Wesleyan University The Honors College

Authenticity in Musical Performance
An Analytical Critique

by

Nicholas Luby
Class of 2011

An essay submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in Music

Middletown, Connecticut April, 2011

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank the music department faculty for providing me with an education I will always be grateful for, and which I don't think I could have gotten anywhere else. Thanks especially to Neely Bruce, Angel Gil-Ordonez, and Jane Alden, who have taught me a good deal about music and about life, both in and out of the classroom. Thanks to Mark Slobin for being my teacher, music advisor, and enthusiastic supporter, to Sandra Brough for her tremendous help with just about everything, and to George, for keeping the pianos in as good shape as possible.

I would also like to thank everyone who has ever attended any of my solo performances; I would not be where I am today without the support of my teachers and peers.

Thanks to my friends, family, and colleagues, especially Stefan Golangco and fellow pianists Sam Friedman, Brian Parks, and Andrew Chung, who have provided me with inspiration, advice, kindness, support, and camaraderie. I feel very lucky to have had Lucy Strother as both a dear friend and musical collaborator. She has greatly influenced my attitude towards and understanding of music, and has played no small part in my wanting to become a pianist.

There are three people I wish to thank, without whom this project would not have been possible. I am indebted to Steven Horst for the growth and rigor of my philosophical thinking and for his mentoring and encouragement throughout my whole four years at Wesleyan. My thesis advisor, Yonatan Malin, has helped me navigate this difficult process from the beginning by providing exceptionally wise advice and ongoing support at every step of the way. He has also been the most formative influence on my development as a scholar of music; the knowledge and inspiration I gained from his courses have been indispensible to writing this thesis, and I also think all that I've learned from him will prove to be an invaluable asset as I pursue my career as a performer. Last but not least, words cannot describe my gratitude towards my teacher, Erika Schroth. She has taught me so much in our three years together– under her guidance I have grown tremendously as a pianist, fallen completely in love with the instrument, and made the decision to pursue music professionally. The dedication she has shown me, as well as the passion, energy, and warmth she has brought to every lesson, has been a constant source of joy and inspiration. Thank you all so much.

Finally, and most of all, I would like to thank my parents. They not only inspired this project, but have also provided countless amounts of advice, conceptual feedback, and love. They are truly the best parents I or anyone could hope to have, and I love them with all my heart. Mom and Dad, I dedicate this work to you.

Table of Contents

Prologue *1*

Introduction *2*

Argument *4*

Epilogue *26*

Prologue

Last year I spent part of the summer studying music abroad in the Czech Republic. I learned a piece from The Well Tempered Clavier, following my teacher's suggestion to add octaves to the bass entry of the dramatic, final stretto of the fugue. When I played the piece for my parents upon returning home, I was surprised by their critical reaction. (I had already received a fair amount of praise for my rather expressive interpretation and had grown a bit overconfident.) They saw many things to 'fix,' included among them the octaves that, by that time, I had become extremely fond of! Needless to say I was not thrilled, and I demanded an explanation for why on earth I should curb my desire to play the music as I felt it – deeply and passionately. I do not remember whether the word 'authenticity' was actually used, but my parents, being the early music enthusiasts that they are, were adamant that I should endeavor to feel (not just play) the music not the way *I* wanted, but the way *Bach* wanted. To them this meant playing in a different style, one without the romantic gestures made by dynamic extremes or excessive rubato, and playing just the notes that Bach expressly wrote, no added octaves, no exceptions. Frustrated, I did my best to internalize these suggestions, and over time I was able to feel my expressive intuitions genuinely and fully within the confines of this new style. I never was able to make myself forgo the octaves, though, so I vowed that someday I would get to the bottom of the issue and decide once and for all who was right and how I or anyone should really play. This essay is the first step of what I'm sure will be a lifelong process.

Introduction

The very beginnings of the authenticity debate can be traced back to the turn of the 20th century, when Arnold Dolmetsch, musician, instrument-maker and pioneer musicologist, began writing about the performance of old music. From that time on, an ever-growing number of musicians and scholars have been engaged in the study and performance of music from the Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque periods. This constituency, now referred to as the historical, period, or authentic performance movement, or simply the early music movement, emerged alongside those preexisting performance traditions that were inherited from Liszt and the great Romantics and perpetuated by the celebrated virtuosi of the day. Not surprisingly, these two performance ideologies clashed severely, and the tension that grew out of this opposition sparked a heated debate, aptly described by the *New York Times* as a "war."[1] Armed with the intellectual appeal of positivism and the moralizing force of the term 'authenticity,' the early music movement wielded big guns.[2]

Among the most important and strongly voiced participants of this war was Richard Taruskin, who, along with Laurence Dreyfus, argued persuasively that early music is actually a modern enterprise and that its aim to recreate history is no more than a false front which serves as the means of breaking with mainstream performance tradition and "experience[ing] old music newly."[3] His 1988 essay entitled *The Pastness of the Present and the Presence of the Past* is, if not the most

