

THE CAMBRIDGE
HISTORY OF



MUSICAL
PERFORMANCE

EDITED BY
COLIN LAWSON
AND ROBIN STOWELL

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MUSICAL PERFORMANCE

The intricacies and challenges of musical performance have recently attracted the attention of writers and scholars to a greater extent than ever before. Research into the performer's experience has begun to explore such areas as practice techniques, performance anxiety and memorisation, as well as many other professional issues. Historical performance practice has been the subject of lively debate way beyond academic circles, mirroring its high profile in the recording studio and the concert hall. Reflecting the strong ongoing interest in the role of performers and performance, this *History* brings together research from leading scholars and historians, and, importantly, features contributions from accomplished performers, whose practical experiences give the volume a unique vitality. Moving the focus away from the composers and onto the musicians responsible for bringing the music to life, the *History* presents a fresh, integrated and innovative perspective on performance history and practice, from the earliest times to today.

COLIN LAWSON is Director of the Royal College of Music, London. He has an international profile as a period clarinettist and has played principal in most of Britain's leading period orchestras, notably The Hanover Band, the English Concert and the London Classical Players, with whom he has recorded extensively and toured worldwide. He has published widely, and is co-editor, with Robin Stowell, of a series of Cambridge Handbooks to the Historical Performance of Music, for which he co-authored an introductory volume and contributed a book on the early clarinet.

ROBIN STOWELL is Professor of Music and Director of the Centre for Research into Historically Informed Performance at Cardiff University. He is also a violinist/period violinist, and he has performed, broadcast and recorded with the Academy of Ancient Music and other period ensembles. He is the author of *Violin Technique and Performance Practice in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (1985), and his more recent major publications include *The Cambridge Companion to the String Quartet* (2003) and *The Early Violin and Viola* (2001).

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and
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Contributors

JON BANKS combines a career as a Senior Lecturer in Music at Anglia Ruskin University with a full performing schedule. He specialises in the medieval harp and gittern as well as Oriental string instruments such as the santur and qanun, and has toured and recorded with groups including the Burning Bush, the Dufay Collective, Red Byrd, Joglaresa, Al-Ashekeen, the Jocelyn Pook Ensemble, Sirinu and the Tivoli Café Band. Recent publications include a book, *The Instrumental Consort Repertory of the Fifteenth Century*, and current research interests include a project on the repertoires of music preserved on Oriental clocks. Other activities include regular performances at the Globe Theatre, work with Iranian and Middle Eastern ensembles and freelance recording for film and TV.

TIM CARTER was born in Australia and studied in the United Kingdom. He is the author of the Cambridge Opera Handbook on Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* (1987), *Jacopo Peri (1561–1633): His Life and Works* (1989), *Music in Late Renaissance and Early Baroque Italy* (1992), *Music, Patronage and Printing in Late Renaissance Florence* and *Monteverdi and his Contemporaries* (both 2000), *Monteverdi's Musical Theatre* (2002), and *'Oklahoma!' The Making of an American Musical* (2007). In 2001 he moved from Royal Holloway, University of London, to become David G. Frey Distinguished Professor of Music at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he was chair of the Music Department from 2004 to 2009. He is currently preparing an edition of Kurt Weill's first musical composed in the US, *Johnny Johnson* (to a play by Paul Green).

STEPHEN COTTRELL is Professor of Music at City University, London. His research interests fall into three interrelated areas: ethnographic approaches to musicians and music-making, especially within the Western art-music tradition; the study of musical instruments, particularly the saxophone; and the study and analysis of musical performance. A monograph on *Professional Music-Making in London* was published in 2004, and a further volume on *The Saxophone* is forthcoming. He has contributed to a range of other publications, including the *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, *Ethnomusicology*, and *Twentieth-century Music*. He is an associate editor of the latter, and on the executive committee of the British Forum for Ethnomusicology. He is also an Artistic Adviser to the record label

Saxophone Classics. As a performer he has released several CDs of contemporary music, both as a soloist and previously as the leader of the Delta Saxophone Quartet.

WILL CRUTCHFIELD is the Director of Opera for the Caramoor International Music Festival in New York. He has also served as Music Director of the Opera de Colombia (Bogotá) and Principal Guest Conductor of the Polish National Opera (Warsaw), and has been a guest conductor in various theatres, specialising in Italian opera. He has written on music for the *Grove Dictionaries of Music*, the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker* and various academic publications, and has served on the faculties of the Juilliard School, Manhattan School of Music and the Mannes College of Music.

