The End of Early Music: A Period Performer's History of Music for the Twenty-First Century by Bruce Haynes
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The premise underlying Bruce Haynes’s book is that a paradigm shift in how musicians understand and interpret older Western compositions began during the 1960s and 1970s. In thirteen chapters (grouped into five parts), Haynes characterizes three “broad currents” in the performance of early music during the twentieth century as “Romantic, Modern, and Period” (p. 32; the terms are always capitalized). Against these Haynes postulates a “Rhetorical” style that was prevalent during the eighteenth century. Haynes argues, with wit and passion, that restoration of this Rhetorical style has made it possible for certain present-day performers to achieve a type of historical authenticity. But the meaning of this last term never becomes clear, and the argument is weakened by haphazard organization, as well as an impoverished sense of what history is and how it might relate to musical performance. Following the delineation of the three styles in the first part, part 2 considers the changing relationships between composers, works, and performance during the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This section analyzes popular concepts of “work” and “performance” and lays the ground for part 3 on “Anachronism and Authenticity.” Part 4 delineates aspects of Baroque performance practice that Haynes considers important for achieving Rhetorical style, and part 5 summarizes the author’s view that present-day performers of early music should adopt what he considers authentic Rhetorical approaches, freeing themselves from the continuing influence of Modern style.

Part 5 shares its title “The End of ‘Early’ Music” with the book as a whole—apart from the the quotes on early, which should not be dismissed as “scare quotes” but rather as signaling that the word here has a special meaning. But that meaning remains elusive, nor is it clear whether the double entendre in the title is intended: is the “end” of early music its demise or its purpose? “Early music” itself is never defined as a repertoire, discipline, or culture, though it is each of these at different points in the discussion. Chronologically, Haynes looks back no further than Lully, and the only compositions considered in depth are ensemble works of the late Baroque, particularly those of J. S. Bach. Haynes defines his three twentieth-century performance styles mainly by association: Romantic style with “canonism,” Modern style with “strait” playing, Period style with “rhetoric.” “Strait” playing (from straitjacket) is a play on what Richard Taruskin called “straight” style;¹ a more or less synonymous expression is “click-track Baroque,” derived

from “sewing-machine Bach.” But were there exactly three twentieth-century performance styles for early music? In what sense was eighteenth-century performance rhetorical, and is the best current early-music performance rhetorical in the same way?

Musicologists will be peeved by Haynes’s blinkered view of their discipline, which he criticizes for the absence of “whimsy and wit” in the study of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century music (p. 128). He sees historical musicology as serving only to establish “a foundation of verifiable history on which performance practice can be constructed” (p. 131). This is to equate history with a set of facts, not the critical interpretation of evidence. Scholarly readers will be equally troubled by the frequently imprecise references to earlier authors. For instance, a statement about the interpretation of Bach’s slurs is attributed to Mendelssohn; following up a vague reference to a secondary source, one discovers that Mendelssohn’s comment actually concerned Handel. This is one of an enormous number of citations, most taking the form of endnotes that comprise little more than author-date references. This system forces the reader to turn first to the endnotes, then to the bibliography—a significant inconvenience, given the large quantity of material that is quoted or paraphrased from other authors.

On the other hand, Haynes advances beyond previous authors by including seventy-two recorded illustrations, accessible as streaming audio files on the publisher’s website. Many of these “audio samples” are integral to the discussion. Thus the three twentieth-century performance styles are represented by recordings of Bach’s Second Brandenburg Concerto directed by Stokowski, Menuhin, and Harnoncourt, respectively (samples 8, 7, and 6). Technically, however, the audio clips leave something to be desired, beginning and ending abruptly, without fade-ins or -outs. Each must be reloaded every time it is heard—a problem when one is trying to compare two or more examples. Some of these samples are not what one would expect in a book on early music performance. “Declamation” is illustrated through a sermon by C. L. Franklin, father of singer Aretha Franklin (p. 171). The spontaneity that Haynes considers essential to Baroque performance is exemplified by the 1937 “improvisations” of jazz musicians Stéphane Grappelli, Eddie South, and Django Reinhardt on Bach’s “Double” Concerto (p. 149). Yet Haynes

2. Whether the latter goes back specifically to Sol Babitz, as Haynes indicates, is unclear. The expression does occur in the article by Babitz that Haynes cites (p. 57, referring to Early Music Laboratory Bulletin 11 [1974]), but it is on p. 28, not p. 8. Babitz also compared Wanda Landowska’s harpsichord playing to a “sewing machine” in a letter published in the New York Review of Books (11 March 1965).