---

[1] Will Crutchfield, 'A Report From the Battlefield,' *The New York Times* (Sunday, 28 July 1985) as cited in Richard Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present and the Presence of the Past,' *Authenticity and Early Music* ed. N. Kenyon (Oxford 1988), 139.
[2] Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present,' 148.
[3] Ibid., 204.

influential contribution to the authenticity debate, probably the most engaging and thought-provoking. Since the arguments he presents penetrate to the heart of the issue of authenticity but his dialectic can be quite tricky to follow, I have taken up the task of tracing and analyzing his discussion. It will be my goal to discover, if I can, what is meant by the notion of authenticity, what role it plays in historical performance practice, and whether either of these is justifiable by reason.

Argument

"Do we really want to talk about 'authenticity' any more?" Taruskin asks at the start of his essay. It is a rhetorical question, to which he already clearly knows the answer, and he hopes his readership will have the sense to agree with him. His argumentative strategy is powerful, if a bit sneaky, as he lets his rhetoric do a good deal of the work; upon reading one is left with the feeling that one had better agree, or else risk being without intellectual merit.

He begins by drawing attention to a definition of 'authentic' found in *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* that summarily expresses his greatest woes: "'In performance practice, instruments or styles of playing that are historically appropriate to the music being performed.'"[4] What Taruskin finds so troubling about a definition like this is that it seems to justify, absolutely and authoritatively, one distinct manner of performance, namely, the '*right*' one.

This might not be so bad if one is dealing with music for which there are no surviving performance traditions and/or the chief aim of investigation is historical understanding. When the only known performance styles of a particular instrument – let's say the crumhorn – are native to that instrument's time, to describe them as 'historically appropriate' is practically tautological. Such styles are historically appropriate merely by dint of belonging exclusively to a relic of the past, and there can be no controversy that a meaningful distinction is to be found between authentic

[4] Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present,' 137.

crumhorn styles and inauthentic ones.[5] It becomes useful to speak of historical propriety only when differentiating between styles that have different scopes of application, such as Italian vs. German crumhorn styles (if there is such a difference) in a piece by an Italian composer. In those cases it is necessary to convey that a certain style is meant for a certain piece, composer or period. Likewise, in the context of purely historical inquiry, it is important to be able to specify which instruments and playing styles belonged to which period, composer, or location; historical appropriateness is a perfectly apt label for the job. However, 'appropriateness' in this sense is not a value judgment at all, but rather simply an indication of proper historical identification.

Problems start to arise when this notion of historical propriety is applied to performance styles that have evolved into living traditions of modernity. For even though antecedent styles are, admittedly, historically appropriate in the strict sense to the music of their time, 'appropriate' here is "an ineluctably value-laden term…which always carries its invidious antonym in tow" and thus bears unwarranted implications for the later styles that grew out of them.[6] Needless to say the same goes for 'authentic.' This is because the designation of 'authentic' or 'historically appropriate' is meant to classify performance styles according to when, *historically*, they should be used, and if the use of these terms is "expanded beyond areas of traditional historical concern," it ceases to become clear that the notion of 'should' in question is

[5] It is easy to imagine an inauthentic style of crumhorn playing (using it as a drumstick, to name but one). If, however, the crumhorn were to be genuinely incorporated in a contemporary work, whatever playing style were involved would be historically appropriate (and authentic) to that work.
[6] Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present,' 137.

purely historical.[7] As a result, it appears to signal an aesthetic claim as well – something that requires much greater justification in order to be taken seriously. Indeed, advocates of historical style generally *are* making an aesthetic claim when they say something is historically appropriate, or at least they would endorse one to that effect. And since the inherent morality of these terms produces a degree of ambiguity about exactly what kinds of claims are being made, one can assume that it is both – but only on the supportive grounds of the historical kind.

According to Taruskin, one is not free to "dissent from the concept" of authenticity when it is used in this way, as doing so would seem to commit one to valuing inauthenticity over authenticity or inappropriateness over appropriateness, which is misrepresentative, to say the least, of any coherent musical viewpoint.[8] As Taruskin astutely observes, the words "simply cannot be rid of [their] moral and ethical overtones."[9] Thus it is here that Taruskin makes his first formal objection to the concept of authenticity: the term carries a value judgment that cannot rightly be made with respect to styles of musical performance.