JOHN HAINES is Professor at the University of Toronto, where he is cross-appointed at the Faculty of Music and Centre for Medieval Studies. His publications include *Eight Centuries of Troubadours and Trouvères: The Changing Identity of Medieval Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) and *Medieval Song in Romance Languages* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

ROGER HEATON, clarinettist and conductor, has worked closely with some of the world's leading composers including Henze, Feldman, Bryars, Radulescu and Volans, and performs with such groups as the Fidelio and Archduke Trios, Kreutzer and Smith String Quartets. He was a member of the London Sinfonietta and Ensemble Modern, and has been a member of the Gavin Bryars Ensemble since the early 1980s. He was Music Director and Conductor of Rambert Dance Company during the 1990s, Clarinet Professor at the Darmstadt Ferienkurse für Neue Musik (1982–94) and is currently Professor of Music at Bath Spa University. His most recent CDs include music by Tom Johnson (*Ants/Silenzio*), clarinet quintets by Morton Feldman and Christopher Fox (*Metier*), Hugh Wood's chamber music (*Toccata*) and Schoenberg's (Greissle) Clarinet Sonata (*Clarinet Classics*). His book *The Versatile Clarinet* was published in 2006.

COREY JAMASON is a harpsichordist and conductor and is artistic director of the San Francisco Bach Choir and principal keyboardist of the American Bach Soloists. He has performed with a variety of ensembles including LA Opera, San Francisco Symphony and Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and has appeared in recordings with American Bach Soloists, the violinist Giles Apap and the ensemble El Mundo. He is also co-director and conductor of Théâtre Comique, an ensemble that specialises in recreating late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American musical theatre according to historical performance practices. He teaches historical keyboards at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music where he is director of the Historical Performance Program.

NICHOLAS KENYON is Managing Director of the Barbican Centre, London. He was Controller of BBC Radio 3 1992–8 and Director of the BBC Proms 1996–2007. He was a music critic of the *New Yorker* 1979–82, Editor of *Early Music* 1983–92 and edited the influential volume *Authenticity and Early Music* (1988). He is the author of *The BBC Symphony Orchestra 1930–80* (1981), *Simon Rattle: From Birmingham to Berlin* (rev. edn 2001), *The Faber Pocket Guide to Mozart* (2005) and *The Faber Pocket Guide to Bach* (2011). He has been a council member of the Arts and Humanities Research Council and a Governor of Wellington College, and is now a member of Arts Council England and a Board member of English National Opera and Sage Gateshead, and a Trustee of Dartington Hall.

COLIN LAWSON is Director of the Royal College of Music, London. He has an international profile as a period clarinettist and has played principal in most of Britain's leading period orchestras, notably The Hanover Band, the English Concert and the London Classical Players, with whom he has recorded extensively and toured worldwide. Described by *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* as 'a brilliant, absolutely world-class player' he has appeared as a soloist in many international venues, including London's major concert halls and New York's Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall. His recent discography includes two volumes of sonatas by Lefèvre in their original scoring for C clarinet and cello. Colin has published widely, especially for Cambridge University Press. With Robin Stowell, he is co-editor of a series of Cambridge Handbooks to the Historical Performance of Music, for which he co-authored an introductory volume and contributed a book on the early clarinet.

NATASHA LOGES gained her B.Mus. in piano performance at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and her M.Mus. at King's College, London. She completed her doctoral thesis at the Royal Academy of Music, before taking up her current post as Assistant Head of Programmes at the Royal College of Music. She has published articles on Brahms's Lieder in *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* (2006), *Indiana Theory Review* (2005) and in *Music and Literature in German Romanticism* (2004). Natasha also works as an accompanist, and has performed in St John's, Smith Square, London and the Holywell Music Room, Oxford; she has also broadcast live for BBC Radio 3.

TIMOTHY J. MCGEE is a music historian whose areas of research include performance practices before 1700 and Canadian music. His latest book, *The Ceremonial Musicians of Late Medieval Florence* was published in 2009. Other publications include *The Sound of Medieval Song* (1998), *Medieval Instrumental Dances* (1989), *Medieval and Renaissance Music: A Performer's Guide* (1985) and *The Music of Canada* (1985). In 2002 he retired from the Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto. Currently

he is an Honorary Professor and Adjunct Professor in the departments of English and History at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario.

