing the damage being done to musicians by the necessity to conform?

I gave a seminar in which I tried to show how this might be applied in my own performance. I performed a short piece, then wrote down on a whiteboard the feelings of anxiety that came up. I then performed the piece again, led by these symptoms. The intended piece became unrecognisable, but I was physically exhilarated and musically fulfilled in a way that rarely occurs in

[299] James, I. (1998). Western Orchestral Musicians are Highly Stressed. *Resonance; International Music Council* 26, 19–20.

[300] Lawrence, Martin. (2020). Music Performance Anxiety as Hidden Desire and Emerging Self: the Development and Exploration of a Conceptual Lens for Performers and Practitioners. PhD thesis, City, University of London.

my ‘regular’ performances. Couldn’t music always feel this good? I was also struck by the utterly involved, even shocked, reaction of the audience, very unusual in classical performance. Couldn’t more performances get such a response?

A fellow student attending this seminar also pointed out that the writing down of my performance anxiety symptoms for all to see was itself a moving part of the occasion, revealing to the audience the private struggles of a musician playing such a “well-loved” instrument. It made theatrical the gap that often occurs between the genuine feelings of the performer and the feelings the music is supposed to evoke.

In this way, my research led me unexpectedly to new performance practices for classical music:

1. Discovering the forbidden performing desires hidden in performance anxiety symptoms and following them even, or especially, if they are different from current norms.
2. Allowing performance anxiety to lead, or partly lead, a performance.
3. Consciously displaying the current feelings of a performer as part of a performance.

Included here are examples of each of these approaches.

The first shows part of another seminar, where I transform the performance anxiety symptom of shifting my weight onto one leg to the idea of not being square, being more dynamic and unbalanced, perhaps reckless, physically as well as musically. As it is an experiment, I become extremely unbalanced towards the end…

Watch: https://youtu.be/pAHXBxhEwio

In the second I share responsibility for a performance between my normal performing self and what I call my ‘performance anxiety-self’, allowing them to take charge of alternate phrases in the slow movement of Mozart’s horn concerto K.417.

Watch: https://youtu.be/YeFbpdXJMUM

For the third example I perform an arrangement of Schubert’s Ave Maria, taking time in bars rest to speak my live performance anxiety. This is done through a looper so that all my anxieties pile up as the piece goes on, and are all that is left at the end. In the previous two examples, the piano player is Alex Metcalfe.

Watch: https://youtu.be/hfBjBghpeWQ

These practices may seem strange for a person who has been involved in historically informed performance (HIP) for more than thirty years. Shouldn’t I be doing what the composer wanted? But I was drawn to HIP at the beginning because these were ***new*** sounds. I was more interested in the iconoclasm of it rather than the authenticity. I enjoyed the cleanliness, the impact and the directness of expression that following this new set of rules gave. I still do. But these rules have become a new normal, with the practical advantage, as Dan Leech-Wilkinson says, that this leads to less, and therefore cheaper, rehearsal time. Inevitably, some of the earlier revelations have been watered down to make them more ‘acceptable’, but I still like the directors who don’t do this, for instance Roger Norrington with his insistence of no vibrato, even in Bruckner or Elgar. And Le Concert Spirituel, performing Handel’s Fireworks music with absolutely uncorrected trumpet and horn harmonics and at full blast.

Watch: https://youtu.be/fNqJ8mED1VE

Thrilling and anarchic! If I listen closely to my feelings, maybe there is a sense in which it is thrilling to listen-in to something like it may have sounded (and I know because I play the horn), but I am not really arguing for the correctness of these ideas or justifying them on those grounds. It's just wonderful, and preferable to my taste to an older, more straight-laced style. What was also wonderful was the Academy of Ancient Music and Richard Egarr turning the tables and playing Bach and Purcell in arrangements by Stokowski, and in early 20th century style, at the Proms in 2019!

I still think there are more revelations to be had from studying old sources, but their value will be their newness and revelations of something not heard before in the score. This has always been my view about HIP. I do have colleagues who are concerned about 'authenticity' and 'correct' phrasing, but I often find that arguments concerning HIP are 'straw man' arguments, which raise all the problems about authenticity and what it means, the fact of improvisation in the 18th century, over-reverence to the letter of the score etc., when the interesting thing about it is what becomes possible, not what is forbidden. Leech-Wilkinson's work implies that even more is possible, a liberating philosophy. Let's do something striking, whether it is old or new! That's why I am quite happy with 'destroying' Mozart's horn concerto to produce something interesting. If you want to listen to all Mozart's notes, I can recommend some really good recordings…

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24 Reinterpreting opera: ‘Dido & Belinda’

24.1 *Regieoper*

We’ve become very used to the innovative staging of opera. For some decades, now, opera houses have been bringing in directors from (spoken) theatre to direct new productions, and naturally they have brought with them the highly imaginative approach to rereading texts that is normal in theatre. Perhaps opera houses see this as a way of seeming more relevant, more in touch with artistic practice elsewhere, and perhaps they hope to draw in theatre audiences to fill the house for a run of performances. Opera is appallingly expensive to produce, incapable of covering its costs, and needs all the box office help it can get. I don’t know enough about the economics of opera to know whether the numbers attracted by this more creative approach to staging outweigh the numbers of classical music aficionados who run a mile from innovation. I would expect that they do, by quite a substantial margin. At any rate, a *Regietheater* (director’s theatre) approach to opera is now the norm.

A review of Martin Kušej’s production of Mozart’s ‘Idomeneo’ at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, in 2014 gives a good impression of what can happen—machine guns, carnage—and how people react (‘the booers were out in force’). Here, as in every opera production almost without exception, the music remains entirely untouched by the staging. If you shut your eyes (as the booers could have) you would have no idea that anything contemporary was going on. In productions of any opera score the performance sounds much the same wherever you go.

Holly Champion (as noted in chapter 18.2) has called this the Fidelity Dichotomy.[301] The musical performance is ‘faithful’ to whatever are currently imagined as the composer’s intentions—and we’ve seen what that’s worth—while the staging is very definitely not and does not intend, nor sees any reason, to be. The stage and music directors work alongside each other using completely different and incompatible belief systems. If no one seems bothered by this it’s because few have ever imagined that the musical performance might reinterpret the score as innovatively as the staging (or indeed at all). The absurdity of the contrasts seems to be noticed only by those music purists who view opera as music with some tiresome staging—*prima la musica*—and for them it’s the staging that’s the problem, not the music. If anyone (perhaps the director) does see opera as theatre with some tiresome music—*prima le parole*—then altering the music is not a response that’s within their reach; the musical staff would never agree.

This is curious. As we’ve seen in Parts 1 and 2, there is no good reason not to reread the score just as radically as the text. And that immediately opens up the intriguing option of performing the score in such a way as to tell the same story as the staging. At last there’s a chance, and a reason, why the staging and the music might add up to a coherent whole; and beyond that offer a thought-provoking commentary on themes of much wider relevance and interest to a contemporary audience. Which in turn opens up the possibility of opera becoming not just a relevant artform but of doing significant

[301] Champion, Holly. 2016. Dramaturgical Analysis of Opera Performance: Four Recent Productions of *Dido and Aeneas* (PhD thesis, University of New South Wales).

social-political work, getting its well-heeled audience to think about more than celebrating or escaping themselves, and going some way towards justifying the enormous subsidies on which its survival depends.

This is what we aimed to show in Helios Collective's 2016 production of Purcell's 'Dido & Aeneas' score, retitled to show our intent as 'Dido & Belinda'. We wanted to find out what else Purcell's notes could do, and to get them to do it in exactly the same way as the text was being reinterpreted on stage. More specifically, we wanted to comment on, by subverting, opera's predilection for murdering its heroines. We were interested in finding out how Nahum Tate's abbreviated version of Virgil's psychologically complex story—so abbreviated as to lose any plausible motivation for its characters—could make sense in a modern social setting, that of the international super-rich who people glossy magazines and for whom superficial motivation and interaction are a fashion statement. The tale was easy enough to retell in these terms; but what would we do with the musical performance?

Continue to Chapter 24.2: How we made 'Dido & Belinda'

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24.2 How we made ‘Dido & Belinda’

Ella Marchment (director, Helios Collective) had taken some of my classes as a student at King’s College London, and when she approached me in 2015 about Helios working with King’s I suggested that we might develop a production of a well-loved opera in which the reading of the score was as creative as the staging of the text. There could be an opportunity to stage it at King’s College’s Arts and Humanities Festival in 2016 whose theme was to be ‘Play’.

My initial idea was that we start from the ‘Dido’ score, and treat the lament as a love duet, somewhat along the lines of Benedetto Ferrari’s ending to Monteverdi’s ‘Poppea’ (‘Pur ti miro’), and then see what other reworkings would be necessary to make a coherent whole. Ella brought in conductor and composer Leo Geyer, and in October 2015 we ran a workshop with two sopranos and a continuo group in which we tried extracts from the opera in a lesbian reading, with considerable improvisation in acting and music-making. Though not without its difficulties this encouraged Ella, Leo and me to meet shortly after for a long and enjoyable session around a piano in which we worked through the whole score, exchanging and testing ideas.

Our original idea had been to use the standard score and work collaboratively with the performers to develop an appropriate performance in rehearsal that aligned with our rethinking of the plot. We were unable to raise enough money to pay for the many weeks of workshopping that that was going to need, and so Leo produced a complete score which we then used as the starting-point for further development in the three weeks of rehearsal we could afford. Ella and I made further suggestions (Ella: ‘Aeneas can be made to seem like a real horrible prig. I think that when he means he’s gone off hunting he is hunting vulnerable women. He’s one of those disgusting cat calling men. Number 24 can be read in a totally different way.’ Dan: ‘The 2nd Woman … What’s her back story? Is she the palace’s PR officer? Head of External Relations? Suit, clipboard? Conducting the chorus? Cheerleader? … How does the chorus in 40 know [Dido’s] dead since 39, and what became of the body?!’ Leo: ‘I’ll leave the situation of the body in Ella’s safe hands!’).[302]

Many more details were adjusted during rehearsals, and also between the four performances (12–14 October 2016, at King’s), including in one performance a horrifying alteration which they were careful not to warn me of. More of that in Chapter 24.3 when we look at the performers’ feedback. I will say here, though, that that is exactly what performers should feel free to do; and so as a demonstration of my case it could not have been more effective or more pleasing.

‘Dido & Belinda’ was a group production, then, with performers enjoying as much agency as the available money allowed. That the money and the agency proportionally interlocked was all-too irritatingly unavoidable, illustrating as clearly as one could (not) wish how normativity in performance is the cheapest option. Equally, on a modest budget (£37,000), we (Leo and Ella most of all) were able to make something (I think) remarkably original and effective, using nothing more than a canonical score and fertile dramatic and musical imaginations. Given those imaginations, it’s not so difficult: any team could try it. Certainly it’s well within the financial and (with the right attitudes) the musical reach of an established opera house.

[302] Emails: EM to LG & DLW 31/08/2016; DLW to LG & EM 09/08/16 and 31/08/16; LG to EM & DLW 31/08/16.

A link to the video of the whole opera follows (filmed, and edited from two performances, by Heathcliff Blair), but you may find it helpful first to look at the more detailed synopsis of this reading of the story. Lists of cast and production team members are provided on the separate 'Dido & Belinda' section of the Challenging Performance website.

'Dido & Belinda': the video [NB the performance begins at 8:00 minutes, so feel free to skip the opening interview which introduces the concept for YouTube viewers.]

Continue to Chapter 24.3: 'Dido & Belinda': what the performers thought

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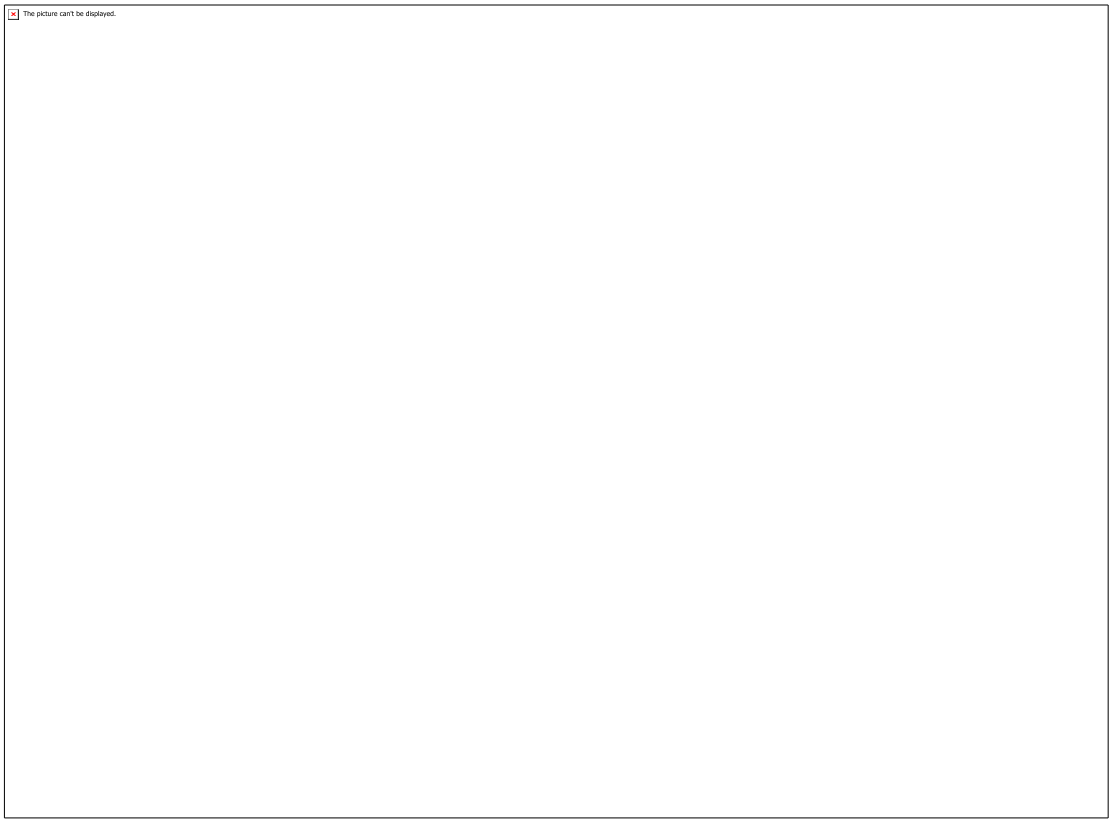
24.3 ‘Dido & Belinda’: what the performers thought

Why this production? In the first place, of course, I wanted to show that a persuasive production can do things I’ve been suggesting in this book: in this example leave the score largely intact, and yet enable it to mean more to a contemporary audience than a normative performance; be funny and touching and dramatic and beautiful, and yet say something to a youngish audience today.