At this point Taruskin pauses to take stock of several alternatives: historical verisimilitude, Joseph Kerman's term, 'contextual,' and Gary Tomlinson's notion of authentic meaning, noting first the failure of other phrases, such as 'historically accurate,' 'aware' or 'informed,' to eliminate the "moral and ethical overtones of authenticity." He rather cleverly summarizes Tomlinson's whole essay in the quick stroke of a sentence, as "a performance accompanied by a good set of programme

[7] Ibid., 139.
[8] Ibid., 137.
[9] Ibid.

notes."[10] While accurate, this characterization fails to make explicit the main points of Tomlinson's argument: that a search for authenticity is, more precisely, a search for authentic meaning in music, and that "the most profound and authentic meanings of music will be found not in musical works themselves but behind them, in the varieties of discourse that give rise to them."[11] These are bold, contentious claims, and, following Taruskin's lead, I will not discuss them in detail. Suffice it to say that Tomlinson's treatment of the issue seems to relegate the performative aspects of music to a rank below the historical/musicological aspects in importance, which is an odd move to say the least, and provides a less-than-satisfactory solution to the problem of authenticity in performance, given that performance is the main concern here.

Using 'contextual' as a "value-free substitute" for authenticity, Taruskin claims, is also inadequate, and for two reasons.[12] First, not unlike Tomlinson's theory, it seems to elevate the importance of external factors above that of the music itself. This allows the opportunity for performers to eschew interpretive responsibilities in favor of recreating or adhering to the historical conditions surrounding past performances of works. Taruskin provides a description of Christopher Hogwood's "express attempt to re-create the conditions that obtained at the first performance of [the *Eroica* Symphony]" as an example of exactly the sort of vapid, unsophisticated performance that "arises not so much out of serious artistic conviction as out of

[10] Ibid., 139.
[11] Gary Tomlinson, 'The Historian, the Performer, and Authentic Meaning in Music,' *Authenticity and Early Music* ed. N. Kenyon (Oxford 1988), 136.
[12] Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present,' 140.

Wellsian time-travel fantasies."[13] He is referring to the lack of rhythmic nuance resulting from the use of amateur performers and conducting from the fortepiano, which Beethoven was forced to cope with in his first performance of the piece.

This example clearly illustrates Taruskin's point, but it is not a good example, especially for anyone wishing to take seriously Kerman's suggestion of the term 'contextual.' No word is invulnerable to misuse or misinterpretation, and just because Christopher Hogwood may have been looking in the wrong place for what one could (arguably) call a 'historically contextual performance' does not necessarily mean there is anything wrong with the concept of historical contextuality. One need only point out that not every single aspect of the historical context of a work is important or beneficial for fully understanding that work in order to successfully deflect the criticism that the concept of contextuality encourages "the naïve assumption that re-creating all the external conditions…of a piece will thus re-create the composer's inner experience of the piece and allow him to 'speak for himself.'"[14] In this particular case, one could easily claim that since the subpar proficiency of the performers was an undesirable contributing factor to the historical context of the *Eroica* Symphony, it should be left out of any attempts at recreating that context. Furthermore, one could say that historical contextuality only provides a necessary condition for authenticity and that thoughtful musical interpretation is still a sufficient condition. Of course, this raises new questions, such as how to determine whether part of a work's historical context is desirable or not, or how to make interpretive decisions within contextual limitations, or even why one should bother with the

[13] Ibid., 140-1.
[14] Ibid., 140.

notion of historical contextuality if it does not guarantee authenticity. However, some of these questions look rather familiar (we will encounter them again soon), and they all point to an issue of greater concern.

That issue, which constitutes a much better argument (not to mention assessment of the real problem at hand) against the use of 'contextual,' happens to be Taruskin's second reason for rejecting the term: "practically all music composed before 1800, and a great deal composed since, is almost invariably heard out of context today–that is, in that most anachronistic of all settings, the concert-hall."[15] To put it simply, contextuality is just not what we seem to be after, for if it were we would be equally committed to recreating the historical context of audiences, which is certainly not the case. Nor should it be. Concert-hall culture benefits society overall, as it allows unrestricted, high-volume access to performances and elevates the status of performers far beyond that of servants of the upper class. (If anyone that feels worthy of the label 'aristocracy' gets nostalgic for the days of court performances, just let that person hire some musicians to play at his or her estate – I'm sure they'll appreciate the work.) And I wouldn't trade the ability to listen to The Well Tempered Clavier as I go to sleep in my bed for anything in the world, contextual appreciation included.

Not only is this sort of total contextuality undesirable, it is also unfeasible. It is one thing to understand a piece of music's historical context, and to allow that understanding to supply or enhance the meaning of the piece. It is something else entirely to attempt to relive that context in hopes that it will supply the same meaning it once did originally. Any effort to recreate the original aural context of a piece is

[15] Ibid., 141.

doomed to failure because, even if one somehow successfully replicated the sound of, say, the St Matthew Passion as it was in Bach's time (the mere possibility of which is highly questionable; more on this presently), no human alive today would be capable of hearing it as one would have in Bach's time. There is no way to erase the mark of several hundred years on our musical sensibilities, or even our sense of hearing at all. A person who has listened to Schoenberg, Wagner, or Cage and experienced the sheer loudness of an airplane, helicopter, or rock concert will never hear music (or anything, for that matter) the same way as a 17th century peasant who has only heard Baroque sacred music and the sounds of a small village.