3. Haynes evidently reached this view after his attendance at the Fifty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society in Montreal, November 1993.

does little to relate these examples to the performance of older European music. This failure extends beyond the audio samples. For instance, Haynes quotes echoes of Cicero in eighteenth-century writings—those not only by the musicians Quantz and C. P. E. Bach, but also by the actor Jean Poisson. Like the Rev. Franklin, Cicero presumably declaimed his speeches in an effective, “enflamed” manner. But what that involved—the technical means employed, how they actually sounded to their audiences—must have been as different from eighteenth-century acting and music making as the latter are from twentieth-century preaching.

Other samples, however, are essential for understanding what Haynes means by his three performance styles, which are hard to pin down even when he lists their attributes. Those of “Romantic” style include portamento, “extreme legato,” “exaggerated solemnity,” and “controlled use of vibrato” (pp. 51–52). Some of these features indeed characterize the early twentieth-century recordings of Furtwängler and Mengelberg that Haynes cites. Yet, as Teri Towe has pointed out, their tradition was only one of several inherited from the nineteenth century. Whether their style is any further than “a recent Period style recording” from achieving “what Bach had in mind” (p. 36) is essentially a matter of definition. Both Mengelberg and the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin recorded “what Bach actually wrote.” But the latter’s unornamented performance style may leave out something authentically Bachian that is present in Mengelberg’s performance, despite his anachronistic performing forces and leaden tempo.

Haynes faults English early music specialists as well as the American Joshua Rifkin for performances that adhere to “strait” style. But I hear little fundamental difference in the approved Dutch performances of Bach that Haynes juxtaposes with Rifkin’s (p. 111). A performance led by Ton Koopman reveals

5. Haynes (p. 174) cites Cicero from M. H. Abrams’s famous The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 71; the text in question reads: “ut enim nulla materies tam facilis ad exardescendum est, quae nisi admoto igni ignem concipere possit, sic nulla mens est tam ad comprehendendam vim oratoris parata, quae possit incendi, nisi ipse inflammatus ad eam et ardens accesserit” (“For just as no substance is so capable of catching fire, to produce flame without the application of flame [a spark], so no mind is so prepared to grasp the power of a speaker, to be able to burn, unless the speaker comes to that mind himself inflamed with passion”); De orat. 2.190. Carl Dahlhaus, in “‘Si vis me flere . . . ,’” Die Musikforschung 25 (1972): 51–52, pointed out, in addition, a Horatian parallel to the admonitions of Quantz and Bach: “Si vis me flere, dolendum est primum ipsi tibi” (“If you would have me weep, first you must grieve”); Ars poet., 102.


7. The Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin is represented by a sample from their 1995 recording of Bach’s “Air on the G String” (BWV 1068/2) (Harmonia Mundi HMX 2908074.77).
greater dynamic variation, but this is partly a matter of its audio engineering and larger ensemble, and its online excerpt simply plays louder than Rifkin’s. The differences between the recordings are real, but in none of Haynes’s Bach clips—not even one featuring his own playing (he has had a long career as maker and player of early oboes)—do I hear the “unpredictability or spontaneity” that he considers crucial to the Rhetorical style.

For Haynes, rhetoric is the key element that was lacking in Romantic, Modern, and early Period performance. But an index entry for “Rhetoric, defined,” takes one only to a definition of “Rhetorical music,” which is glossed, not very helpfully, as “music made when musical Rhetoric was valued and used” (p. 15). Haynes’s source for rhetorical as denominating a whole approach to music is Nikolaus Harnoncourt, whose 1982 collection of essays and talks bears the title Music as Rhetoric. But neither author gives the detailed analysis of musical texts and practices that would be necessary to demonstrate that a Baroque work, or some way of performing it, resembles actual verbal rhetoric. If a song by Machaut, Schubert, or Elliott Carter is any less rhetorical than one by Lambert or Telemann, neither Haynes nor Harnoncourt tells us how. Yet both authors imply that use of historical practices will insure that a performance of music by one of the two latter composers will be somehow rhetorical. These practices presumably include the devices of articulation and ornamentation that Haynes discusses in part 4; familiar subjects in writings on Baroque performance, these are “rhetorical” only metaphorically. Indeed, as Haynes writes, some things described by Greek and Latin names “that sound like diseases”—he mentions parrhesia, the use of unfamiliar dissonances—“turn out to be familiar Baroque ornaments, like the appoggiatura” (p. 188). This is to admit that the rhetorical aspect of such things is largely nominal.