But I also wanted to know how performers would find the experience, shocking or infuriating or engaging; and I wanted to know how audiences would react, depending on their previous experience and expectations. And so I used the performances to run two questionnaires, one for performers, one for audience. The results are provided in detail in the ‘Dido & Belinda’ section of the Challenging Performance website. I’d like to share a smaller and more readable selection of the results here, though, because I think they do suggest that this may be a way to go if we want to enlarge the options for young performers in the future. Which is the whole purpose of this book.

As well as a couple of members of the production team, I got fifteen performer responses which amounts to 50%, a fair sample. Two thirds were singers. Most were young, so people in the process of forming careers. Most were experienced opera performers, some of whom knew ‘Dido & Aeneas’ very well:



I asked them why they agreed to take part. Seven were specifically interested in the chance to do something different. For example,

> I was really interested in what direction the opera would be taken, and how far it would go (instrumentalist)

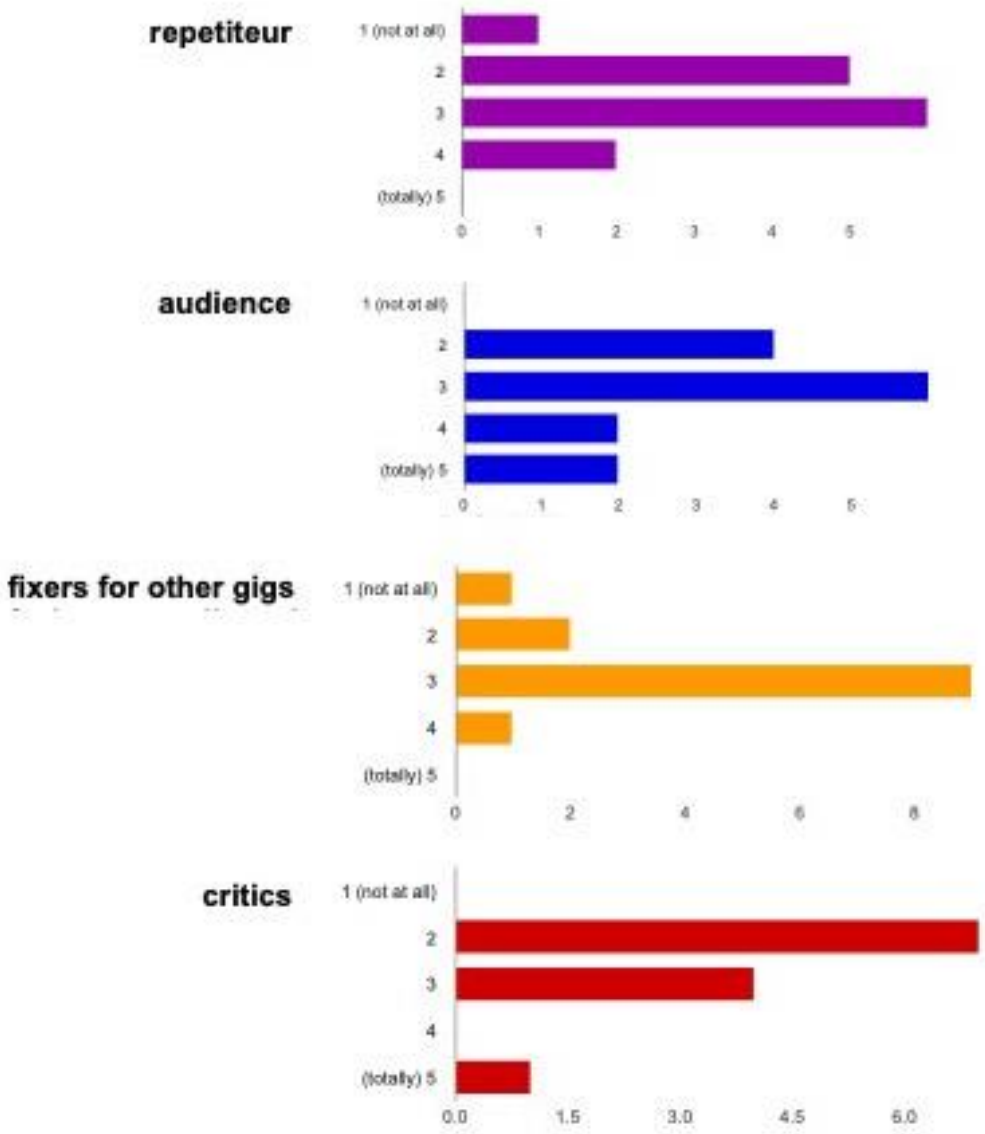
And some had more down-to-earth reasons:

> At that point, I was still only interested in the money (singer)

though later this performer did find the process very engaging.

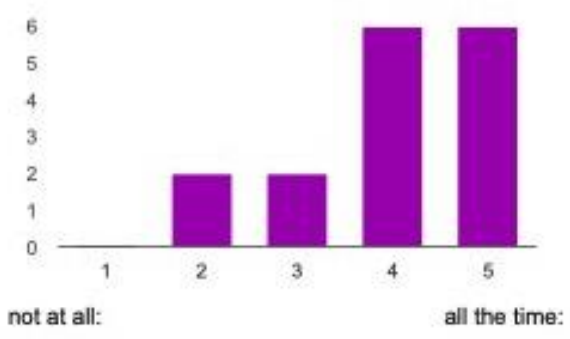
I asked them how creative they felt they themselves were allowed to be by the director and the conductor, and how that compared to their experience in a typical performance situation:

I also asked how creative they usually felt allowed to be by others including repetiteur, audience, fixers for subsequent gigs, and critics:



And that result ties in strongly with the research reported in Chapter 9.2 on the strength of hostility among critics.

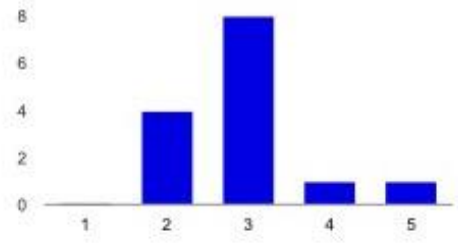
I asked how much, in a typical performance situation, they worry about performing in correct style:



This is an extraordinarily telling result, confirming everything we saw in Chapter 14 about the impact of policing on musicians' health.

I asked about their own teaching, hearing a clear preference for teaching more creativity than they feel they can:

13a. How free do you currently feel to teach your pupils to be creative with scores?



b. Would you like to, if it felt safer?

And I asked them what stops them; and here I got interestingly conflicted responses:

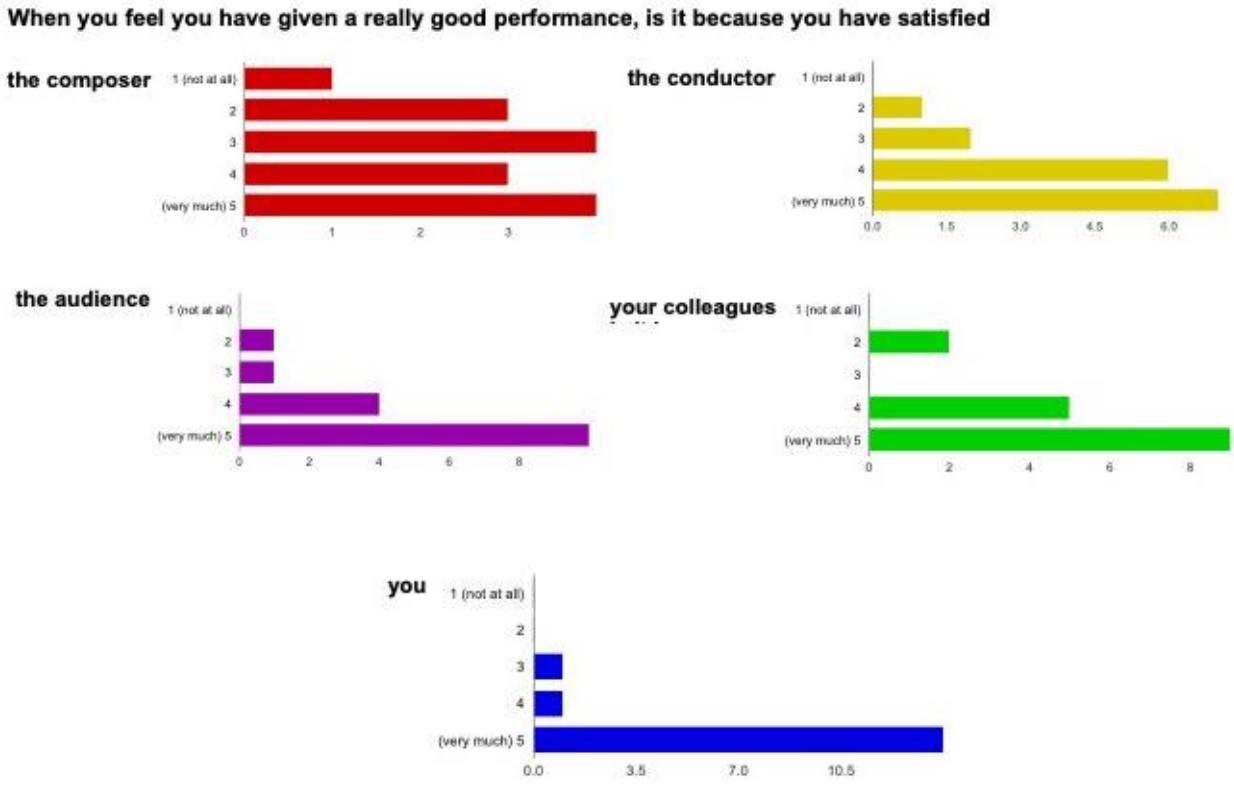
> Expectations
>
> …adjudicators, mark schemes etc
>
> Feeling that there is a 'correct' way something should be interpreted and that by doing something different I am somehow doing a disservice to the music or at risk of being criticised for not doing it in the 'correct' way.

And from that anxiety to:

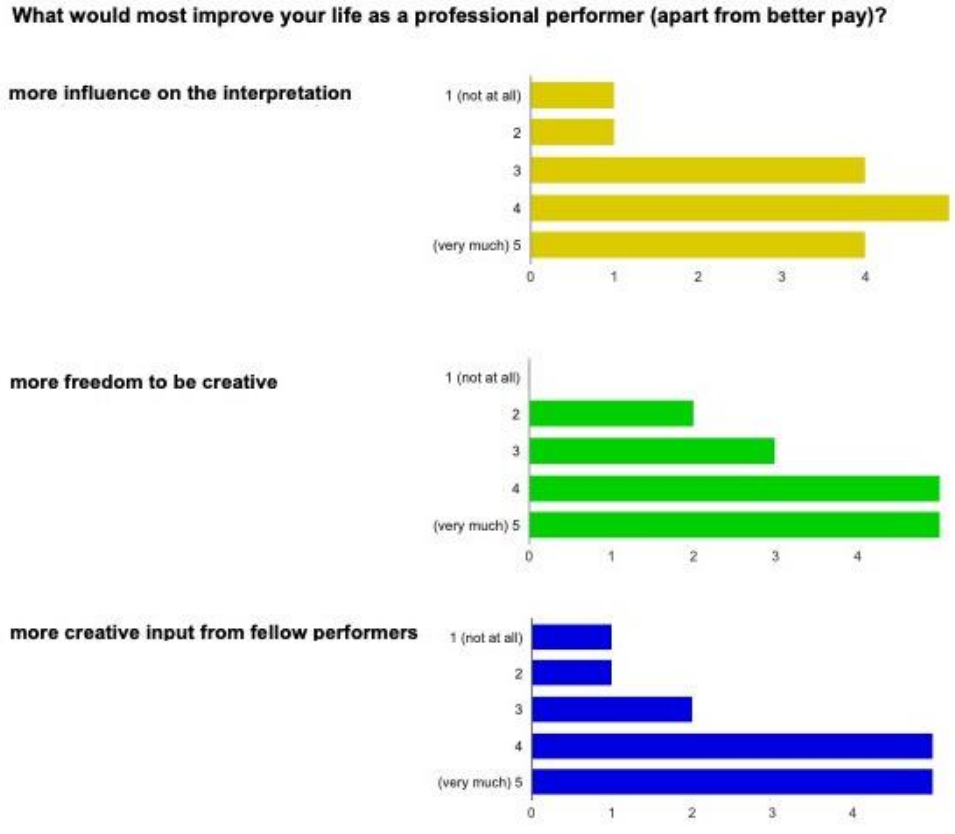
> I am quite a firm believer of performing what is written and performing what is believed to be the composers' intentions, stylistically and musically.

