

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.

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ROBIN STOWELL

 **CAMBRIDGE**
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521896115

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First published 2012

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-89611-5 Hardback

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Contents

List of illustrations ix
List of musical examples x
Notes on contributors xiii
Editors' preface xxi

PART I PERFORMANCE THROUGH HISTORY 1

1 · Performance today 3
NICHOLAS KENYON

2 · Political process, social structure and musical
performance in Europe since 1450 35
WILLIAM WEBER

3 · The evidence 63
ROBIN STOWELL

4 · The performer and the composer 105
COREY JAMASON

5 · The teaching of performance 135
NATASHA LOGES AND COLIN LAWSON

6 · Music and musical performance: histories in disjunction? 169
DAVID WRIGHT

PART II PRE-RENAISSANCE PERFORMANCE 207

7 · The Ancient World 209
ELEONORA ROCCONI

8 · Performance before c. 1430: an overview 231
JOHN HAINES

9 · Vocal performance before *c.* 1430 248

JEREMY SUMMERLY

10 · Instrumental performance before *c.* 1430 261

STEFANO MENGOZZI

11 · Case study: Guillaume de Machaut, ballade 34, 'Quant Theseus / Ne
quier veoir' 279

JOHN HAINES

PART III PERFORMANCE IN THE RENAISSANCE
(*c.* 1430–1600) 295

12 · Performance in the Renaissance: an overview 297

JON BANKS

13 · Vocal performance in the Renaissance 318

TIMOTHY J. MCGEE

14 · Instrumental performance in the Renaissance 335

KEITH POLK

15 · Case study: Seville Cathedral's music in performance,
1549–1599 353

OWEN REES

PART IV PERFORMANCE IN THE SEVENTEENTH
CENTURY 375

16 · Performance in the seventeenth century: an overview 377

TIM CARTER

17 · Vocal performance in the seventeenth century 398

RICHARD WISTREICH

18 · Instrumental performance in the seventeenth century 421

DAVID PONSFORD

19 · Case study: Monteverdi, Vespers (1610) 448

JONATHAN P. WAINWRIGHT

PART V PERFORMANCE IN THE 'LONG
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY' 471

- 20 · Performance in the 'long eighteenth century': an overview 473
SIMON McVEIGH
- 21 · Vocal performance in the 'long eighteenth century' 506
JOHN POTTER
- 22 · Instrumental performance in the 'long eighteenth century' 527
PETER WALLS
- 23 · Case study: Mozart, Symphonies in E flat major K543, G minor K550
and C major K551 552
COLIN LAWSON

PART VI PERFORMANCE IN THE NINETEENTH
CENTURY 575

- 24 · Performance in the nineteenth century: an overview 577
MICHAEL MUSGRAVE
- 25 · Vocal performance in the nineteenth century 611
WILL CRUTCHFIELD
- 26 · Instrumental performance in the nineteenth century 643
IAN PACE
- 27 · Case study: Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde* 696
ROBIN STOWELL

PART VII THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND
BEYOND 723

- 28 · Musical performance in the twentieth century and beyond: an
overview 725
STEPHEN COTTRELL
- 29 · Vocal performance in the twentieth century and beyond 752
JANE MANNING AND ANTHONY PAYNE

30 · Instrumental performance in the twentieth century and beyond 778

ROGER HEATON

31 · Case study: Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Gruppen für drei Orchester* 798

WILLIAM MIVAL

PART VIII 815

32 · The future? 817

COLIN LAWSON AND ROBIN STOWELL

Select bibliography 834

Index 894

Illustrations

- 5.1a-c. Illustrations of the façade, the concert hall and stairwell of the building Hochschule für Musik und Theater 'Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy', Leipzig. Bibliothek/Archiv, A, II. 3/1: from the prospectus *Das Königliche Konservatorium der Musik zu Leipzig*, 1900 page 155
- 8.1. Conventional view of medieval music repertoires 232
- 8.2. Revised view of medieval music repertoires 234
- 8.3. Standard medieval repertoires revised 234
- 10.1. Country scene with players of tabor and pipe, and gittern. From Lyon Municipal Library, MS 27, fol. 13r (fourteenth century) (Photo, Lyon Municipal Library, Didier Nicole) 266
- 10.2. Giovanni del Biondo, *Musical angels* (fourteenth century), showing two players of organette and fiddle (courtesy of the National Museums, Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery) 273
- 10.3. *Glorification of St Francis* (attributed to Antonio Vite, School of Giotto); detail showing a wind ensemble (two shawms and bagpipe), organistrum and psaltery (fourteenth century). Church of St Francesco, Pistoia, Italy 277
- 15.1. Medallion on the choir stand in the *coro* of Seville Cathedral, showing a group of singers 362
- 15.2. Medallion on the choir stand in the *coro* of Seville Cathedral, showing the *ministriles* 364
- 22.1. Haydn instrumental works – percentage distribution by key 538
- 22.2. Mozart instrumental music – percentage distribution by key 538
- 22.3. Chopin distribution of works by key 539