This brings us nicely to the issue of historical verisimilitude, which Taruskin, having now rejected 'contextual' as a viable alternative to authenticity, proceeds to consider. One possible case for refuting the validity of historical verisimilitude (which Taruskin does not mention) is a continuation of the previous discussion of the shortcomings of contextuality. Philosopher Peter Kivy notes a distinction between two phenomena that could both be considered examples of achieving what he calls 'sonic authenticity' of a piece of music, that is, for a piece to sound like it did in performances in the historical past (what, I believe, we would want to call historical verisimilitude).[16] Thus, he explains, there are two senses in which one can understand a piece to 'sound like it did back in history.' On the one hand one may construe 'sounds like' to mean something like 'duplicates the "physical perturbations of the medium,"' effectively recreating the sound waves that were "there to be heard" – a single, objective, determinate physical state.[17] On the other hand one may also

[16] Peter Kivy, *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance*, (Ithaca 1995), 47-53.
[17] Ibid., 49.

construe ‘sounds like’ to mean something more along the lines of ‘sounds this way *to* someone’ – a potentially multifarious (depending on the number of someones), subjective, conscious, mental state. The names Kivy gives to these two different significations are sonic authenticity in the case of the former and sensible authenticity in the case of the latter.

Now, recall that because the aural contexts of the 18th and 21st centuries differ so greatly from each other, a 21st century listener’s sensible experience of any given sonic phenomenon will be vastly dissimilar to that of an 18th century listener. This shows that sonic authenticity and sensible authenticity are mutually exclusive. For if one successfully reproduces in the present the objective, physical sounds of Bach’s own performance of the St Matthew Passion, the subjective experience had by Bach’s audience cannot also be reproduced in that present audience. The goal of historical verisimilar performance therefore must not be to induce historically authentic subjective states such as thoughts, feelings, emotions, or any of the internal reactions normally considered to be the hallmarks of music and musical experience. This appears to be quite problematic – what else could be the point of historical verisimilitude if not to evoke an experience more closely tied to that which the composer would have expected (or intended) an audience to have?

One possible answer is that even though the achievement of historical verisimilitude does not amount to sensible authenticity, it does in fact, when combined with knowledge of the relevant historical and aural contexts, provide a novel and artistically valid musical practice. Thus, we may not be hearing anything exactly as Bach or his contemporaries heard it, but with the right conceptual tools we

can perceive and appreciate how they might have heard music as it originally sounded, and through this appreciation construct new meanings and meaningful experiences of our own. The result, of course, is not authenticity in any strong sense of the word, but nonetheless brings us closer to experiencing music as it was experienced historically. I find (and I think Taruskin would agree) that this is actually a plausible solution to the issues brought on by the problem of contextuality and sonic vs. sensible authenticity. It will be good to keep in mind a little later on, as it hints at an important conclusion Taruskin draws that requires a good bit of discussion. However, a number of important problems remain: first, there are still the difficulties in establishing the possibility of achieving historical verisimilitude in practice, second, it is not clear that historical verisimilitude is what the early music movement is really after either, and third, if a rescuable concept of authenticity is what we're after, historical verisimilitude, which amounts to something less, just won't cut it.

These are more or less the charges that Taruskin brings against historical verisimilitude, so let us now turn back to his arguments. Though they are difficult to follow – at this point in his essay Taruskin begins to dance around the issues at hand – he appears to make two separate cases for the inadequacy of the concept of historical verisimilitude. First, he claims, our conception of it has not progressed at all in the last several decades and, regardless of its likelihood of progressing at all in the future, will always either be specious or else unworthy of the name 'authenticity.'[18] This is a rather bold claim, though the reasoning behind it is compelling. It is important to note before anything else that Taruskin does not make the distinction here between sonic authenticity and sensible authenticity, and when he speaks of

[18] Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present,' 141.

historical verisimilitude he is almost certainly referring to the notion contained by the former, that of physical sound. In light of this, it is hard to doubt his assertion that "strict accountability [to historical evidence] reduces performance practice to a lottery."[19]

There can only be one way to recreate a sound as objective phenomenon, and that is to recreate its unique physical configuration. Thus the only way to *truly* recreate the sounds of Beethoven's first performance of the *Eroica* Symphony would be to replicate, molecule for molecule, nanosecond for nanosecond, Newton for Newton, nanometer for nanometer and so on, the physical and spatial configurations of the instruments and (acoustically relevant) properties of the performance space, the timing of each note relative to the start of the performance, and the force, distance, and pressure of every bow stroke, drum stroke, and attack of every player. It goes without saying that this idea is utterly absurd, and there should be no need to rehearse its impossibilities, epistemic, human, or otherwise. Obviously it is nowhere near what Taruskin or anyone else has in mind when talking about historical verisimilitude or the unique performance determined by the 'lottery' of historical evidence. Let us then see if we can find a more sensible reading.