Looming behind Haynes’s “Modern” style is Taruskin’s idea of a literalistic twentieth-century approach to performance heavily influenced by modernist composition, especially Stravinskian neo-Classicism. But Haynes also delineates a trend toward “anti-Modernism” in recent performances (p. 61); for


9. Haynes does cite (p. 167) a work that includes just such an analysis: Patricia M. Ranum, The Harmonic Orator: The Phrasing and Rhetoric of the Melody in French Baroque Airs (N.p.: Pendragon, 2001). Harnoncourt mentions English “funerals” and French tombeaux of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as instrumental genres modeled on a specific sort of rhetorical exercise, here the funeral oration (Grabrede); the idea was subsequently fleshed out in Clemens Goldberg, Stilisierung als kunstvermittelnder Prozeß: Die französischen Tombeau-Stücke im 17. Jahrhundert (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1987).

Haynes, this bears out the familiar idea that Baroque performance had something in common with jazz. Parallels between the two styles, however, lie at a high level of abstraction. It is easy to imagine that Baroque musicians sometimes performed with the exuberance heard in the Grappelli-South recording. But the latter reduces Bach’s complex phrasing and harmony to a recurring four-bar pattern, effectively converting a fugal ritornello form into a chaconne. This is less startling than it might have been seventy years ago, now that it has become commonplace for early-music performers to improvise actual chaconnes. But such improvisation must be remote from what one heard in eighteenth-century performances of music by Bach, or even Telemann.

It is probably no coincidence that twentieth-century composers were exploring improvisation at the same time that it became interesting to performers of early music. Yet Carter, explaining his decision not to incorporate improvisation into his own compositions, reported: “I’ve always had the impression of improvisation of the most rewarding kind when good performers take the trouble to play music that is carefully written out as if they were ‘thinking it up’ themselves while they played it.” Haynes admits as much, observing that “the best performers of written music give the illusion that they are improvising (since to read mechanically is the kiss of death)” (p. 209). For Haynes, then, what really matters is that one not perform mechanically—“like a trained bird,” as C. P. E. Bach famously put it.

For Haynes, Modern and early Period performance indeed was mechanical, a failing that he traces to nineteenth-century “canonism” and the tyranny of the conductor. Both evils are exaggerated, however. Haynes asserts that “seventeenth- and eighteenth-century music was not meant to be heard repeatedly” (p. 84). Yet Frescobaldi’s keyboard works and Corelli’s violin sonatas were reprinted and copied into manuscripts for more than a century after the first publication of each; were they any less canonic than were Beethoven symphonies and certain Schubert songs for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? In some repertories, musicians surely did become tools of a conductor who “makes the players aware of ‘the hidden intentions of the composer’”—as the German cantor Johann Samuel Petri put it already in the

11. Haynes identifies his audio sample no. 52 as the “swing version,” but it is actually a portion of the “Improvisation sur le Premiere [sic] Mouvement du Concerto en ré mineur de Jean-Sébastien Bach” recorded two days later; for a transcription, see Benjamin Givan, “The South–Grappelli Recordings of the Bach Double Violin Concerto,” Popular Music and Society 29 (2006): 341–51. According to Givan, the “Swing Interpretation,” released on the opposite side of the same ten-inch disk, had disappointed the producer for the lack of improvisation involved; at this writing it is accessible at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQZw3nema0Q (consulted 12 December 2009).


late eighteenth century, in a phrase quoted by Haynes.14 Even more striking, indeed chilling, is Petri’s statement in the previous sentence that each musician in an ensemble “plays like the mechanism in a clock, that is, like a machine.”15 Evidently, at the time when mechanical musical instruments were an exciting new technology, and playing in unison alongside professionals was probably a thrill for the amateurs who frequently participated in late eighteenth-century orchestras, being part of a clockwork mechanism was something a musician might aspire to. But doing so was hardly new; disciplined playing by large ensembles had been made famous by Lully’s band a century earlier, and by Petri’s time it had spread to places like Dresden and Mannheim.