In other words, their gut response, reflected in the charts, was to want to be able to teach more creativity, but when asked for their thoughts there was a tendency to revert towards the standard ideology.

I then asked whose pleasure most justified a feeling that they'd given a really good performance. The point of this question was to find out whether their respect for tradition really was the main value in which they believe. And here the results told a slightly different story, suggesting that the opinion of contemporaries is far more immediately important (though 'you', at the bottom, is obviously complex because it includes elements of the others; and needless to say the opinion of others is the product of the ideology):

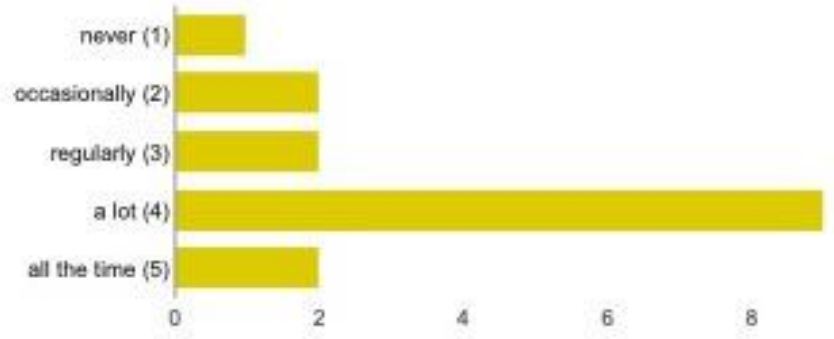


From here I went on to ask what would most improve their lives as professional performers. The strongest trends were for more influence on the interpretation, more freedom to be creative, and more creative input from fellow performers:

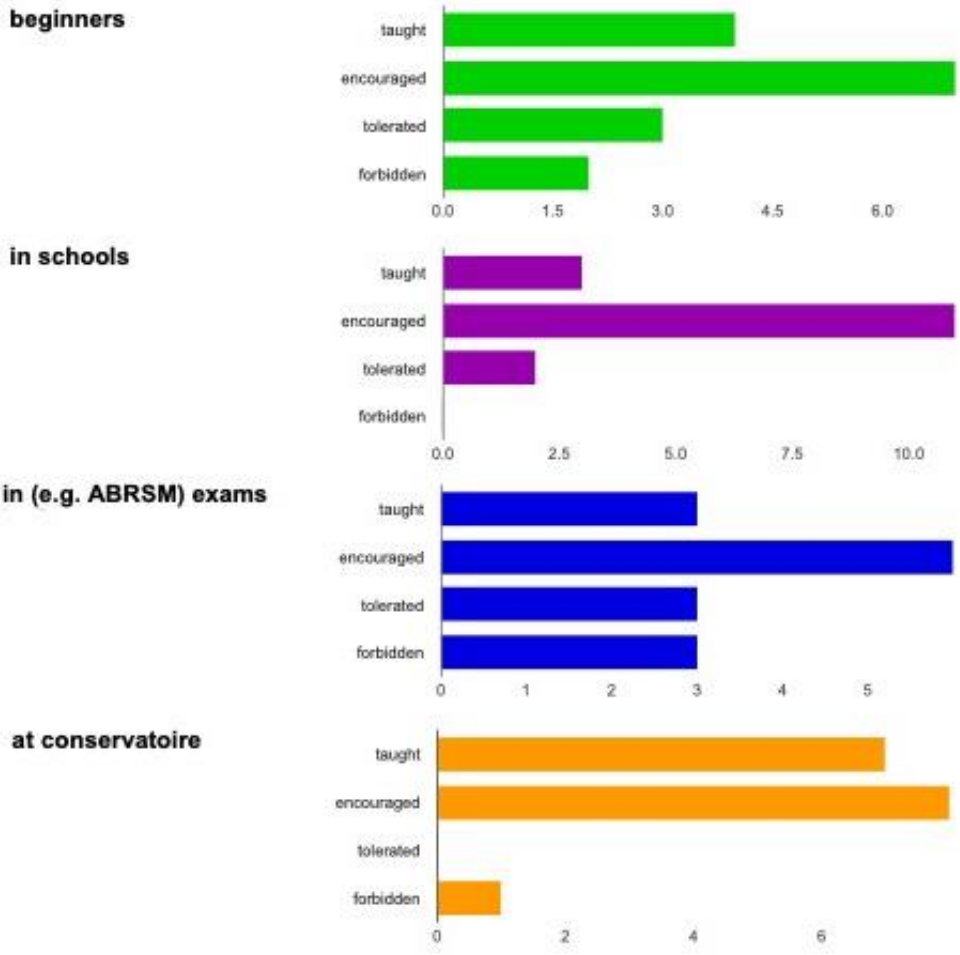


I thought that was interesting, emphasising the extent to which encouragement from peers would provide support; and this in turn confirms the suspicion that if enough performers started to work *together* on these sorts of approaches that itself would provide a safer and more productive environment in which to be creative.

Very clear support comes from their answers to, 'Would you like to work like this with other well-known scores?':

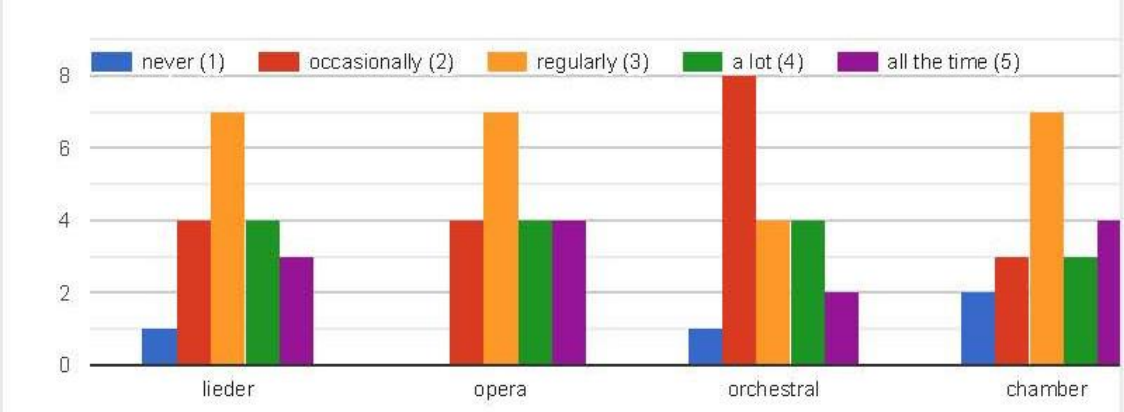


I asked at what stage in music education they'd like to see this approach to performing classical scores be taken, and how much. There was surprising enthusiasm, I felt, for encouraging young players to be more creative; more mixed feelings about exams; and strong support for teaching it at conservatoire:



I imagine that this ties in with the still widespread belief, which I've observed in other data, that you need to learn to interpret 'correctly' before you (to quote a teacher) "mess about" with the score. That sense that there is an original, and that we know what it's like, and that reproducing it is our first duty, is still overwhelmingly strong, since it's been repeated endlessly since first lessons. But that being so, the strong support, after the experience of performing in 'Dido & Belinda', for teaching similar approaches in conservatoire is still heartening, I think.

I then asked about the repertoires in which they'd like to see this approach taken. The strongest support was for song and opera, and interestingly the least support for orchestral music.



The idea of an orchestra doing something different seems hardest to contemplate, perhaps because it's so antithetical to orchestral musicians' everyday experience. As one performer commented:

> It's all a bit like a battery farm in orchestras these days. …any attempt to discuss the musical interpretation of a piece … would be professional suicide. (instrumentalist)

I asked what they least and most enjoyed about working on this production. Least enjoyed were rehearsal constraints:

> By the end of the rehearsal process I felt like the performers were just beginning to feel comfortable enough to be really creative and take risks

Most enjoyed were:

> Creative freedom – lifechanging eyeopening experience.
>
> I really enjoyed the fact that everyone, singers and instrumentalists alike, were encouraged to come up with their own ideas.
>
> The opportunity to be involved in something innovative and imaginative in an industry which is brimming with unoriginal productions. (production team member)
>
> The way the show developed over the three nights - changing things and watching the audiences' reactions. (singer)

And in fact in a further, matinee performance for covers, to my total surprise (as Dramaturg) the witches slit Dido's throat, so that there was no happy ever after. I was appalled but I also loved the fact that they felt free to do it. So this one's interesting:

> Trusting my colleagues to get a positive and beautiful response from everyone else on stage when we all try something new. (singer)

I asked what they thought they could transfer from this production to their normal professional music-making, and here the responses were most consistent of all:

> [not] to take everything as gospel.
>
> Don't be afraid.
>
> be braver.

And

> I think a greater sense of "what if….?" when approaching my music making, rather than singing a standardised version by default.

And actually for me that 'what if?' question is one of the most important. 'What else can these notes do?' is the question I ask constantly when working with performers because it addresses our relationship with the score and our sense of what potential the composer has initiated. It's obvious from the way, and the extent, that performance has changed that every score can be persuasive in many more ways than are normative at any one place and time. The composer can't envisage that. Referring back to the composer's intentions is to seek to evade most of that potential and, don't let's forget, also to invalidate every performance any of us has ever made or heard of any piece older than ourselves. Performances like this 'Dido' bypass these sorts of nonsensical but ideologically enforced beliefs.

Nothing made that clearer here than the responses of one of the singers, the one who insisted that they were 'a firm believer of performing what is written and performing what is believed to be the composers' intentions'. When I asked about prior expectations of working on this production they'd selected 'I expected a difficult or unpleasant experience', and when I asked what would most improve their life as a professional performer they said, 'More detailed instructions in the score.' And yet at the end of this long questionnaire, when I asked if there was anything else to add, they wrote:

> Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to perform this wonderful re-imagining of Purcell's work! I honestly didn't think I would enjoy it as much as I have! I am overjoyed that I got to be a part of this amazing company and really relished every rehearsal. Thank you again!

There is huge potential here for a more fulfilling professional life.

Continue to 24.4 'Dido & Belinda': what the audiences thought

Detailed audience and performer feedback (links to PDFs)

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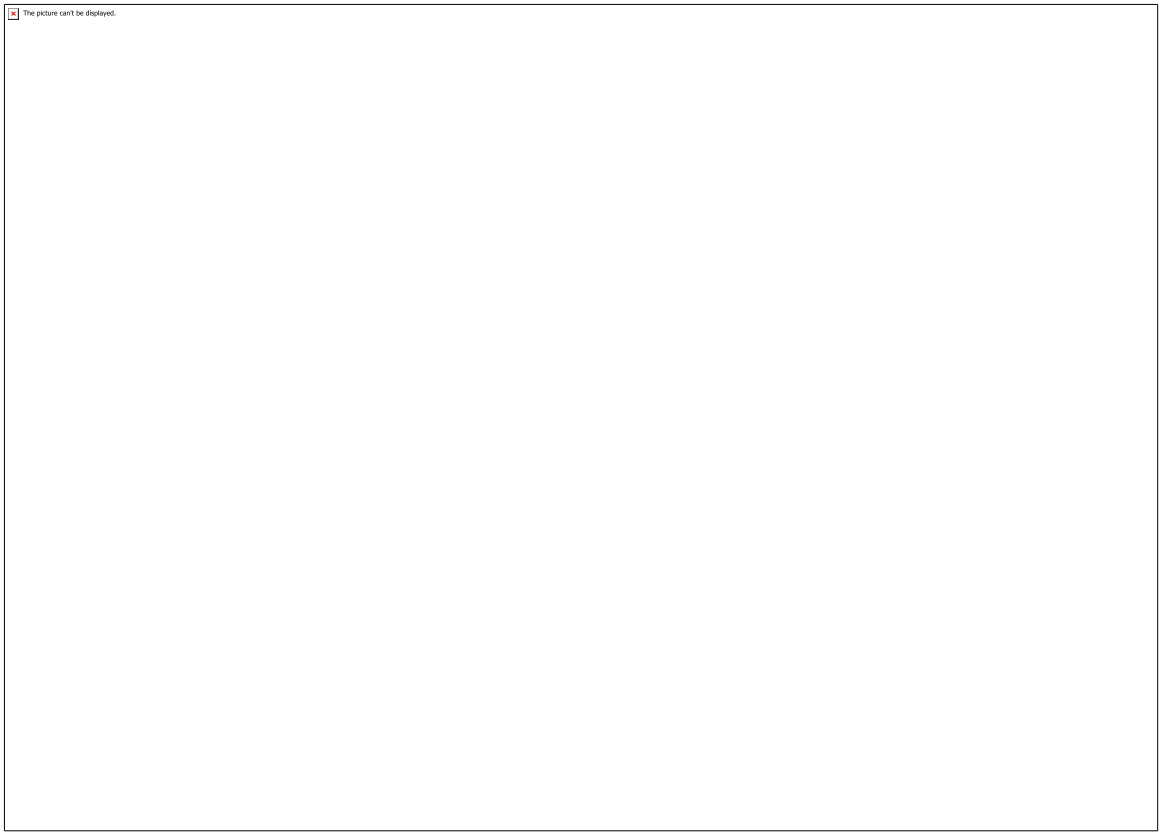
24.4 ‘Dido & Belinda’: what the audiences thought

Are audiences really ready for this kind of work? I’ve argued earlier that there is real potential here to attract much larger and more diverse audiences, simply through making performances that are not known in advance and that are able to interact with current concerns of the wider field of art, with social concerns, and that provide themes for debate by people with cultural interests far beyond the narrow world of current WCM. But is that borne out by audience responses to ‘Dido & Belinda’?