SIMON McVEIGH is Professor of Music at Goldsmiths, University of London. He has published extensively on eighteenth-century instrumental music and on music in Britain, including *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn* (1993) and, with Jehoash Hirshberg, *The Italian Solo Concerto 1700–1760: Rhetorical Strategies and Style History* (2004). He also co-edited with Susan Wollenberg a volume of essays entitled *Concert Life in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2004). Current research projects include a study of the British symphony in the eighteenth century and a collaboration with Leanne Langley on London concert life around 1900. In addition he is a Baroque and Classical violinist, with a particular interest in the north Italian violin repertoire and in the development of the concert string quartet.

JANE MANNING is an internationally known soprano, specialising in twentieth- and twenty-first-century music, who has given more than 300 world premieres. An extensive recording catalogue includes many twentieth-century classics. She founded her own ensemble, Jane's Minstrels, in 1988 and still enjoys an active career. Currently Visiting Professor at Kingston University, her academic work includes three terms as Visiting Professor at Mills College, six years as Honorary Professor at Keele University, and many shorter international residencies, including seminars at Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford and Yale Universities. Her published works include two volumes of *New Vocal Repertory*, a chapter in *The Messiaen Companion*, and the forthcoming *Voicing Pierrot*, the product of three years of research at Kingston University funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. She holds honorary doctorates from the Universities of York, Keele and Durham and is a Fellow of both the Royal Academy and the Royal College of Music.

STEFANO MENGOZZI is Associate Professor of Music at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA. His research focuses on the history of music theory in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. His publications include *The Renaissance Reform of Medieval Music Theory: Guido of Arezzo between Myth and History* (2010).

WILLIAM MIVAL is a composer, broadcaster, writer and teacher and is Head of Composition at the Royal College of Music in London. He has written works for, amongst others, the Belcea String Quartet, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Welsh Chamber Orchestra and the harpsichordist Sophie Yates. As a broadcaster he has been a frequent contributor to BBC Radio 3's *CD Review* and *Building a Library* and was invited to discuss the concept of musical 'resonance' on BBC Television's *The Culture Show*.

MICHAEL MUSGRAVE is Emeritus Professor of Music at the University of London, Visiting Research Fellow at the Royal College of Music, and serves on the graduate faculty of the Juilliard School, New York. His fields of research are nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German music, and English concert life in the same period. He is author and editor of six books on Brahms, including (with Bernard D. Sherman) *Performing Brahms. Early Evidence of Performance Style* (2003); this won the 2003 Association for Recorded Sound Collections Award for Best Research in Recorded Classical Music. His recent work includes a biography of Robert Schumann. He is author of *The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace* (1995), and editor of *George Grove, Music and Victorian Culture* (2003). He is also a member of the Trägerverein of the 'Johannes Brahms Gesamtausgabe', for which he has edited the two orchestral serenades Op. 11 and Op. 16 (2006); other editions include the Liebeslieder Waltzes of Brahms in different versions for Carus Verlag and Edition Peters, and Schumann's Piano Concerto, also for Peters (2009). He received the Fellowship of the Royal College of Music in 2005.

IAN PACE is a pianist and musicologist specialising in areas of nineteenth-century performance practice, the post-1945 avant-garde, and issues of music and society. He is a Lecturer in Music at City University, London, and has previously taught at Dartington College of Arts and the Universities of Southampton and Cardiff. He has published many articles, and co-edited the volume *Uncommon Ground: The Music of Michael Finnissy* (2008). His book *Brahms Performance Practice: Documentary, Analytic and Interpretive Approaches* was published in 2010. As a pianist he has played in over twenty countries, recorded numerous CDs, and given world premieres of over 150 works, by composers including Richard Barrett, James Dillon, Pascal Dusapin, Brian Ferneyhough, Michael Finnissy, Horatiu Radulescu, Frederic Rzewski and Gerhard Stäbler. He is also writing a book on the history of instrumental performance between 1815 and 1890, as well as researching the emergence of the avant-garde in West Germany after 1945.

ANTHONY PAYNE, composer, was born in London and studied at Durham University. His commissions include three orchestral works for the BBC Proms, and works for the BBC Philharmonic, London Sinfonietta and Cheltenham Festival. His discography includes two complete CDs of chamber music. He has published books on Schoenberg, Frank Bridge and Elgar's Third Symphony, the completion of which, in 1997, brought him international acclaim, as well as South Bank and Evening Standard awards. It has been performed by the Philadelphia and Chicago Symphony Orchestras, as well as all the major UK orchestras. There are now six CD recordings in existence. He has been Visiting Professor at Mills College, California and Composition Tutor at the New South Wales Conservatorium, and is a frequent broadcaster for the BBC. He holds Honorary Doctorates from the Universities of Birmingham, Durham and Kingston, and is a Fellow of the Royal College of Music.