Assuming, at least for argument's sake, that the amount of knowledge required to fully realize a sonically authentic performance will never be available to us, we may conclude that there will always be gaps in the historical evidence for the performance of a given style or piece.[20] According to Taruskin, musicians may either choose to fill those gaps with unsubstantiated interpretive decisions based on

[19] Ibid., 142.
[20] Taruskin does appear to make this assumption himself, and it seems like a pretty reasonable one to make, barring the discovery of time travel or some other invention of science fiction.

creativity and imagination, or they may choose to leave the gaps as gaps, performing only according to what can be proven and omitting anything that might be criticized on a documentary basis. While the former seems to preclude the ideal of historical verisimilitude, making it into something speculative, contingent, and hence specious, the latter appears to doom us "to a marginal existence as performers," as it commits one to doing nothing.[21] This kind of shirking of interpretive duties, so Taruskin claims, "is worthy neither of the name ['authenticity'] nor of serious discussion."[22]

Taruskin's second argument against historical verisimilitude is that it is not what performers within the early music camp actually seek to achieve, whether they say so or not. He gives numerous examples of the historical disregard of both musicians who claim they are aiming at verisimilitude and those "that explicitly eschew verisimilitude as a performance ideal."[23] I will not reiterate those examples here; suffice it to say that, in practice, capturing the actual sounds of the past does not seem to be as important to performers as capturing what we take those sounds to be, and this involves faculties of imagination to the extent that historical verisimilitude can no longer rightly said to be the real goal. If we are to find a notion of authenticity that might actually be endorsed by those it would serve, we must depart from historical verisimilitude.

This brings us at long last to the controversial issue of the composer's intentions. By far the most popular conception of an 'authentic' performance is one that fully realizes the composer's intentions.[24] While this is an attractive idea, and one

---

[21] Ibid., 141-2.
[22] Ibid., 143.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Kivy, *Authenticities*, 9.

that I think has the most viable potential both practically and philosophically, it invites criticism on many levels. Taruskin expresses preliminary doubt over whether composers even have the kind of intentions we take them to have. He cites examples of several composers, including Debussy, Irving Berlin, and Elliott Carter, who regard and relate to a finished piece "either as a performer if he is one, or else simply as a listener."[25] However, despite these "copious" examples, he has certainly not shown that *all* composers regard their pieces in such a way (curiously missing from his list are any composers from the time periods most in question – he can only marshal evidence from the 20th century), or even that we can assume right off the bat that a composer does not have specific intentions about the way a piece should sound.[26]

A slightly better line of reasoning for denying the viability of composers' intentions as a performance ideal is Taruskin's claim that we cannot know we know them. However, as Kivy points out, "there are no special epistemic barriers to our gaining knowledge of them…if one means by 'know' anything like 'have justified true belief.'"[27] The "familiar epistemological impediments to learning what the composer's intentions were" are no more than "the solipsistic fallout from the Cartesian mind-body problem… [which,] if it has not been laid to rest within the philosophical community, certainly need not haunt the historian without."[28] This does not seem to be what Taruskin is referring to, however, as he points out that we seem

---

[25] Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present,' 147.
[26] Kivy, *Authenticities*, 20.
[27] Ibid., 16.
[28] That is, the infamous 'problem of other minds' according to which we cannot know the contents of anyone's thoughts other than our own. Quotations are respectively from Richard Taruskin, 'On Letting the Music Speak for Itself: Some Reflections on Musicology and Performance,' *Journal of Musicology*, I (1982), 340; and Kivy, *Authenticities,* 15, 17.

quite capable of 'knowing' a composer to have two contradictory intentions. This is a practical problem, not a philosophical one – if composers publish multiple different versions of a score, or express multiple conflicting reports of how they 'intend' a piece to be played, how can we determine what their true intentions are? Taruskin's answer is that "the decision will have to be made either on the basis of one's preferences (in which case the recourse to authority has been entirely spurious), or on the basis of some arbitrary rule, which comes down in any case to an appeal to an authority higher than the composer's, anyway."[29] Yet this argument makes two assumptions that I don't think anyone would want to grant: one, that when a composer seems to have conflicting intentions all we can do as faithful performers is throw up our hands and pick one to follow, and two, that actually doing this would be a violation of a composer's intentions.

To illustrate the first point, consider Chopin's habit of sending different autograph versions to his various different publishers in France, Germany, and England. Though the lazy scholar might indeed decide to play from one edition rather than the others based on preference or 'some arbitrary rule,' a scholar truly committed to authenticity, I think, would strive to ascertain why such intentional incongruities exist. In the case of Chopin, one would learn that the countries to which he supplied autographs generally employed three different varieties of piano, and the editorial inconsistencies are a result of Chopin's familiarity with the subtle differences of these instruments and desire to make his pieces sound as best they could on each one. To determine Chopin's true intentions, one would need extensive knowledge of the differences between pianos manufactured by Pleyel, Erard, Broadwood, etc. as well

[29] Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present,' 146.

as which countries used which. This would allow one to make a decision about what markings or what edition to follow informed entirely by knowledge of the composer's intentions – no spurious recourse to authority there.