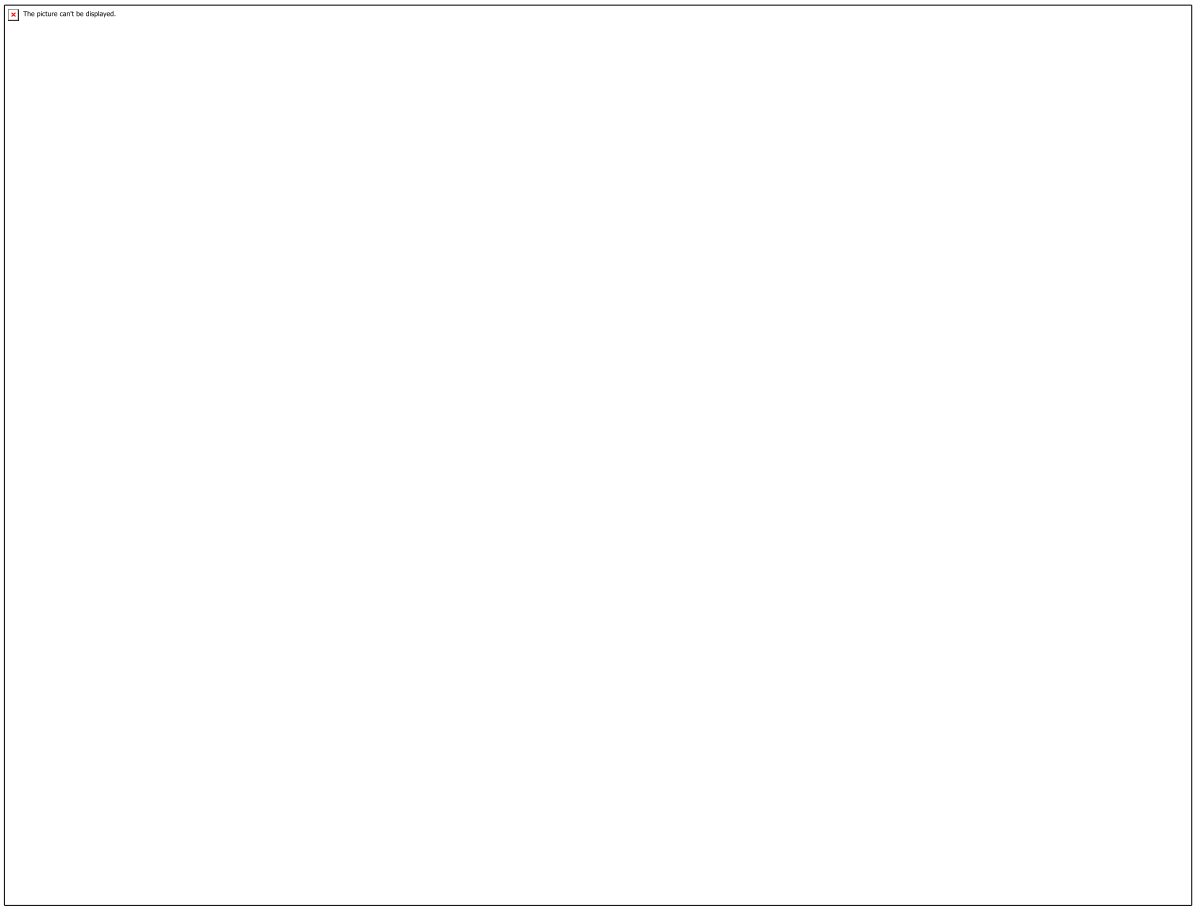
Audiences too have been taught to share the standard ideology and to believe that the performances they encounter in concert and on record represent the composer’s intentions and do it as well as it can possibly be done. How would they react to this very different take on ‘Dido & Aeneas’?

We placed an audience questionnaire on every seat at each performance and received 52 responses, about a third of those who attended. Two-thirds of these were aged 18-35 and most of the rest 46-65.



Judging by their detailed responses the younger ones were mainly friends and colleagues of the performers—25% or all respondents were professional musicians, another 16% had studied music at conservatoire or university but were not professionals, which is a pretty high proportion for an audience—while the older group probably included parents and family. So it may not be surprising that comments were overwhelmingly favourable. But I’ll try to tease out more nuance as we look at the results.

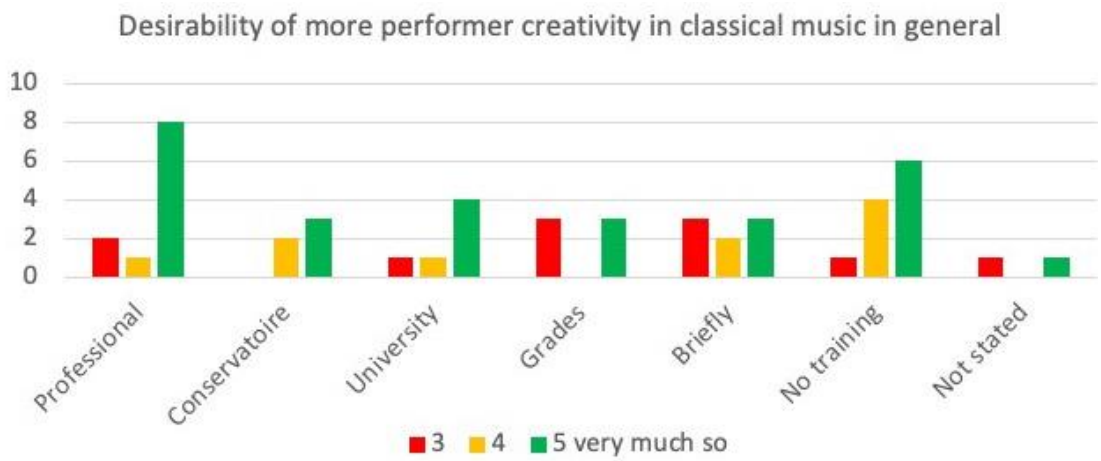
Perhaps not surprisingly, given the reworking of the plot empowering the women, women were much more likely to rate the opera ‘very effective’ than men, as were those in the 18-35 age bracket (who are exactly those whom the project aims to reach since they have most to gain from new performance options):



Opinions were most divided among professional musicians, as one might expect given the challenge to the values in which they were trained. On the other hand, professionals also provided the largest number of 5s (the highest rating). Those with less musical training mostly scored effectiveness at 5; while those with none, mostly at 4; which I assume is because for them it was just another opera, whereas those with some training were aware of the implications and were nonetheless convinced.

Among the professionals, a male in the 36-45 bracket commented that ‘I felt no need for this tampering’ and they felt ‘angry at times’. A younger woman found it ‘extremely effective … revitalising, engaging, exciting, interesting, rejuvenating, refreshing’. A male of the same age found it ‘truly enjoyable’ and left convinced that ‘Opera is 100% the key to unlocking the door which will let us escape our current aesthetic prison we find ourselves in.’ And I think there’s truth in that, in that it’s simply easier to wrap up as dramatically necessary than with a string quartet, for example. (Or indeed the Moonlight sonata.)

I asked some of the same questions that I asked the performers. 57% think now, in the light of this experience, that classical music performances would benefit ‘very much’ from more performer creativity, with professional musicians among the audience much the clearest that they would like to hear more creative freedom.



Among comments on reinterpreting the story there were four objections to the feminist or lesbian themes, three of those from older men, the fourth from an older woman; but a lot of strong support from younger and women audience members.

On reinterpreting the score, detailed comments were more varied. Several of the standard tropes were reproduced:

> Music is for me sacred. It's the composer who decides how to make it sound. (Male, 18-25, musical training as far as grade exams)

i.e. the belief in composer as god. And:

> it struck me that he perhaps meant this score to be highly adaptable (M, 56-65, beginner)

i.e. the composer's intention as authorisation.

Others were more discriminating:

> Musical transformations / Intriguing, sometimes *un*convincing, others brilliant. (M, 56-65, university music training)

> These weren't always too integrated and thought out into dramatic concept, but when they were they worked. (M, 26-35, professional)

Quite a few would have liked us to go further, which I must say did surprise me:

> Un-notated inflections from musicians in pit [f]elt appropriate … could probably have gone a little further (M, 46-55, university)

> Freer vocal performances including improvised (?) ornamentation. … I think the singers could have gone even further. (M, 46-55, university)

> Both direction and musical re-interpretation successfully translated. 21st century re-imagining could've possibly extended. (M, 26-35, professional)

The integration of musical and stage direction was noted by a professional:

> Orchestra seemed to have more agency as a musical entity than I am used to hearing in opera. It seemed more integrated with the stage action (Female, 26-35, professional)

and it was good to know that that came across.

There were a great many general comments, far too wide a range to illustrate, but they included the man quoted earlier who felt 'angry at times':

> I definitely prefer a 'proper' historically informed performance. Well, I am a musician and this evening won't change what I do and how I do it. (M, 36-45, professional)

But also this from a younger professional musician which illustrates the key point that no damage is done to an artwork by this kind of performance: the sources remain, they're unaltered and available to anyone to read in other ways.

> You didn't improve Purcell. And that is *exactly* what I loved: by virtue of the fact I think you weren't trying to create the 'quintessential' performance. But it was different. And really successful. And in a country where 100 other Didos are being staged this year, the opportunity to experience a unique version is really wonderful. (M, 26-35, professional)

But I was particularly interested in the general comments from people without musical training, because I want to get a sense of whether, as I hypothesise, a much wider range of performances could increase the audience for classical music. Here's a selection covering the age range:

> It was loads of fun to watch. And far more effective than the Purcell staging at the Barbican on Monday. (F, 56-65, no musical training)

> I think the production would work very well as a gateway to audiences who would normally be reluctant to see operas. (gender not stated, 46-55, nmt)

> The experience has made me realise that opera/classical music can be interpreted in ways that make performances feel more relevant and engaging, especially for an audience not well-versed in classical music. (F, 18-25, nmt)

> … makes me want to go see more events like it. (M, 26-35, nmt)

> As a first exposure to opera it was a thoroughly enlightening and engrossing introduction. (M, 26-35, nmt)

Of course this is not a representative sample for the more diverse audience I think we could reach, but it is pointing in a very encouraging direction. A couple of final comments:

> It was an inspiring evening that proved much more radical interventions in scores can be *vitalising* forces, not vandalising ones. (M, 46-55, university)

And:

> As for classical music in general, this evening didn't and couldn't address the question of what 'reformed' performances and presentation of, say, Beethoven string quartets or piano sonatas, or Boulez's La Marteau sans maître, might feel and sound like. Still, food for thought and for future experiments. (M, 56-65, childhood lessons)

And with that I completely agree. It's exactly what the experiments with instrumental scores here at challengingperformance.com aim to explore (see the drop-down list from 'Interviews and Recordings' in the menu at the top of this page).

I believe this is enough to provide some support for my claims that much more varied readings of canonical scores are possible, musically and in principle, and produce results that are thought-provoking, engaging, persuasive; that musicians find this kind of work refreshing and rewarding; and that they have the imagination and skills already to work this way, if only the occasions are provided and they feel empowered and safe to be creative.

I hope, also, that these data suggest to you that the audiences that we can already begin to see emerging with new venues and new forms of presentation are likely to be sympathetic to these much more open kinds of interactions with texts from the past. There are real possibilities here for generating new work and new audiences for adventurous young musicians. The problem is to get the profession to enable, not to block these sorts of approaches. And only successful examples will achieve that, examples that people want to emulate and improve upon. Musicologists just talking about it aren't going to make the slightest difference: people have to get out there and do it!

Continue to Chapter 25: Speaking of contemporary concerns

Or if you've not done so, watch
'Dido & Belinda': the video
[NB the performance begins at 8:00 minutes, so feel free to skip the introductory interview, introducing the concept for YouTube viewers, which you won't need if you've read this far!]

Detailed audience and performer feedback (links to PDFs)

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25 Speaking of contemporary concerns

I once suggested on Twitter that the reason most cultured people are not interested in WCM is that its performance usually has nothing to say about current cultural concerns. In response WCM fans, and some practitioners, erupted in tweet-rage. And yet it seemed a reasonable point and evidently true. WCM *is* perceived as occupying its own world, to whose values you have to subscribe if you want to take part. Concerts do not make any intentional reference to the wider cultural world, and musicians mostly seem to believe that to do so would be to betray 'the music' and the composer. WCM has to be the way it is, its followers believe, and if you want to talk about it you must talk about in the terms in which people who are musically knowledgeable understand it.

But let's try to stand back for a moment and think more clearly. The idea that performance is uninfluenced by the world around it, and instead proceeds with pure objectivity to sound the instructions in a composer's score, is really not plausible. We've seen, throughout this book, performance responding to its context, changing all the while. How it does that, how the context influences the performance, opens up a huge set of questions that research has hardly begun to consider;[303] but, whatever the complexity of the interrelationships, it could hardly be more evident that performance changes not through self-contained laws of its own but because the world around it changes.