KEITH POLK has produced numerous articles and several books on instrumental music of the Renaissance. He is also a French horn player, having performed with the San Diego Symphony, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, the Boston Baroque, and the Smithsonian Chamber Players, among others. He is Professor Emeritus, University of New Hampshire, and has also taught at Brandeis University, the New England Conservatory and Regents College, London.

DAVID PONSFORD is a scholar, organist and harpsichordist, and an authority on keyboard music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. An organ scholar at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, he studied the organ with Peter Hurford, Lionel Rogg and Piet Kee, and the harpsichord with Kenneth Gilbert and Gustav Leonhardt. He is an Associate Lecturer at Cardiff University, where he conducts the University Choir and the University Chamber Orchestra. He also teaches the organ and harpsichord at Bristol University, and gives series of lectures at Madingley Hall, Cambridge. Recent recordings include Bach's complete violin sonatas with Jacqueline Ross, 'Parthenia' (1612), J. S. Bach's *Clavierübung* Part 3, and the complete Handel recorder sonatas with Alan Davis. He has recently published an edition of Biber's Mystery Sonatas (2007) and *French Organ Music in the Reign of Louis XIV* (2011).

JOHN POTTER is a singer and writer. He was a member of the Hilliard Ensemble for many years and currently sings with the Dowland Project, Red Byrd, and the Gavin Bryars Ensemble. He collaborates with a number of instrumentalists and performance artists. He records for ECM and has an eclectic discography of some 150 titles which include five gold discs and several Grammy nominations. He is the author of *Vocal Authority* (1998) and *Tenor: History of a Voice* (2009), edited *The Cambridge Companion to Singing* (2000) and has contributed to several Cambridge Histories.

OWEN REES specialises in Spanish, Portuguese and English sacred music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He is Reader in Music at the University of Oxford, and Fellow of the Queen's College. Previously he held posts at St Peter's College and St Edmund Hall, Oxford, and at the University of Surrey. He has published studies of the music of Cristóbal de Morales, Francisco Guerrero and William Byrd, and of musical sources and repertoires from Portugal and Spain. His first book, *Polyphony in Portugal*, considers music at the Monastery of Santa Cruz in Coimbra, Portugal, and he is co-editor (with Bernadette Nelson) of *Cristóbal de Morales: Sources, Influences, Reception*. His work as a scholar regularly relates closely to his performances and recordings; he directs Contrapunctus, the Choir of the Queen's College, Oxford, and the Cambridge Taverner Choir.

ELEONORA ROCCONI'S research interests focus on Ancient Greek Music and Music Theory, in which she specialised at the University of Birmingham under

the supervision of Professor Andrew Barker. Since 1999 she has been working for the Faculty of Musicology in Cremona (University of Pavia), where she is a Lecturer in Greek Language and Literature. Since 2000 she has been a member of the International Study Group on Music Archaeology (ISGMA), and in 2008 she became a member of the 'Kommission für antike Literatur und lateinische Tradition' within the 'Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften'. She is charter member of 'MOISA: International Society for the Study of Greek and Roman Music and of its Cultural Heritage'. Among her publications is *Le parole delle Muse* (2003).

ROBIN STOWELL is Professor of Music and Director of the Centre for Research into Historically Informed Performance at Cardiff University. Educated at Cambridge University and the Royal Academy of Music, he is also a violinist/period violinist, and he has performed, broadcast and recorded with the Academy of Ancient Music and other period ensembles. Since his pioneering book *Violin Technique and Performance Practice in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (1985) he has published widely on issues of performance practice, organology, music of the 'long eighteenth century', violinists, chamber music and string playing in general. His more recent major publications include *The Cambridge Companion to the String Quartet* (2003), *The Early Violin and Viola* (2001), a monograph on Beethoven's Violin Concerto (1998) and a co-authored volume (with Colin Lawson) on historical performance (1999), the first of a series of which he is co-editor.

JEREMY SUMMERLY is a conductor, musicologist, broadcaster and recording producer. He studied music as an undergraduate at Oxford University and musicology as a postgraduate at King's College, London. He is founder-director of Oxford Camerata and the Royal Academy Consort, has conducted almost fifty original commercial recordings of music spanning nine centuries, and has directed choirs and orchestras in locations as far afield as San Francisco and Melbourne, Helsinki and Cape Town. He has edited four volumes of medieval and Renaissance music for Faber Music, presents programmes for BBC Radios 3 and 4, and produces location recordings for Hyperion Records and Naxos. He is the recipient of a European Cultural Prize and is an Honorary Member of the Royal Academy of Music.