Of course, such straightforward answers will not always be available, either because we simply cannot find them, or because a composer really does hold conflicting intentions which cannot be sorted out by any deeper understanding of them. But even if, as in Taruskin's reference to the five different recordings Stravinsky made of *The Rite of Spring*, historical evidence presents equally strong support for multiple incompatible intentions, is it right to say that choosing one of them on the basis of preference invalidates any recourse to their authority?[30] Surely one does not violate the totality of a composer's intentions by following one set and not another. If this is not immediately apparent, consider the old joke about the Jewish mother who gives her son two ties for Hanukkah. He goes to visit her a few days later wearing one of the ties. When she answers the door she looks him up and down and promptly remarks, "what's the matter – you didn't like the other one?" I would be inclined to think that any indeterminacy regarding a composer's intentions should invite, first, more rigorous investigation, but short of that, freedom of choice between plausible alternatives. I can see no reason why having to choose to respect one justifiable set of intentions, even if it means disregarding others, renders the notion of composers' intentions *ipso facto* incapable of providing the basis for authenticity. The truth of the matter surely is that there can sometimes be multiple, equally authentic ways to realize a composer's intentions in performance.

[30] Ibid., 145.

This directly raises yet another important problem, which Taruskin discusses in detail. "Adherents to the point of view we are dissecting here," he asserts, "have no unique claim in the matter of fidelity to the composer's intentions. Everyone claims it."[31] In addition to citations from Bruno Walter and Kenneth Cooper, he provides the following excerpt by Wanda Landowska to illustrate his point:

> By living intimately with the works of a composer I endeavor to penetrate his spirit, to move with an increasing ease in the world of his thoughts, and to know them 'by heart' so that I may recognize immediately when Mozart is in good humor or when Handel wants to express triumphant joy. I want to know when Bach is raging and throwing a handful of sixteenths at the face of some imaginary adversary or a flaming spray of arpeggios, as he does in *The Chromatic Fantasy*. The goal is to attain such an identification with the composer that no more effort has to be made *to understand the slightest of his intentions* or to follow the subtlest fluctuations of his mind.[32]

Thus to realize a composer's intentions is no more the goal of early music performers than it is of anyone else. "The difference," Taruskin observes, "between the point of view represented here by Landowska, Walter, and Cooper, and what from here on I shall in desperation call the 'authentistic' point of view… is that the former construes intentions 'internally', that is, in spiritual, metaphysical, or emotional terms, and sees their realization in terms of the 'effect' of a performance, while the latter construes intentions in terms of empirically ascertainable – and hence, though tacitly, external – facts, and sees their realization purely in terms of sound."[33] This is, of course, exactly the distinction between sonic and sensible authenticity. As we have seen, though, sonic authenticity (i.e. historical verisimilitude) cannot be constitutive of authenticity with a capital A, if only for the a posteriori fact that it is not what

---

[31] Ibid., 147.
[32] *Landowska On Music*, ed. Denise Restout (New York, 1965), 406; as quoted in Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present,' 147. His italics.
[33] Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present,' 148.

performers who seek and/or claim authenticity are in pursuit of.[34] Thus we are able to tease out of Taruskin a contradiction that is very, very subtle, but also very important in resolving all of this apparent tension: the difference between the traditional and authentistic viewpoints cannot purely be one of sonic vs. sensible authenticity, as he claims, because he has already shown that sonic authenticity is not necessarily characteristic of the authentistic viewpoint.

Taruskin is, however, right about the positivistic nature of the authentic performance movement, and so I would like to propose that the fundamental difference between it and traditional performance ideology is not one of aims, but of methodology. Performers such as Landowska, Cooper, and Walter may be just as committed to realizing a composer's intentions as Hogwood, Leonhardt, or Harnoncourt, but their primary strategy for achieving this end is different with regard to both how those intentions can be discerned and how, once discerned, they should be executed. Before I continue, I suppose I must say something about the possibility of the notion of composers' intentions as viable grounds for authenticity, since this has previously been called into question. As far as I am aware, however, Taruskin provides the most compelling and sustainable arguments against this possibility, and I take it that I have successful refuted these. I should thus like to shift the burden of proof to the other end, i.e. to showing that the notion is either fundamentally incoherent, or else that it is for some reason incapable of providing the grounds for authenticity. For the time being, then, I will assume the truth of such a possibility.

[34] In case it is of concern, I do not mean to offer this point as proof that historical verisimilitude cannot be constitutive of what we *should* mean by 'authenticity,' but only that it cannot be constitutive of what we *do* seem to mean by 'authenticity.' Whether it is necessary to change the definition has yet to be determined, though I highly doubt that doing so would bring it any closer to the notion of historical verisimilitude.