Largely this happens without anyone being aware of it. One might think being unaware *that* it happens is pretty inexcusable, given the wealth of recorded evidence. But being unaware of it *as* it happens is quite understandable. For the same reasons that contemporary performance seems natural, the ways in which it reflects social and cultural concerns are so thoroughly embedded in practice as to be impossible to notice without a great deal of focused and, to a considerable extent speculative, thought.

Nonetheless, that it must happen also means that it could happen differently. With thought, and especially with experiment, it must be possible for a musical performance to comment (by behaving in relevant ways unexpectedly) on the sorts of concerns with which musical performance interacts, whatever they may be, or whatever a performer is able to make them be. If this doesn't normally happen it's probably because no one has realised that it could, rather than because it can't.

By now you will want examples. I'd like some very much. With texted (perhaps also with titled) music it's not so hard. The 'Dido & Belinda' performance on this website offers a clear and quite extensive example, as aspects of Purcell's score are performed in non-standard, indeed in transgressive ways in order to discuss (in effect) non-standard, indeed transgressive readings of the

[303] I'm talking here specifically about making performances that comment on current social concerns. But this is just one aspect of the much wider rethinking of WCM as a social practice that has been going on for the past few years. For an outstanding survey, with important suggestions for a better interaction between artistic and social purpose, as well a welcome emphasis on musicians as makers, see Gaunt, Helena, Celia Duffy, Ana Coric, Isabel R. González Delgado, Linda Messas, Oleksandr Pryimenko, and Henrik Sveidahl. 2021. Musicians as "Makers in Society": A Conceptual Foundation for Contemporary Professional Higher Music Education. *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.713648

text and plot. This is exactly the sort of performance that could well be discussed with interest by a group of cultural commentators from outside the closed (closeted) world of WCM debate.

This is a pertinent test. What disappoints many in WCM is the lack of interest shown in it shown by the sorts of people who discuss culture in the media (see Chapter 9.6). Why *does* WCM figure so infrequently in media that regularly discuss art and theatre at a sophisticated level? Much of this is the fault of WCM in insisting that you have to know and believe about the music the things that those brought up in WCM ideology 'know' and believe about it. These are precisely the beliefs that prevent the kinds of creativity that would allow WCM to comment more explicitly on the kinds of themes on which visual arts and theatre comment. So evidently one essential move is to get over the delusion that being a paid-up member of the music establishment is an essential qualification for having an interesting view of it. But the fault lies also in WCM's failure to attempt to explore the relationships that performance must have with the world around it, let alone the ways in which those relationships could differ, and its inclination to object to the very idea that it might, as if WCM is somehow outside and above its temporal context. People used to make that claim for compositions, especially those without text ('absolute music', as if), but I think we've largely got over that delusion now, at any rate in musicology if not quite in the profession as a whole. Yet, so far, few have imagined that the same might apply to performance.

So when we come to think about how music without text might also have something to say, through the way it is performed, about current concerns from beyond the score and its normative performance, it's reasonable to aim to perform in a way that is of serious interest to cultural commentators with wider spheres of interest and who are not necessarily WCM specialists. It should be clear to them that a performance is making some contribution to a wider debate, even if the exact nature of that contribution is open to discussion. (One hopes it will be, of course.)

How does one do this, without a text to point the listener in a particular direction? Is doing it, though, necessarily any harder than discussing the relevance of a *composition* to its context? The two are always working together, needless to say, albeit now in non-standard ways. If I play the Moonlight sonata first movement allegro furioso, or 'Syrinx' angrily (if you follow the link, select 'Tempo 2'), or a Bach prelude with the voices variably synchronised, or if I vocalise 'Ave Maria' in a voice broken by despair, it's capable of bringing much to an environment in which what an establishment wishes to pass off as Utopia is arguably a maelstrom of conflict. Context is the point, as ever.

I think WCM performers are perfectly capable of this, of finding interesting ways in which scores can speak of much more, and in much more varied ways, than we imagine they do at the moment. And I think that to do that would make our work of far greater general interest. It's up to us to explore, experiment, and to offer ways of thinking about issues that matter to people, so that we have something that matters to contribute. Otherwise what are we? Why should anyone outside the WCM loop care about what we do? Why should they pay us to do it?

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26 Speaking of others

This chapter is still to be fully written. But let me outline the case.
Chapter 12.2 touched on some of the ways in which music can seem to behave like a person.

As normatively performed today, the people it makes are very familiar to us; we feel comfortable in their company. They are like us, but more perfect and more articulate about themselves.

Non-normative performances of the sort advocated in this book make very unfamiliar people, starting from these same scores; they unsettle those who want music to reassure them that all is well with their world. The hatred of critics for even small unexpected details in performance (Chapters 9.2, 9.4) shows how easily the musical 'other' generates prejudice and encourages exclusion.

But it follows that, with goodwill and a determination to be inclusive and welcoming of difference, non-normative performance could allow us to make many very different others from the scores we know and love, and that those others could be interesting to us and welcomed by us into our culture. Non-normative performance could thus offer a safe space in which to exercise empathy, with benefits for our lives well beyond music.

In turn, this offers a way for western classical music to escape the values of the far right (Chapter 30.1) and foster instead values of generosity and inclusivity. As a result it could also be more welcoming and more interesting to much more diverse audiences, and provide work for many more fine performers.

I make this case, with examples, in a YouTube talk created for a concert by the Orchestra for the Age of Enlightenment at King's Place in December 2020. Watch a run-through here (19 minutes).

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27 Finally: The right to be different

In one sense we are all much more alike than we suppose. We share a common ancestor who lived much more recently than most realise (only a few thousand years ago); though that's not to say that our DNA is identical. But except when parents, children, or siblings, we are all cousins. Nonetheless, we have a strong inherited tendency (because of its benefits for survival in subsistence communities) to band together in groups that conform in culture, appearance, and behaviour and exclude others. WCM does this all too well, hoping to protect itself in what it experiences as a relatively hostile (or at any rate indifferent) environment: its culture is highly constrained and conformist, fearing that any difference from normative behaviour may have deleterious consequences for cultural survival. And yet everywhere where WCM finds the funding and social attitudes conducive to its flourishing there is more than enough economic and social safety, comfort and resource to sustain much more diverse practices without any threat to a flourishing artistic and commercial practice. On the contrary, as I've argued throughout this book, more diverse musicking would make it a great deal safer, for many more people would become engaged in it.

The bedrock of modern thought about diversity and individuality is the UN Charter on Human Rights. In 2013 the UN Human Rights Council received the report of its Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Farida Shaheed: 'The right to freedom of artistic expression and creativity', which includes (in paragraph 85) 'the right of all persons to freely experience and contribute to artistic expressions and creations, through individual or joint practice, to have access to and enjoy the arts, and to disseminate their expressions and creations'.

Is WCM as currently policed even compatible with this right? No. Clearly it is not. But it should be. There's no excuse for such a high-profile, high-status embodiment of Western cultural values not to be in conformity with its (now) foundational statement of ethical and political values. And no need either. Performers have the right to make more varied music starting from these scores. Gatekeepers have an obligation not to obstruct the exercise of that right.

I'd like to end this book with the words of Christopher Small, because so much of its case was made by him in 1998 in a Postlude which one suspects few stayed to read; or if they did they passed over it as too radical to be discussed.

> Nevertheless, we are free, as performers and listeners also, to use these works of music in any way we like. There is nothing in the rule book that tells us that the score is a sacred text that must not be altered in any way or that it must be performed in a way that approximates as nearly as possible to the way it was performed in the composer's time. Or if such a rule does exist, it was invented in the twentieth century by composers and musicologists as part of the contest for control of the musical texture, which we have seen has been a feature of the western concert tradition since the seventeenth century at least. We who wish to play those works are under no obligation to obey it. Performance is for performers and for listeners, not for composers and certainly not for their works and not musicologists either. The performer's obligation, in other words, is not to the composer (who is quite likely dead anyway and can make no protest) or to the work but to his own enjoyment and to that of his or her listeners, if there be any. The performer has the right to make any changes he or she

> feels like making in the work and to interpret the written or printed score any way he or she chooses. The listeners (who may, of course, include other performers as well as composers and musicologists) have the right to reject those changes, but that does not affect the performer's right to make them.[304]

Small (1998, 220) acknowledges that he's 'a white, middle-class male academic on a comfortable pension' and thus to an extent in league with the power-holders he identifies. And so am I. But he says that he's losing sympathy with the power struggles, 'violence and egotism' that so much classical music plays out. I too. And I hope, if you've come this far with me, you too. So let's do something about it.

Finally: THANK YOU. Thank you for reading, thank you for being willing to think about these questions, and thanks in advance for introducing your friends, teachers, students to this book: please do! We can help them make a better musical world.

Continue to PART 4: Related essays

Continue to a bullet-point Summary of every suggestion in this book

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[304] Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. 1st ed. (Middletown CT: Wesleyan), 217.

PART 4: Related essays

While (and since) writing *Challenging Performance* I've been giving talks and writing articles on related issues, and I'll include some of those here for readers who'd like to go into particular topics in more depth. There are copyright constraints on how soon I can add some of the articles, but for now here is an unpublished paper which I wrote in 2020, very soon after the book was finished. It deals with some of the ways in which Classical Music ideology and practice overlap with the values of the political right.

Continue to Chapter 30.1: Sounding the right

30.1 Sounding the right

This talk—which contains references to sexual violence, homophobia and racism—was given first in an earlier version at a seminar on **Musical Interpretation: tradition and experimentation**, at Luleå University of Technology, Piteå School of Music, 9-10 December 2020; and in the current version in a seminar on **REFUSE/NIKS: Classical Music Performance Norms—Resist or Obey?** at Leiden University's Academy of Creative and Performing Arts (ACPA) on 7 June 2021. A video of the talk is available here (30').

We live in a time of prohibitions. Those surrounding the Covid pandemic are reasonable. But most are not about protecting lives but rather about protecting power. In states right around the world prohibitions protect dictatorships, vested interests, and a vindictive hatred of groups other than those in power. In my own country we have a government that forbids the teaching of anti-capitalism or critical race theory in schools. And it's easy to see what they have to fear from both of those. Even in musicology we now see protectionist attempts to invalidate the study of non-western musical cultures. Schenkergate has exposed the extent of white fragility among music theorists, whom we've seen seeking to excuse Schenker in exactly the same terms as white people seek to excuse themselves and their ancestors for occupation, exploitation and slavery. We're now a very long way from a point where the west is ready to think seriously about reparations for the cruelty of our predecessors, cruelty from which we still benefit so much and by which black people are still so much disadvantaged. There's still a widespread sense among westerners that we deserve all our advantages, thanks to the ingenuity of our ancestors and ourselves.

People are beginning to ask what kind of work western classical music has done, and does now, to perpetuate a view of western culture as superior, deserving special protection and universal dissemination. And it's not hard to see how comfortably all kinds of protectionism for western political and social values align with a view of WCM as unchanging, needing and deserving to be preserved and practised perfectly, in conformity with the values and practices of the past, for ever. That was especially obvious in the recent Beethoven year. Perhaps we can be thankful to Covid for cutting short the Beethoven festivities, but even by March 2020 I think we heard more than enough about Beethoven's exceptionalism. Beethoven, we're supposed to agree, is for all time, his music unchanging, ever relevant, to be performed faithfully, for ever. Struggle, triumph, innovation, determination, self-promotion, entrepreneurialism, these are the values that unite Beethoven and western capitalism.

In the UK it's been revealing to see right-wing politicians attacking Covid legislation on the grounds of freedom, the freedom to put business before health, the freedom not to protect people from the virus. The rest of us need to think about this, about freedom as a value, because clearly we do need freedoms, particularly the freedom not to be tied to the past, while at the same time refusing the freedom to ruin the present and the future. We need the freedom to change where change improves many people's lives; and that's going to apply to music too. The kind of freedom that the right demands is the freedom not to care about others. And that combines naturally—and I use that word carefully—it combines naturally with a determination to preserve past practices unchanged. For both are naturally selected behaviours. In the subsistence societies in which humans evolved, to follow past practices that worked, and to be suspicious of people from outside one's group, are

valuable survival tactics, although in a modern society we no longer need either. And I think this perhaps helps to explain the visceral fury with which the right protects itself: its hatred of the other and its conservatism are felt at a deeper level, because they're naturally selected for, than the humane, rational values of the left. But we can afford humane, rational values now, because for most devotees of western classical music it's no longer a struggle to survive. And therefore afford them we must. There is no room to use this argument to excuse exclusion and prejudice. Nonetheless we see this same visceral passion in arguments within classical music culture. The defenders of the classical status quo are just as furious, when confronted by music that's different, as are their political equivalents. We'll see some examples in a moment when we look at performance critics.

Perhaps you're concerned at how easily I'm bringing classical music into discussion of right-wing thought and behaviour. Don't we all find classical music the most beautiful and life-enhancing expression of our best feelings and values, made uniquely powerful by the very imprecision with which it maps onto everyday life, allowing music to speak to each of us differently but deeply precisely because we can't say exactly what it represents other than shaped feeling? Has not the west been astonishingly successful at developing this expressive power in subtlety and at length?