JONATHAN WAINWRIGHT is Professor and Head of the Department of Music at the University of York. He is a musicologist and performer and from 1996 to 2001 he was Director of the Girls' Choir at York Minster. His research interests focus upon sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English and Italian Music and his publications include *Musical Patronage in Seventeenth-Century England* (1997) and *From Renaissance to Baroque* (ed. with Peter Holman, 2005), and his edition of Richard

Dering's Latin Motets for 1–3 voices and continuo was published in 2008 in the series *Musica Britannica*.

PETER WALLS is Emeritus Professor of Music at Victoria University of Wellington and from 2002–2011 was Chief Executive of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. A Baroque violinist and conductor, he is the author of *Music in the English Courty Masque* (1996), *History, Imagination and the Performance of Music* (2003) and numerous articles on historical performance practice. He is the editor of *Baroque Music* (2011) in the Ashgate series *The Library of Essays on Music Performance Practice* and of two volumes of treatises in the *Geminiani Opera Omnia* (General Editor, Christopher Hogwood).

WILLIAM WEBER, Professor of History Emeritus at California State University in Long Beach, has written *Music and the Middle Class* (1975/2003), *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-Century England* (1992), and *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (2008). He edited *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* and *The Musician as Entrepreneur, 1700–1914* (2005). He has been a member of doctoral committees in France, Finland and Canada as well as the United States and is an Associate of the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library at the University of California, Los Angeles.

RICHARD WISTREICH is a scholar, singer and teacher whose work centres on the cultural and social history of music-making in Europe in the period between about 1500 and 1800. More specifically, he investigates how vocal performance of all kinds contributes to the construction of individual and collective identities. His book *Warrior, Courtier, Singer: Giulio Cesare Brancaccio and the Performance of Identity in the Late Renaissance* was published in 2007, as was *The Cambridge Companion to Monteverdi*, co-edited with John Whenham; he is also co-editor, with Iain Fenlon, of *The Cambridge History of Sixteenth-Century Music*. He has an international profile as a singer of both early and contemporary music, specialising in the performance of fifteenth-, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century solo and ensemble song. He is Professor of Music History and Dean of Research and Enterprise at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester.

DAVID WRIGHT'S recent work has focused on British musical life in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly its institutional, social and concert history aspects. His publications include revisionist accounts of the founding of the Royal College of Music, nineteenth-century music examination culture, the London Sinfonietta and the Prom seasons of Sir William Glock. With Jenny Doctor and Nicholas Kenyon he edited *The Proms: A New History* (2007). He is writing a social and cultural history of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. He was formerly Reader in the Social History of Music at the Royal College of Music.

Editors' preface

Over the past generation the intricacies and challenges of musical performance have attracted the attention of writers and scholars to a greater extent than ever before. The net has been cast widely, as research into the performer's experience has begun to explore such areas as practice techniques, performance anxiety and memorisation, as well as professional issues such as alcohol and drug abuse. There has even been greater recognition that a true understanding of musical excellence draws fruitfully upon such diverse fields as exercise science, psychophysiology, sports psychology, cognitive science and medicine. Furthermore, a relatively recent sub-discipline loosely embraced by the term 'performance studies' has circled around a large range of subject matter while not always fully engaging the attention of the executants themselves. At the same time, historical performance practice has been the subject of lively debate way beyond academic circles, mirroring its high profile in the recording studio and the concert hall. Histories of music nevertheless continue stubbornly to be based on composers and their achievements rather than on those musicians who have been responsible for bringing the music to life. Like Heinrich Schenker, many theorists have considered 'the mechanical realization of the work of art . . . superfluous', not least because 'a composition does not require a performance in order to exist'.¹ Whatever the reason, 'we have regarded performance as a totally secondary aspect of music, merely a clothing or a realisation of "the real thing", which are the written dots on the page'.² The complex relationship of score, musical work and performance demands a more flexible and detailed approach. 'For generations, we wrote the story of music as the history of compositions. But it is surely a mistake to think that music actually exists on library shelves in weighty collected editions. It is the history of performance that has shaped the course of music, and the history of

¹ H. Schenker, *The Art of Performance*, ed. H. Esser, trans. I. S. Scott, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 3.