Thus, let us continue with the differences in methodology between the 'authenticists' and the 'non-authenticists.'

Landowska explains of her interpretive methods that "to know what Mozart means when he writes in D major or what Bach wishes to express when he uses the key of E flat major, we have numerous points of comparison at our disposal among various works on which we can lean and rely and from which we can draw conclusions."[35] Drawing such conclusions – which of course can often be thought-provoking and convincing – from entirely within the works themselves bespeaks a creative act of interpretation utterly reliant on intuition. Absolute music has no objective semantic content; any inference to "what Bach wishes to express" therefore must either look outside of the music to sources that can provide that content, or else engage in a process of translation by which content is projected onto the music by some faculty of imagination. Landowska agrees that "[music] suggests images, but leaves us free to choose them and to accommodate them to our pleasure."[36]

This view is echoed by Walter's admonishment "to gain 'intimate knowledge of the spiritual content'" of a piece.[37] Recalling Landowska's earlier quote, one can clearly see that intimacy is key – these artists understand the works they play on a very personal level, in their own subjective terms. No doubt their understanding comes partly from the words and writings of the composers, and perhaps also peripherally from ornamentation treatises and the like. Certainly when these artists find themselves in foreign territory they are more likely to consider sources outside

---

[35] *Landowska*, 406.
[36] Ibid., 405.
[37] Bruno Walter, *Of Music and Music-Making*, trans. Paul Hamburger (New York, 1961), 183; quoted in Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present,' 148.

music for which they have not yet developed an ear. However, what seems to be the most important factor in determining a composer's intentions, especially when it is a familiar composer, is what they have come to *feel* are those intentions, from whatever combination of study and experience that suits their preferences best. The final judgment is sensual, not intellectual. As a performer bred in this tradition, I believe there is also an implicit assumption, shared by all its members, that composers, whatever specific intentions they might have, also to some extent intend their pieces to be played well – to the best of the ability of the performer. Naturally, the more a performer understands and identifies with a piece, the better he or she will play it. Thus there is logic in the assumption that the interpretation that a performer most intimately feels and which affords the greatest understanding of the piece is the one the composer intends. I will return to this line of thought momentarily.

Landowska explicitly acknowledges that, for her, "the means" by which she "attain[s] the proper effect" of a piece (that is, the effect intended by the composer[38]) "are of no importance."[39] (356) Whatever is necessary to achieve the intended result is admissible, even if it would have been impossible for the composer to do the same. While this attitude is somewhat extreme and might be unattributable to some non-authentistic performers (for instance, any pianist morally opposed to 'cheating' by splitting up notes of a difficult passage between the hands), it does illustrate the relative absence of methodological stricture that indeed characterizes how non-authentistic performers realize (their impressions of) composers' intentions. Most

[38] Regardless of the inconsistencies of his claim in the rest of the aforementioned sentence (paraphrased again in this footnote), Taruskin does, I think, correctly describe Landowska et al. as primarily 'construing intentions "internally," that is, in spiritual, metaphysical, or emotional terms, and seeing their realization in terms of effect, not sound.'
[39] *Landowska,* 356.

techniques and stylistic elements, ahistorical or not, are fair game – use of modern instruments, pedaling, grand Romantic gestures and phrases, and rubato, just to name a few, are ordinary occurrences in the mainstream concert-hall, and performers indiscriminately apply them to composers as historically and stylistically divergent as Bach and Rachmaninoff.

Now compare all of this with the tenets and practices of the early music movement. "The typical Early Musician," according to Laurence Dreyfus, "distrusts his intuitive impulses as a harmful residue of a Mainstream upbringing. Instead, he reads the proper treatises, invests in expensive facsimiles, consults source-critical editions, and worries that he is deviating from the proper style."[40] The composer's intentions are to be inferred from verifiable data and empirically ascertainable fact; any other source of discovery is subject to objection and dismissal. Discernment of these intentions is only an act of interpretation insofar as one interprets the source material – a rather minor exegetical feat, without much need for imagination. Creativity is thus replaced by objectivity, and the whole endeavor is approached with the scholarly and methodological rigor of a positivistic science.

So it is in theory. Truth be told, in practice, adherence to such stringencies varies greatly from one individual to the next. Some performers do choose to leave the gaps in historical evidence (which, continuing our previous assumption, there will always be), open in performance, including with the bare notes only those interpretive aspects that can be proven on a positive documentary basis and hence suppressing all subjective, individualistic, and creative tendencies. To these performers, the way they

[40] Laurence Dreyfus, 'Early Music Defended against Its Devotees: A Theory of Historical Performance in the Twentieth Century,' *The Musical Quarterly*, 69.3 (1983), 319.

play truly is determined by lottery. Other performers, however, choose to fill in these gaps, either with other facts borrowed from different, historically irrelevant sources, or, more commonly, with what they imagine should be there. Authenticists construe composers' intentions first and foremost in whatever terms are given by the facts (which may be given either in internal or external terms), and they seek to realize them not so much explicitly in terms of sound, but rather, I think, by the same means as the composers did or *would have* (given a slight change in circumstances) used themselves. Often, especially in the case of the latter, an imaginative leap is required to say anything about what this might mean. Sometimes such a leap is required even to say anything about what a composer's intentions might have been at all – a leap that is just as often made as it is not. What is distinctive about the methods of early music, then, which characterizes both the creative and the rigid authenticists, is that all emphasis is placed on historical evidence; creative interpretation, when involved at all, is either made to appeal to the evidence or else relegated to an inferior role.