Well; maybe. But it's no distance from thinking of western classical music as uniquely powerful to thinking of it as something that needs to be universally practised, to making it part of the imperial project to spread western culture throughout the world. And indeed that's just what happened, and still happens. The UK's Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music still sells its examination system throughout Her Britannic Majesty's commonwealth of nations in order to ensure consistency of classical performance across the globe. Competitors from north, south, east and west are still required to perform standard readings of standard repertoire if they want to succeed in competitions and in auditions. Even the idea that a pianist from Shanghai might legitimately have a very different take on the Moonlight sonata than a pianist from Stockholm is still inconceivable. If that's not imperial thinking I don't know what is.

The extent of fascistic thinking in western classical music culture becomes clear as soon as one looks closely at its teaching and policing. I've written about this in *Challenging Performance*, especially chapters 7 and 9. Teaching indoctrinates reproduction, faithfulness and obedience to an imaginary past, while critical and managerial policing discourages innovation in professional practice. I think it's reasonable to say that, together with classical ballet, western classical performance is one of the world's most strictly and viciously policed activities outside prison. You believe and you obey or you are excluded from the profession.

I want to look at this and its political associations more closely by focusing on a review in a recent issue of *Gramophone* magazine. I've written about the language of *Gramophone* reviews in an article in the Nicholas Cook Festschrift, and also in chapter 9.2 of my book. Today's example I've mentioned briefly Chapter 9.2 and in a podcast but I haven't discussed it in detail until now.

> "If DG thought it had the eccentricity market locked up with Ivo Pogorelich, it hadn't reckoned with the interpretative graffiti that Ugorski would unleash in Beethoven's Diabelli Variations. **The first time I heard it, I felt dirty all over**."
> *Gramophone*, Awards issue 2018, 128

Although I have to provide a bibliographical reference as a guarantee of probity, and you can easily find out who he is, I'm not naming the author of this review. Let's call him X. And I would encourage you not to try to identify him: this isn't about X the individual, or about the magazine. It's about the culture of criticism within which this kind of writing seems appropriate, amusing and entirely normative.

If you Google "I felt dirty all over" you'll find almost all the instances are from the victims of sexual assault and rape. I don't know where the critic picked up his image, but it's hard to believe that he was unaware of these associations. Why did he think it was appropriate?

I should admit that I have been guilty of something similar. In a 2002 book on the modern performance of medieval music (p. 135) I said of a particular approach favoured in the 1970s and 80s, and loathed by a group of critics including myself, that 'We felt medieval music was being raped, and we wanted justice for it'. There I seem to have seen "the music" as a person, assaulted by performers, as if there was a treatment that "the music" deserved and should be able to expect, and that these performers were violating norms of behaviour by violating "the music". X's sense is that *he* is being raped. The music is him.

What does all this tell us about our responses to non-normative musical performance? Why might Beethoven, or in my case medieval song, played differently, lead us to an image of sexual violence? For medieval song of course we know next to nothing about how it might ideally be, and so the image is ridiculous and the example thoroughly ill-chosen. In X's case, with Beethoven, it's easier to follow; and what we see there may well have applied in my case too. When he listens to Beethoven, to a performance that's familiar to him, that he feels sounds Beethoven, he allows that music to enter him and occupy his body and mind, he becomes those sounds; the music he hears, which he imagines coming from Beethoven's soul, is him, X, his body, his sexuality; the Beethoven he hears is his partner in a consensual, loving relationship; sounded by pianists he likes, it is his lover; he listens, he feels, and cannot and would not wish to prevent it. We feel great music, wonderfully played, so deeply and fully that the most powerful metaphor we can think of seems appropriate, even though of course it is not. And so a performance that makes this music into a stranger, somebody we don't love but who nevertheless occupies us, forcing us to listen on their terms, is very likely to be experienced as deeply unwelcome. Sexual violence, of course, is on another level entirely, and should not have been invoked, even in this very intimate context where felt experience is at stake.

That said, I don't argue that we shouldn't feel music deeply, or that this intensity of identification between listener and music is wrong. On the contrary, to be wholly occupied by music can be wonderful when it happens. There are good reasons, from research in music psychology, to think that we do experience music as another person and experience listening to it as forming a relationship with them, understanding them, even being them; indeed it's one of the most powerful and important things that music does. I'll return to this at the end. But I do think that when it comes to the experience of art, including performance art, there is a third partner whose view deserves respect and an attempt at sympathy. It's not a *dia*logue, composer and listener. What we experience depends on the performer; and it's the performer with whom we have the real relationship. The composer's presence is only imagined. And it is exactly here that classical music ideology has gone so violently wrong. It's the erasure of the performer, the pretence that they must disappear and be a transparent medium, that is so damaging, damaging to the performer first of all, and to everyone who tries to understand music; for this erasure of the performer grossly misrepresents the nature of

what's happening. And as a result we find critics like X and Leech-Wilkinson claiming that a performer who finds other music in one of these scores is violating the composer and us, violating them by being there at all, breaking into our mental home and assaulting us with their music.

It's this claim, it seems to me, that is so wrong. For if we want to understand what classical music is and does the first thing we have to accept is that the performer decides what is the music, its nature and its identity. Our role is to listen, to try to understand, to learn something if we can, to learn what it is that the performer finds in this score, to enrich ourselves by experiencing that with them. This first and foremost must involve accepting the other's difference from ourselves. To force a partner to behave as one would wish is, if not rape at least coercive control. We should not be trying to do that to performers by telling them how they may and may not sound a score. And we need to think, now, about why coercive control sits so easily within western classical culture. We've already seen exactly that in the way it's taught and examined and managed.

To continue with X on Ugorski:

> "His **monkey tricks** render Var 18 unrecognisable, such as in the long accelerando in the 'A' section's second half that has nothing to do whatsoever with Beethoven."
> *Gramophone*, Awards issue 2018, 128

Remember what we are actually *talking* about here: someone who plays Beethoven faster or slower or with more rubato than X likes. Let's listen to a bit of Ugorski's variation 18. [https://open.spotify.com/track/2LoInALF1E4Fr9rdxsQ5QH?si=a-FnhVJKQ5uDyDrhk3NLRA]

Why the scorn, the sense of being made a fool of, of being insulted? Why does it matter so much that there should be no significant difference between this performance and anyone else's? On the one hand, as I've just suggested, it is a fear of difference, of being taken over by this Diabelli variation rather than the one we were expecting to feel in our musical embrace. But that attitude is also the product of a musical culture so rigidly policed, so treated as an issue of moral behaviour, that to transgress, to misbehave, even slightly, is to cause the deepest outrage. And that's where the problem lies. Not in experiencing music as a lover but in training everyone within its cultural orbit to believe that only one kind of lover is acceptable, the one the musical state chooses. Music becomes in that case barely more than a sex doll, a standard model supplied by the state, which you will enjoy; for your preferring a different kind of loving would mark you out as failing to qualify for membership of this culture. (You'll note that my analogy applies mainly to men here, and indeed most critics being male is part of the problem.)

When a little tempo variation can cause such outrage you can easily see how mad this moralising control over performance has become, forcing the performer to be so normal that we don't notice they are there, as if, in music, the performer could ever not be there. This is delusional. So why do we allow this kind of control? Whom does it serve? Why shouldn't this piece, which has been recorded over and over, be played differently? Why shouldn't a pianist have something individual and different to say about it? And why shouldn't they perform that on a Deutsche Grammophon disc? How have we got ourselves into a situation where tempo variation is rape? And how do we get ourselves out of it?

A final quote from this review, now commenting on Ugorski's *Für Elise*:

> “his mincing, droopy and impossibly vulgar reading of Für Elise makes Liberace look like Artur Schnabel by comparison.”
> *Gramophone*, Awards issue 2018, 128

As you may know, Liberace was an American pianist and showman famous for his glittery clothes and piano. His sexuality was argued over in the popular press and then famously in court. So when X says that Ugorski makes Liberace look like Artur Schnabel, everyone’s model of German musical rectitude, we understand that he’s labelling Ugorski as camp, more camp than the most camp pianist you can imagine.

And here’s what is meant by ‘mincing’.

> affectedly dainty, elegant, or mannered. In later (usually *derogatory*) use often associated with an effeminate or effete manner or behaviour in a man, esp. a homosexual man.
> *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘mincing, *adj*.’

Mincing and droopy can *both* be dog-whistle terms for gay.

Analysing *Gramophone*’s metaphorical writing more widely I’ve found effeminacy used regularly as an accusation, just as often in the last few years as in earlier times. So this review fits comfortably into a culture in which homophobic analogy seems to be acceptable. Which is presumably why neither the writer nor the editors at *Gramophone* thought these images inappropriate.

Let's listen to a bit of this *Für Elise*. And to be as fair as possible to the reviewer I'll play the passage with the most rubato. [The end of B section, return of A: https://open.spotify.com/track/11xeuRYntBQwHMKlsOZ0ey?si=jEtsmOs4SbKW1xOTA0wFwA]

I think that gives you a useful sense of how beautifully a performer can play and still be accused of what the culture views as perversion.

We can see in this review, and any number of others, how performance norms are associated with ultra-conservative notions of 'normal' personal behaviour, and how the notion of 'normal' becomes, in this culture, a marker of prejudice against the other. Prejudice, in this respect, is endemic to western classical music today. It is part of its ideological fabric.

We can confirm this by looking at the ways in which thinking about classical performance can also be racist. I'm not thinking here just of the absence of black and brown musicians, the lack of serious effort to make training available and welcoming to them, and lack of interest in diversity of any sort. That's consistent with what we've already seen. Diversity is a threat to the identity that this music is thought to possess. And so it's no surprise to find race invoked in performance criticism as a cause of unwelcome interpretation. There's a section on this in my online book, which there isn't time to include here. But what it shows is how East Asian pianists are liable to have their race highlighted in criticism in ways that western performers are not, in phrases like those quoted in the book. (Incidentally, none of those is by X.) The only way to succeed, as a non-white performer, is to be musically whiter than white, perfectly and persuasively normative, to make the norm ever more moving and thereby to confirm that the culture's values are the ideal ones.

By requiring performers to stick to normal performances, western classical music makes dislike of the other structural. So my case, unfortunately, is that western classical canonical performance culture (not the performance itself, but the culture within which that is taught, promoted, and enforced) is inherently discriminatory; and by being so it damages everyone who works within it by forcing them to behave in accordance with its prejudiced view of norms. Considering how much we love this music, how deeply it moves us, this is a pretty tragic situation. *But* it's one from which escape, artistically persuasive escape, is perfectly possible. And how we escape it, and the musical, social, cultural and commercial benefits that could follow, is exactly what my book is about.

The final point I want to make here, though, is a different one, because I'd like to put this in the context of the current drift towards populism and also the situation created by Covid.

Currently the right is in the political ascendant. That means government by the ruthless for the ruthless. And you can see how easily that value-system is compatible with classical music culture. It's hardly coincidence that most of its funding and its audiences come from conservative sections of society. The right's unsympathetic performance in business and in government is always wrapped up in a veneer of authority that people find reassuring. And the same is true of classical music. It may be tough on performers, but if you do what you're told you'll have a chance to succeed. To change is to be wrong, perverted, disrespectful, unfaithful to the greatness of the past. These attitudes are taken for granted in western classical music, assumed to be natural, necessary: as if there could be no good music without obedience to tradition. Classical music performs the right in culture, and in the most beautiful and engaging ways, beautifying obeying orders that benefit mainly those who already have power. For an artistic practice, could anything be more dangerous?

I'd worry that classical music was going to be used within the emerging police state, simply because it offers such a clear model for fascism in beautiful artistic disguise. (Think how much Boris Johnson would like this culture if only he understood it.) But actually, nobody cares. The very fact that there is so little financial support at the moment (in my country, for freelance musicians, no support at all) shows, thank heaven, that governments don't see the political work it does.

Hence this notorious ad that appeared a little while ago from the UK government:

Note how carefully designed that ad is. The Fat in Fatima, her physique, her race, all telling her she hasn't a hope of succeeding in ballet. It's truly loathsome. But better for a right-wing government to think classical ballet is useless than to realise that it offers the very model of the society they desire.

For some musicians, especially young professionals who are best-placed to develop and perform new approaches to these scores, but who have had no work for the last year, it may already be too late. But for those who can hang on in there Covid does give us a chance to ask what would make persevering, not retraining for IT, worth it. It would be worth it if afterwards we could make a much more welcoming, tolerant and creative musical culture; one in which the point of a performance was to allow the listener to experience an other, to empathise with them, to be understanding of them; in fact, a culture in which the point of making music was to exercise and to spread tolerance and mutual understanding. To make this switch from obedience to exploring difference may be our last chance to find an audience and funding for an artform that the public and donors are now finding, during this long year of Covid, that they can manage quite well without.

At any rate, we could try genuine freedom of musical expression as a last, best hope for the survival of these scores in performance. And also because it's the right thing, the humane thing, to do.

Challenging Performance: Classical Music Performance Norms and How to Escape Them

by Daniel Leech-Wilkinson

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Acknowledgements

I've been thinking about this topic for seven years (2013–20), and so a great many people and much listening and reading has influenced it. I wish I'd kept a list from the start, but it was some years before I appreciated that this was all forming into a book (if that's what this is). So this list of those to whom I know I'm especially grateful can't be complete. But everyone on it has helped and influenced me, often in ways of which they're unaware (some may wish they hadn't). My sincere thanks to them all.

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Challenging Performance:

Classical Music Performance Norms and How to Escape Them

by Daniel Leech-Wilkinson

About the author

To help you assess my reliability as a narrator, and to own up to at least some of my biases, I'm adding this autobiographical note.