Musical examples

- 8.1. Opening of the lament for Charlemagne *page* 238
- 8.2. Opening of 'Bele Yolanz en ses chambres seoit'
(Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France,
f. fr. 20050, fol. 64v) 239
- 8.3. Prose of the Ass from the Feast of Fools 243
- 8.4. Banquet song from *Renart le nouvel* 244
- 9.1. The opening of Léonin's *Viderunt omnes* transcribed
in measured rhythm (Florence, Biblioteca
Medicea-Laurenziana, Pluteus 29.1, fol. 99) 257
- 9.2. The opening of Léonin's *Viderunt omnes*
transcribed as free rhythm (Florence, Biblioteca
Medicea-Laurenziana, Pluteus 29.1 fol. 99) 258
- 10.1. *In seculum viellatoris* (Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek,
MS. Lit. 115, fol. 63v), opening. The example is
modelled after G. A. Anderson (ed.), *Compositions
of the Bamberg Manuscript* (American Institute of
Musicology, 1977), pp. 138–9 (used by permission
of the American Institute of Musicology,
Inc., Middleton, WI) 274
- 10.2. *T'Andernaken al op den Rijn* (Trent, Castello del
Buonconsiglio, MS. 87, fol. 198v–199r), opening.
The example is modelled after *T'Andernaken: Ten
Settings in Three, Four, and Five Parts*, ed. R.
Taruskin (Coconut Grove, FL: Ogni Sorte
Editions, 1981), pp. 9–10 276
- 11.1. Machaut's ballade 34, 'Quant Theseus / Ne
quier veoir', edited from the Reina Codex
(Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, nouv.
acqu. fr. 6771, fols. 54v–55r) 288
- 15.1. Guerrero, *Duo Seraphim*, opening 373
- 18.1. Froberger, Toccata 3, bars 5–7 428
- 18.2. Froberger, Toccata 1, bars 1–3 429

-
- 18.3. Louis Couperin, opening of *Prélude à l'imitation de Mr. Froberger* 429
 - 18.4. Buxtehude, *Praeludium* in G minor (ostinato theme, fugue subjects and time signatures) 430
 - 22.1. Francesco Geminiani, *The Art of playing on the Violin* (London, 1751), Essempio VIII, section 20 546
 - 25.1a. Schumann, 'Die beiden Grenadiere' 618
 - 25.1b. Handel, *Judas Maccabeus*, 'Sound an Alarm' 618
 - 25.2a. Bellini, *La sonnambula*, 'Ah, non credea mirarti' 619
 - 25.2b. Verdi, *La traviata*, 'Pura siccome un angelo' 619
 - 25.3. Verdi, *Ermani*, 'O sommo Carlo' 621
 - 25.4a. Portugal (Portogallo), *La morte di Mitridate*, 'Teneri e cari affetti' 626
 - 25.4b. Cimarosa, *Penelope*, 'Ah, serena il mesto ciglio' 626
 - 25.5. Pacini, *Niobe, Didone*, 'Il soave e bel contento' 627
 - 25.6. Mercadante, *Andronico*, 'Soave immagine' 627
 - 25.7. De Garaudé, *Méthode de chant* 628
 - 25.8. Appoggiatura-based ornamental patterns in Bellini, *Norma*, and Verdi, *Nabucco* 628
 - 25.9. Zingarelli, *Giulietta e Romeo*, 'Sommo ciel' 629
 - 25.10a-c. Nineteenth-century final cadenzas 630
 - 25.11. Verdi, *Ermani*, 'Infelice, e tu credevi' 630
 - 25.12. Bellini, *Norma*, three fragments from the role of Pollione as altered by Giovanni Mario 632
 - 25.13. Facsimile from García the younger's *Treatise* 639
 - 25.14. Haydn, 'She never told her love' (Hob. xxvii:34) 641
 - 26.1. Beethoven, String Quartet in B flat Op. 130, opening of fourth movement 646
 - 26.2. Schubert, Symphony No. 9 in C D944, finale 647

-
- 26.3a. Schubert, String Quartet in G D887, first movement 649
 - 26.3b. Schubert, Impromptu D899 No. 2 649
 - 26.4a. Paganini, Violin Concerto No. 1 in E flat major, opening 650
 - 26.4b. Paganini, Violin Concerto No. 1 in E flat major, opening, as played 650
 - 26.5. Portamento as suggested in treatises of Habeneck and de Bériot 651
 - 26.6. Liszt, *Grande Fantaisie de Bravoure sur la Clochette de Paganini* 653
 - 26.7. Chopin, Waltz in A flat Op. 69 No. 1, execution as described by Kleczyński 654
 - 26.8. Berlioz, Overture to *King Lear*, bars 364–8 661
 - 26.9. Mendelssohn, Violin Concerto Op. 64, Allegro molto appassionato. Edition of David, with implied portamenti notated 666
 - 26.10. Schumann, Fantasy Op. 17 667
 - 26.11. Robert Schumann, *Arabeske* Op. 18 668
 - 26.12a. Liszt, Sonata in B minor, opening 673
 - 26.12b. Liszt, Sonata in B minor, towards end of first ‘movement’ 674
 - 26.12c. Liszt, Sonata in B minor, conclusion 674
 - 26.13. Liszt, *Consolation* No. 3 677
 - 26.14. César Franck, Violin Sonata, from fourth movement 679
 - 26.15. Wagner, Overture to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, bars 89–90, 97–8 681
 - 26.16. Bruckner, Symphony No. 7, Adagio. Funeral Music 684
 - 26.17. Brahms, Intermezzo Op. 119 No. 1 685
 - 26.18a. Brahms, *Ein deutsches Requiem*, opening of seventh movement, ‘Selig sind die Toten’ 686
 - 26.18b. Brahms, String Quartet in C minor Op. 51 No. 1, third movement. 686
 - 26.18c. Brahms, Violin Concerto, first movement, bars 347–52, 460–3, solo part 687
 - 26.19. Rimsky-Korsakov, *Russian Easter Overture* 691

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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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