Whether these methods constitute a result that can properly be termed 'authentic,' even just in the sense of indicating proper historical correspondence, depends rather largely on the size of the gaps in the evidence. Certainly when they are so big as to severely underdetermine the performance style in question, any performance that limits itself to what can be objectively determined (or one that fills the gaps imaginatively) cannot admit of being totally authentic, though it may be more so than other performances. Indeed, unless one is unduly optimistic about the kind of historical picture we can acquire from fragmentary evidence, it seems likely that there will always be gaps, and thus authenticity will never be achieved in the

strongest sense of the term, denoting the authority of the original. Lewis Lockwood is surely correct in his assertion that 'authenticity' "represents a goal that is, on the one hand, a historical improbability…"[41] However, this does not mean that the enterprise of early music is without immense scholarly and artistic value. I see this value as more or less a given nowadays – the 'battle' fought by early music seems to have finally been won.[42]

Nevertheless, this does not warrant Lockwood's claim that, on the other hand, authenticity is "a philosophical necessity."[43] Early music is not inherently valuable as an artistic object for its methodology, for it is entirely conceivable that someday (or in a parallel universe) people might not appreciate even a modicum of historical authenticity – their aesthetic sensibilities may leave them only wanting to hear Bach on a synthesizer. Granted, it is inherently valuable as an object of scholarship, but that is beside the point, as Lockwood is clearly making a claim about musical practices. Perhaps the metaphysician in me is too eager to pounce, and he is only using the word 'philosophical' as a synonym for 'ideological.' If this is the case, then he is absolutely right that, given our current aesthetic sensibilities and our widespread recognition of the interpretive authority sustained by the composer's genius, it is necessary to seek historical authenticity in order to be in keeping with the taste of the time. However, it is not metaphysical necessity that places such demands on the performer, but rather the necessity of obligation to the mainstream. (Ironically, it is this same necessity that so stubbornly resisted the success of the early music movement.) This might seem to

[41] Lewis Lockwood, "Performance and 'Authenticity'," *Early Music*, 19.4 (1991), 502.
[42] Nicholas Kenyon, 'Early Music Is Enjoying Its Moment,' *The New York Times* (Friday, 4 March 2011).
[43] Lockwood, "Performance and 'Authenticity'," 502.

weaken the persuasive force of early music ideology, but it is only unfairly, because of words like 'authenticity,' that such force has been acquired to begin with. In truth, no single performance ideology, including one that appeals to the positivistically oriented minds of the age of science, can claim any more authority than any other, except through that which is invested in it by the people who believe in it. Authority granted in this way is, of course, far from meaningless, and recognizing its significance does much to explain why early music, while intellectually appealing for its methods, is artistically appealing for its novelty and opportunity for inventiveness. The concept of authenticity has been important in the success and development of the early music movement, but now that its practices can stand on their own as artistically valid objects of the mainstream, it should no longer be needed, hence used, other than to make explicitly historical claims.

Epilogue

Like most performers, my love for music comes out of the deep, personal connection I feel to it, and this will never change. When I sit down to play I do so for myself, not for any composer or scholar. At the same time, I recognize the importance of being able to appreciate, if not emulate, the work of early musicians, not just because one must follow current trends in order to get hired, but also because being able to understand and appreciate the beauty and artistic nuance of a performance from more than one perspective is a valuable skill, generally indicative of a sensitive and sophisticated musician. I was not wrong to keep the added octaves in my Bach, but it would have done me well to try and feel the power of that stretto just through the clarity of the contrapuntal lines, without the help of those bass sonorities, whether I played it that way in performance or not. Issues of stylistic correctness aside, doing so would at least have been a useful exercise in musicianship.

Reflecting upon my future as a performer, I find it unlikely that I will ever be at the forefront of the early music movement. I believe that my voice will best be heard from what I have to say about music as a creative interpreter, not as a scholar (though this may change if I find that there is an area about which I have something important to say). What I love most about making music is not the intellectual rigor of my methodology, but the physical and emotional sensations of playing. Like Landowska, I do not hope to convince an eternity of scholars that I 'execute Bach's will;' I hope only to convince my audience of this, in the fleeting, magical moment of performance. That is true authenticity.