I grew up in a loving and music-loving household. My father, a gynaecologist by profession, had been organ scholar at Trinity College, Oxford, after he returned from the First World War. There was an organ in our house (I still have one and play every day) and a record collection with a strong bias towards Bach. My mother sang a wide repertoire of (Second World) Wartime popular hits. My education was in the British public (i.e. private) school system where I learned to play effectively for services including improvised plainchant accompaniment. I found school relatively bearable (I was good at sports, which excused my being musical) but annoying on account of the rules and the uncritical continuation of pointless traditions. (You may think this relevant…) And so I took my A-levels at 16 and left school at the first opportunity. To fill in a year while applying to university (1972-3), I went to the Royal College of Music, at first studying organ (with Douglas Guest, Westminster Abbey) and composition (with Herbert Howells, who also taught me harmony and counterpoint, and then Anthony Milner).

My compositional interests were strongly focused in contemporary atonal music, largely thanks to having been at school with composer-percussionist James Wood who introduced me to Messiaen, after which I explored widely. As a student in London in the early 1970s I took every opportunity to go to concerts of new music. Boulez was conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the time, there were visits to London from Stockhausen, Berio, Ligeti, Xenakis, Kagel, among others; the London Sinfonietta was young; other groups and series I heard often were the Fires of London (Peter Maxwell Davies), the English Bach Festival, London Music Digest, the Park Lane Group, and Adrian Jack's series at the Institute of Contemporary Arts: I still have all my concert programmes and still find them astonishing for what they show about the liveliness and adventure of the London new music scene in the 70s. But I also attended more conventional programmes, the London Philharmonic under Haitink, the Royal Opera and English National Opera. And also early music. I'd been taken to hear the Early Music Consort of London from school; others newly active were Anthony Rooley and Emma Kirkby, and I was a contemporary of Linda Nicholson who introduced me to the early piano field.

With modernist interests as a composer (not widely shared by the RCM staff) I was relieved to change from composition to harpsichord, studying happily with the wonderful Ruth Dyson. Both Guest and Dyson cheerfully accepted that I had no plans to perform for a living and was there to play and think rather than to make a career, and so lessons were as much about ideas as about technique. But I played concerts from time to time, both as a keyboardist and as a composer-

conductor, including in the latter role Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* and parts of Cardew's *The Great Learning*. I also made full use of the London libraries and record libraries, maxing out on my library cards every week.

This 100% absorption in music, interacting daily with talented young musicians willing to play one's music, was such a delight that I decided to do a London University degree at the RCM rather than go to university, and so I was able to spend, in all, four happy and productive years at conservatoire. The RCM BMus was pretty useless as a degree, at least as far as the teaching went (they borrowed a lecturer from Goldsmiths' College one day a week, and largely left us to it for the rest), but I worked out early that I could answer more or less any exam question if I knew enough music to bring to bear on it; and in any case, getting to know lots of music was most of what I wanted to do. So I listened to and studied many more scores than books, and read almost no articles. (I don't recall ever being directed towards a journal article throughout my degree.)

That, plus strong interests in early music which had so far been unsatisfied as a student, led me to apply to King's College London for their MMus course where I was able to focus on musicological skills (under Reinhard Strohm), while listening keenly to what was going on in Arnold Whittall's analysis course. King's wasn't interested in performance (I started an improvisation group which was considered highly eccentric) but I did get a very good education in the musicology of the middle ages and early renaissance. And so at this point my life took an academic turn, focusing at first on early 15th-century sources and then, as a PhD student at Clare College, Cambridge (1977-80), on 14th-century compositional techniques, followed by a research fellowship at Churchill College (1980-84). This of course took me away from performance, and so needn't be described here. But I did start to get very interested in arguments about the performance of late medieval polyphony, was friends with Christopher Page and a keen supporter of his a cappella innovations with Gothic Voices. My enthusiasm was musical rather than musicological (though happily the evidence was relatively supportive); and I was pleased also to be able to work closely with the newly founded Orlando Consort on recordings of similar repertoire. I did quite a lot of record reviewing for the *Early Music* journal, and all this enabled me to think more and more about performance once again.

The Cambridge music faculty had a large record collection, and I got interested in the implications of early recordings for arguments about authenticity. A lecture I gave in the Faculty (for a course taught by Peter LeHuray) turned into an article which appeared in *Early Music* (February 1984) alongside one of Richard Taruskin's early critiques of the authenticity movement. We found we were making the same case from different perspectives, not for the last time.

During the later 1980s I played periodically in concerts in and around Southampton where I was a university lecturer. Playing the organ in a Berlioz Te Deum with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra I remember as the most terrifying experience of my career, partly because there was a ca. 1-sec. delay between pressing a key and getting a sound back and partly because the Southampton Guildhall's Compton organ had the peculiarity that if you pressed any of its illuminated stop-knobs harder than usual everything except that stop switched off. Fortunately all was well but, as someone who suffers from stage fright, I did my best to avoid those kinds of job thereafter.

From the early 1990s at Southampton, after the appointment of Nicholas Cook and then José Bowen, my long-standing interests in early recordings finally had a chance to start to become the focus of my research: the three of us were fascinated by the differences in expressivity documented

by early recordings, and with mutual support studies began to appear. In 1997 I moved to King's College London, wrote my last medieval music study – a book about myths of performance (*The Modern Invention of Medieval Music*) – and from then on have focused exclusively on questions of performance, many of them arising out of the evidence of recordings.

With Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke and John Rink I took part in the five-year Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music research project (CHARM, 2004-09), whose legacy includes an online library of early recordings and my eBook *The Changing Sound of Music* (2009). Within CHARM, with the help of a wonderful team at Queen Mary led by Mark Sandler, I oversaw the development of musicological tools for Chris Cannam's Sonic Visualiser, introducing real-time spectrographic visualisation of performances. And this software has become the standard tool for examining performance detail. We followed CHARM with the Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice (CMPCP, 2009-14) where I focused on a study, using techniques from music psychology, looking at the dynamics (or shape) of musical experience. During those same years I began to work with performers to test the possibilities for new approaches to performing canonical scores, some of the results of which are documented here on this site (and in Chapters 23 and 24 of this book).

The CHARM project included a three-year study of Schubert song performance which led to articles on portamento, responses to early recordings, performance style-change. And CMPCP allowed me to work in some depth on the pianism of Alfred Cortot, all with the aim of understanding how performance is perceived as expressive and how it changes over time.

I took early retirement in 2017, not least in order to have more time to write this book. I live in the depths of the countryside where I can make plenty of musical noise without annoying too many people, and where I act as the (determinedly atheist) village organist. I use that as a discipline to encourage me to learn new pieces for each service, and thereby have worked my way through the 48 (the village organ has one manual and no pedals), the Goldbergs and the collected keyboard pieces of Byrd, Tomkins, Frescobaldi, Gibbons, Sweelinck and their contemporaries. It's a long way from the performances I write about but offers a relatively safe space in which to experiment with rubato in repertoire that's not recently been used to it.

I hope to go on working with musicians for as long as I can hear and ask questions.

My King's College webpage

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Challenging Performance:

Classical Music Performance Norms and How to Escape Them

by Daniel Leech-Wilkinson

Summary

Here I provide a list of the main points of my argument, linked to the relevant chapters. (The grey links are to the online version, but you'll find the corresponding sections in this PDF easily enough.) Please try to resist the temptation to use *only* this summary to find out what I'm saying. The book is much more interesting than the list! Or, if this list is too long, try the brief (but combative) summary in 20.1.

– Current beliefs about western classical music maintain that:

– Composers create(d) works that exist thereafter [5, 6.3, 6.10, 6.17, 11.1, 19.2]

– They have/had clear intentions as to how these works should sound [6.9, 6.12, 6.13, 8]

– Composers' scores encode the music that composers imagine(d) [5, 6.8, 6.9, 6.16, 7.5]

– This music ('the music itself') exists independently of any performance [5, 6.10, 12.3, 19.2]

– It must be sounded in any performance in such a way that it can be recognised and acknowledged as the music intended by the composer [3, 6.7, 6.13, 7.9, 11.2, 12.1, 15]

– Composers know best how their scores can sound [6.12, 19.2]

– Dead composers can be harmed by performances that do not sound their intentions [6.15, 11.1, 11.2, 11.3]

– Current listeners are harmed by performances that do not sound composers' intentions [6.12,11.2, 11.3]

– The music is more important than the people making it [14, 19.2]

– Within the current belief system (or ideology [10]):

– Composers whose scores consistently give rise to powerful experiences (especially once dead) are considered godlike, their scores quasi-sacred texts [5, 6.1, 6.12, 6.16, 7.5, 7.9, 10, 11.1, 11.2, 12.3]

– Faithfulness to composers' texts and wishes is a quasi-religious duty [6.1, 6.3, 6.12, 6.16, 7.3, 7.5, 7.9, 8, 9.2, 11.1, 12.3, 18.2]

– The greatest faithfulness is rewarded with the most transcendent experiences [6.1,, 6.16, 7.5, 12.3]

– Performers should be the composer's faithful servants [6.1,, 6.9, 6.16, 7.8, 9.2, 10, 11.1, 12.3, 15]

– Performers should contribute only as much of their own creativity as the composer allows [6.9, 12.3, 13, 15, 18.1]

– As far as possible, performers should not be noticed, but should be transparent (inaudible) mediums for the composer's intentions [4, 5, 6.14, 9.1, 9.2, 12.3]

– Performances should sound, as far as possible, as they sounded during the composer's lifetime [6.7, 6.12, 6.13, 11.2]

– except in the case of composers' performances documented in recordings, which tend to be unacceptable today [6.7, 6.8, 21]

– To perform ideally it is necessary to know as much as possible about music history and music theory/analysis [2, 6.2, 6.9, 25]

– Knowing about music enhances one's experience of performing and hearing it [1, 6.2, 25]

– Composers usually imagine performances and have expectations about performance [3, 6.13, 11.3]; that aside, all these beliefs are misguided [6 (all subsections), 11.1, 18.2]

– A consequence is insecurity among believers, which tends to lead to proliferation of articles of faith and their policing [6.1, 6.3, 6.9, 7.8, 7.9, 8]

– The performance of Western Classical Music (WCM) is heavily policed by gatekeepers to the profession: teachers, examiners, adjudicators, artist managers, venue managers, promoters, concert planners, fixers, A&R managers, producers, critics, bloggers, social media, etc., who cooperate in maintaining performance norms [7.1, 7.7, 7.8, 9.2, 12.1]

– Gatekeeping seeks to constrain difference and to promote the persuasive performance of norms [1, 2, 6.4, 7.1, 7.3, 7.5, 7.7, 7.8, 9.2, 12.1, 22.3]

– Gatekeeping constructs a WCM State whose 'performance' it ensures [6.4, 6.5, 6.17, 7.1, 9.2, 9.6, 12.1]

– Norms and their policing ensure that excellent performances are achieved with minimum paid rehearsal [6.7, 6.19, 12.1, 22.4]

– Norms simplify musical decision-making [6.19, 8, 19.2]

– In an intensely policed environment norms provide psychological reassurance [6.7, 6.19, 12.3, 13]

– Policing continues throughout a career, from first lessons to farewell recital [3, 7.7, 13]

– Policing empowers gatekeepers [6.11, 7.7, 8, 22.4]

– Policing ensures that performers adhere to current beliefs about proper performance, assuming that

– Gatekeepers know, as far as possible, how composers wanted their texts to sound [6.9, 7.7]

– Given excellent performers, current beliefs about the realisation of texts afford the best possible performances [3, 6.4, 7.7, 7.9, 12.2, 19.2]

– And the current WCM State is the best possible state [12.2]

– These assumptions are also mistaken [3, 6.13]

– WCM gatekeeping generally mistakes its ethical obligations to performers and listeners [19.2]

– Gatekeepers could still have useful roles in the classical music business without policing performance so narrowly [12.1]

– The composer's currently-supposed intentions are current norms in disguise [9.2, 9.3, 12.1, 13]

– Composers are often more open to unexpected performances of their scores than are gatekeepers [6.12, 11.3]

– Musical training aims to produce technically impeccable performers who accept current beliefs and sound them as persuasively as possible [6.4, 6.19]

– Performers are expected to achieve this at the same time as being unalike in ways that specialists can discern [6.6, 7.4, 7.8, 13]

– Gatekeeping aims to ensure that these differences between performers and performances are not so great as to call into question the belief that performances are sounding the composer's preferences [6.6, 6.9, 13, 22.3]

– These differences are usually very small [7.5, 7.7, 7.8, 9.2, 9.3]

– Despite the policing, performances are believed to be very unalike [6.6, 7.5, 13]

– Thus the concept of creativity is appropriated by normativity in order to constrain it [7.5, 13, 18.1]

– How different performances seem depends on your point of view, on your knowledge of past performances, and on your ability to imagine alternatives [6.6]

– WCM, through its current performance ideology, sounds the values of conservatism, promoting a status quo conceived of as tradition [9.2, 9.5, 10, 21, 30.1]

– Norms of WCM performance are taught so consistently, from childhood on, as to seem natural to all performers accepted into the profession [5, 6.1, 6.5, 6.12, 6.14, 7.1, 7.6, 9.2, 10, 12.3]

– Obedience to teachers, to norms, and to the letter of the score becomes obedience to the composer [7.2, 7.5, 7.6, 7.9, 12.3, 13]

– Performers who accept these norms receive praise, affection and support [7.2, 7.5, 7.6]