² N. Kenyon, 'Musical Tradition in a Time of Anxiety', Twelfth Leverhulme Memorial Lecture, The Leverhulme Trust (2005), p. 6.

performance has never been written. The history of repertoires and institutions and taste and reception is only beginning to be written.³

The Cambridge History of Musical Performance takes up the challenge, aspiring to be nothing less than the largest and most comprehensive history of musical performance to be published in the English language. Apart from Frederick Dorian's *The History of Music in Performance* (New York, 1942), a now outdated book and of limited value, it can reasonably be claimed that there has been no previous publication on the subject, and certainly none matching the scope of the content and scholarly expertise represented within its pages. A collaborative project by leading music scholars, historians and practitioners, it seeks to trace the rich panorama of performance history, conventions and practices from the Ancient World to the present day, aiming to provide not only an invaluable and up-to-date source of reference about the subject but also an appreciation of the historical interrelationship of style and interpretation during the various musical epochs.

The format of this volume aligns with others in the 'Cambridge History' series. It reflects the research and performance experience of an international authorship, presenting a synthetic historical overview of a fascinating and complex subject that demands distinctive treatment. Much of the book addresses performance and performance practices in specific periods of history from times ancient to modern. From the Middle Ages onwards, an overview chapter for each period lays the historical foundations on which the immediately succeeding chapters are built, devoted respectively to vocal and instrumental performance. Case studies outline the performance history and the performance practice issues involved in interpreting a particular work or works from six of the periods under scrutiny. By way of introduction to this investigation of chronological developments, the opening chapters address broader issues that are immediately relevant to the performance of music, focusing respectively upon 'Performance today', 'Political process, Social structure and musical performance in Europe since 1450', 'The evidence', 'The performer and the composer', 'The teaching of performance', and 'Music and musical performance: histories in disjunction?'

With classical music increasingly being challenged in our society by pop music, world musics and a vast range of alternative mass entertainment, advocacy is clearly an important aspect of any performer's work. Yet the digital age has brought new opportunities, as the ways in which musical performance is disseminated have become subject to radical change. Contributors discuss these technological developments along with other performance-related topics

³ *Ibid.*

such as repertoires, audiences, criticism, careers, patronage and venues. An analysis of the complex and ever-changing relationship between composers and performers centres upon several areas of enquiry such as notational conventions, leadership roles and the cult of personality. Performance through the ages has been subject to a variety of didactic practices, often focusing on musical learning within institutions, whether church, court, university or conservatoire. An appropriate curriculum for performers beyond the immediate study of music has been promulgated in many different contexts, one eighteenth-century source prescribing for music students 'the whole of worldly wisdom, as well as mathematics, poetry, rhetoric and many languages'.⁴ This idealism scarcely found long-term favour, though in more recent times theory and analysis have gradually been supplemented by a host of other performance-related subjects, such as acoustics, performance practice, psychology and world music. In addition, the increasing interaction of performers with their communities has brought into focus the benefits of music to disadvantaged members of society.

Recording has made musical performance durable, its natural evanescence captured and preserved by technology. No longer is music's sound necessarily inseparable from the actions of the performers creating it, with a perishability once described by Adam Smith (*The Wealth of Nations*, 1776) as 'leaving behind no tangible, vendible commodity'.⁵ And social, economic and cultural change after Smith's day – with new expectations of a more leisured society for its edification and entertainment – meant that the virtuoso eventually became a social achiever, acclaimed for his skills and exploited for his marketability. This was a new situation compared with Smith's observation (1776) that being a professional performer was an essentially discreditable occupation, 'a sort of public prostitution'. Such change over so short a time underlines the advisability of examining concepts of canon, repertoire and music reception in relation to the ways in which musical performance has been marketed and distributed. Traditionally, music was listened to within some sort of social context, such as a concert or a liturgical setting. This experience generated a collective aesthetic response in groups of listeners, giving rise to a common understanding of what constituted a canon of exemplary works. But today's digital miniaturisation, and the unparalleled choice of recorded repertoire now available, puts consumers (with their own individual sensibilities and musical preferences) in complete control of what they listen to, when they listen and whether they listen to favourite moments or an entire work. Increasingly,

4 P. Poulin, 'A view of eighteenth-century musical life and training: Anton Stadler's "Musick Plan"', *Music & Letters*, 71 (1990), 215–24.

5 A. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), ed. E. Cannan, New York, Random House, 2000, p. 361.

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