– Performers who do not accept these constraints cannot succeed in training and cannot reach the profession [6.4, 6.11, 7.5, 7.6, 7.9, 12.3]

– Performers who reject them at any point in their careers will lose work [3, 6.7, 9.2, 10, 12.1]

– In teaching norms conservatoires aim to fit students for work in the profession [7.5]

– Teachers strive to function as representatives of the composer, transmitting composers' wishes [7.1, 7.6, 7.9]

– Obeying teachers and sounding traditions is a demonstration of love, faith, and service [6.3, 7.2, 7.5, 7.6, 13, 14]

– For these reasons teachers often feel entitled to use forceful, even abusive behaviour, in order to instil their tradition [7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.6, 7.9, 10]

– WCM performance could and should be taught with respect for students, encouraging creativity [7.9, 12.1, 18.1, 19.1, 20.2]

– Competitions reward the performance of norms, with the most persuasive performance of norms leading to the best early-career promotion [7.8]

– Musicology assists in researching composers' wishes set out in editions, histories and analyses, and presents them as requirements for performers [6.3, 8]

– Critics police performance by praising the most persuasive soundings of current beliefs and by criticising the unexpected [6.14, 9.2]

– Performance that contradicts normative beliefs generates anger caused by perceived challenges to identity and power [1, 7.7, 7.8, 7.9, 9.2, 9.6, 11.1, 13, 22.3]

– Yet at the same time critics sense the allure of the Other, which they fear [9.2, 30.1]

– The imagery used by critics is characterised by binary thinking [9.1, 10]

– The imagery used by critics often draws on structural prejudice in order to discourage the unexpected [6.5, 6.14, 9.2, 30.1]

– Notions of power and mastery in performance feed into misogynistic critique [7.8, 9.1, 9.2, 13]

– Notions of expressivity and non-normativity feed into homophobic and (in the case of non-Western performers) racist critique [9.1, 9.2, 10, 30.1]

– The strength of WCM criticism feeds abuse of musical difference on social media [9.4]

– Given the excellence of professional performance there is little need for most professional assessment and evaluation [9.3, 22.5]

– Where assessment is required normativity should not be a major criterion [7.3, 12.1, 22.5]

– Written descriptions of performance are insufficient to allow the reconstruction of a performance style [6.8, 6.13]

– Recordings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including performances by composers, show that composers and performers used to have very different understandings of

– composers' preferences [3, 6.9, 6.13]

– the extent to which a composer's text should be followed [6.9, 6.10, 20a]

– musicality [1, 3, 5, 6.8]

– performance style [3, 5]

– the sounding of compositional or analytical structures [6.3]

– consistency of style among performers [4]

– consistency of interpretation among performers [1, 4]

– Audiences for these performances were just as sure that they were hearing great performances as current audiences are when they hear currently approved performances [3, 5, 6.4, 19.1, 20a, 21]

– With exposure modern listeners can experience early recorded performances as just as powerful as current performances, often more so [3, 6.2, 6.8, 21]

– Gatekeepers and audiences already willingly accept very different performance styles from 'historically informed' performers [1, 3, 6.7]

– Gatekeepers and audiences already willingly accept performance practices that contravene composers' expectations when it benefits the music business [1, 6.7, 6.9, 15]

– Performance style changes slowly and, over long spans of time, to such an extent that beliefs about correct performance must be recognised as being substantially contingent upon period taste [1, 3, 4, 6.4, 6.6, 6.9, 11.1, 24.3]

– We cannot know composers' expectations for performance before the age of sound recording [19.1]

– As performance style changes, the character and identity of compositions change, the way we perceive and think about their composers change, and what we believe about music changes [3, 4, 6.19]

– When they become aware of it gatekeepers find this change threatening [9.6]

– 'The work' and 'the music itself' can only be perceived and accessed through performance, real or imagined [4, 6.17, 6.18]

– But since they are by definition independent of any performance they cannot exist, only function as (impossible but coercive) concepts seeking to disempower performance [5, 6.11, 12.3]

– Performances are necessarily made and imagined using current performance styles [3, 4, 6.4, 6.12]

– except when deliberately copying past performance styles, which may be revelatory [20.2, 21]

– As performance-style changes 'the music itself' and 'the work' must change [3, 4, 6.19]

– Performers are contributing more, and composers less than the belief system claims, to the character, identity and meaning perceived in pieces [3, 4, 5, 6.10, 6.12, 6.14, 15, 19.1]

– There cannot be an ideal performance [6.11]

– The extent of the potential for scores to sound different identities cannot yet be known [4, 6.6, 6.11]

– Beliefs about proper performance have differed, will differ, and therefore could differ now, and performances with them [3, 6.12, 6.19, 11.1, 11.2]

– There is no good reason not to vary approaches to performing texts now [3, 6.19, 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 20.1, 24.1]

– There is ethical value in performances that reflect the needs of their period context [11.3, 19.1, 25]

– Current performance standards are astonishingly high [2, 6.4, 6.6, 6.19, 9.3, 10, 12.2, Pt 3 intr]

– Nothing in the argument made here requires any performer to change their current performance practice [6.19, 11.1]

– But it may suggest that they change their beliefs and liberalise their teaching, and that gatekeepers liberalise their choices and critiques [6.4, 6.19, 7.9, 19.1]

– There is an obligation of courtesy (and also a legal obligation [15]) to living composers and to their immediate descendants to try to perform their music as they wish(ed) [6.14, 11.3]

– This obligation declines as time passes after their death, as the tastes of performers and listeners change [11.3]

– Those aside, our obligations are to the living, not the dead, and to performers and listeners as much as to composers [11.3, 19.1, 19.2]

– Musical experience arises from the interacting of scores, performers and listeners, as well as a great many other interrelated (f)actors, all context-dependent [6.9, 6.12, 19.1, 20.2]

– Attempting to keep performance unchanged and unresponsive to its context is counterproductive, leading canonical WCM in performance to become irrelevant to its host cultures, ultimately leading to its decline in public estimation [6.19, 25]

– The severity of WCM criticism, and of the penalties for non-compliance, cause musicians constantly to police their own musical behaviour and to experience high levels of anxiety lest any failure of self-policing is perceived [6.11, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 12.1, 12.3, 13, 14]

– Musical Performance Anxiety is substantially caused by fear of censure [7.3, 7.5, 13, 14]

– Musicians' ill-health has been found to be a greater problem in WCM than other musical genres [14]

– Anxiety about being completely accurate is intense among classical musicians [7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.8, 7.9, 12.3, 13, 14, 24.3]

– Anxiety about being normative persuasively enough leads to physical and psychological problems [2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6] that may only be temporarily alleviated through treatment if sufferers have to reassume the same constraints when they return to work [14]

– The supply of excellent musicians is such that the business model is not threatened by performer illness [14]

– Classical musicians are permitted little agency and limited opportunities for self-expression or self-development through performance [7.4, 7.5, 12.1, 13, 14, 24.3]

– Classical musicians appear to be treated, in effect, as historians reproducing the past in sound [1, 3, 6.7]

– The ideology is confused as to whether WCM performance functions as an artistic (rather than a worship or reproduction) practice [6.12, 6.16, 13, 14]

– Musicians may wonder, in that case, whether the enormous amount of self-disciplined work involved in training and in keeping in training are worthwhile [1, 2, 6.5, 7.5, 7.6]

– Musicians are owed, in return for this labour, the right to express themselves through performance creativity and respect for doing so [7.4, 7.6, 7.9, 9.5, 19.1, 20.2]

– Performance creativity and innovation should be encouraged, enjoyed and celebrated [6.19, 7.4, 7.9, 11.2, 11.3, 12.1, 18.1, 19.1, 24.3]

– Safe spaces (physical and imaginative) should be available where musicians can experiment without fear of censure [20.2]

– A useful model for performers is provided by theatre practice, where classical texts are typically reinterpreted to find meaning related to current concerns [6.16, 18.2, 20.2, 24.1]

– Opera has drawn on theatre, but only for stage direction; it should also apply in musical direction and performance [18.2, 24.1, 24.4]

– The concept of production could usefully be applied on occasion in the preparation of WCM performances [18.2]

– Music is the experience of a performance [6.18]

– Music is made within networks of interacting individuals, traditions, practices and institutions [6.12, 6.17, 7.3, 13]

– Music engages many aspects of people's life and being [6.2, 12.2, 22.2, 22.3]

– People value music, among other things for the ways it affords bonding and mutual understanding [6.1, 12.2]

– Music is experienced as having person-like qualities, perceived in terms of motion and emotion [11.2, 12.2, 19.1, 22.2]

– Performances can model, and allow performers and listeners safely to test and experience, idealised behaviours and responses to others [12.2, 19.1]

– Performers have rights [6.1, 7.6, 27]

– Performers should be free to explore many different interactions with scores [6.3, 11.3, 19.1, 23.2]

– An ethics of WCM, in which the needs of people are not subservient to needs attributed to dead composers or texts, should guide the training of musicians, their employment, critique of their work, interwoven with a view of the empathy that performances of WCM model, foster and enhance, all considered together with options for persuasive performance [6.7, 6.11, 6.12, 7.3, 7.6, 7.9, 11.3, 12.2, 14, 19.1, 19.2, 22.4]

– The persuasiveness of a performance depends substantially on its (motional and emotional) dynamics [6.12, 12.2, 19.2, 22.1, 22.2]

– Nonetheless, beliefs about 'proper' performance can easily overrule responses to its dynamics [1, 6.3, 7.5, 9.1, 9.2, 12.2, 19.1, 22.1]

– Removing such beliefs, as far as possible, from musical response is a good [6.3, 6.11, 7.3, 12.1, 12.2]

– In addition to being dynamically well-shaped over time, persuasive performance involves such qualities as being engaging, moving, exciting, stimulating, thought-provoking, making the listener eager to hear what happens next [19.2, 22.1, 22.5]

– Apart from being persuasive, in the sense of dynamically engaging and rewarding, the only requirement for good performance is that it should do no serious harm [1, 3, 6.7, 6.19, 19.2, 20.2, 22.4]

– Challenging listeners' beliefs and causing them to question values is not seriously harmful to them [11.3, 19.2, 20.2] though it should be done with care for them [19.2]

– Equally, listeners are entitled to experience music in their own way [6.2, 22.5]

– And being dynamically engaging and rewarding is never all that music does [22.4]

– Musical practices, even in WCM, should not exclude or oppress [22.4]

– Notation is insufficient to encode performance style [6.9, 6.17]

– Notation is insufficient to encode musical character or emotional expression [6.9]

– Scores are only a starting-point for WCM performers to make music [5, 6.17, 19.2, 20a]

– Performers need not adhere to composers' texts or (historically documented or currently claimed) intentions [3, 6.15, 6.17, 8, 11.1, 18.2, 19.2, 20a, 22.1]

– Performers should be able to seek to answer the question, 'what else can these scores do?' [3, 6.3, 11.2, 11.3, 19.2, 20a, 20.2, 22.5, 23.2, 24.1, 24.3]

– Performances that contradict composers' texts and intentions (real or imagined) can be as musically persuasive as performances that do not [1, 3, 6.12, 6.15, 6.17, 7.7, 8, 11.1, 19.1, 20a, 22.1, 22.3, 24.3, 24.4]

– Such performances are already achieved through crossover [1] but there is great potential for more varied approaches without invoking other existing genres [20.2]

– Performers should be better recognised, admired and rewarded for the extent of their contribution to the making of music through performance [6.9, 9.5, Pt 3 intr]

– Performers would be happier in their work if they were allowed to be more personal, more creative, more inventive [6.9, 6.11, 7.6, 9.5, 11.3, 14, 24.3, 24.4]

– There is limited need for more instances of normative readings of scores [3, 21]

– While consideration needs to be given to how to present non-normative performances [6.11, 19.2, 20.2, 22.5],

– audiences would be larger and more diverse, the business would be more profitable and performers better rewarded if performances were more diverse [2, 6.11, 7.9, 9.5, 11.3, 12.1, 18.2, 19.1, 24.4]

– People from more diverse backgrounds would choose to become classical performers if more creativity in performance were encouraged [7.2, 7.9]

– WCM currently sounds and affirms the values of the white, western, highly-educated middle class [7.5, 9.1, 9.2, 10, 15, 30.1]

– The way WCM is policed conflicts with western society's claims for freedom of expression [7.5, 7.9, 9.5, 10]

– White, western, middle-class culture has no special entitlement to WCM and classical music's function should not be to sound its self-image [2, 7.3, 9.2, 19.1, 24.1]

– Allowing performers to be more creative may enable them to make performances that invoke, reference or comment on issues of current public interest across societies [11.3, 20.2, 24.1]

– To attend concert performances of well-known scores should often be to experience discovery and surprise [20.2, 24.4]

– Exploring ways of being creative with scores in performance should be encouraged, as should all kinds of experimentation [6.19, 7.5, 12.1, 20.2, 24.3, 24.4]

– Improvisation, creativity and innovation should play larger roles in classical music training and practice [7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 18.1, 20.2, 24.2, 24.3]

– Experimentation with technique and embodied musicality, though demanding, may also be fruitful [20.2]

– Public performance should welcome musical risk-taking [20.2, 24.2, 24.3] and the danger inherent in music's modelling of feeling states [22.3] while seeking to use these to improve lives [22.4]

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Challenging Performance:

Classical Music Performance Norms and How to Escape Them

by Daniel Leech-Wilkinson

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