Although the nineteenth century doubtless did see changes in the relationship between the individual musician and the larger ensemble, the idea of Baroque music making as always involving active invention or spontaneity by performers is problematical. Haynes exaggerates in his assertion that “composing through performance”—the phrase is Lydia Goehr’s16—was “the dominant mode of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century music, improvisatory and informal” (p. 104). Embellishment, figured bass realization, and the like might have seemed elements of composition or invention to a twentieth-century observer, since they were less familiar than nineteenth-century practices that had come to be viewed as aspects of interpretation. But to realize a figured bass in one of several possible ways is no less “interpretive” (and no more “compositional”) than adjusting dynamic levels or phrasing; each is part of the re-creation of a musical text within its respective tradition.

Hence it will not do to exaggerate differences between eighteenth- and twentieth-century notation in Western music. Haynes—using terminology that he seems to attribute to Nikolaus Harnoncourt, but which actually comes from Charles Seeger—describes musical notation in today’s mainstream classical world as “prescriptive,” that of Rhetorical music as “descriptive” (p. 103).17

14. “Auf die etwas künstlicher versteckten Absichten des Komponisten aber soll der Direktor bey der Probe die Musiker aufmerksam machen, damit sie bald entdekken können.” Johann Samuel Petri, Anleitung zur praktischen Musik, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1782; repr., Munich: Katzbichler, 1999), 181; quoted (p. 100) from John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw, The Birth of the Orchestra: History of an Institution, 1650–1815 (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 386. Haynes, following Spitzer and Zaslaw, gives the word “composer” in the plural, not the singular; he neglects to translate the adjective künstlicher, which could mean “more artistic” but could also mean “more artful”—referring to things that are merely clever, or perhaps notation that contains tricky rhythms or unfamiliar performance indications.

15. “Außerdem spielt der Musiker wie die Welle in der Uhr, das heißt, wie eine Maschine.” Petri, Anleitung zur praktischen Musik, 181.


17. Haynes’s source is Charles Seeger, “Prescriptive and Descriptive Music-Writing,” Musical Quarterly 44 (1958): 184–95. Harnoncourt, Baroque Music Today, 28–29, distinguishes “performance-notation” from “work-notation,” the first corresponding roughly to what Seeger might have termed the “prescriptive” notation of the present-day classical musician, the second to the “descriptive” notation of older Western music.
But Seeger approached the topic at a higher level of abstraction than Haynes or Harmoncourt. Seeger’s point was that nearly all European musical notation has been prescriptive, in the sense of telling the musician what to do (sing, play, etc.), rather than describing the sounds actually produced. Baroque notation cannot be interpreted without, as Seeger put it, “knowledge of the oral (or, better, aural) tradition associated with it.” But the same is true of Brahms’s notation or, for that matter, the graphic scores that Cage and others were producing just as Seeger was making his argument for the scientific transcription of music of all cultures. Seeger pleaded for graphic notation that plotted pitch and other acoustic parameters against time, yet no such system can specify with precision such parameters as the use of the damper pedal or the perceived dynamic level of a particular note produced in a given hall.

That musical notation varies in its degree of completeness or prescriptiveness is uncontroversial. But it does not follow that “trying to reproduce the individual composer’s personal intentions is a Romantic idea. Baroque composers did not expect anyone to do that” (p. 114, original emphasis). What else could Mattheson have meant when he concluded his most famous book with the observation that one who has not heard a composer performing his own work may fail to understand it?\(^\text{18}\) Haynes supposes that the intentions of Mattheson and his contemporaries were limited to aspects of general style, unlike those of later musicians. But the distinction is murky, and Mattheson’s comment echoes a much older one by the Duchess of Montbéliard—Froberger’s pupil and last patron—to the effect that only one who had heard the composer play it could satisfactorily reproduce his Méditation sur ma mort future.\(^\text{19}\) How does this differ from the allegedly Romantic idea that the job of the performer is to “reproduce the individual composer’s personal intentions,” at least if by intention is meant how the composer performed a work (or wished it performed)? Of course, Baroque works directed by the composer, including Bach’s church pieces and Handel’s operas, could change from one performance to the next. But this means only that intention might vary from performance to performance, or, to put it another way, that certain works were defined rather loosely (they were “open,” in late twentieth-century parlance). Is this situation special to Baroque music, or is it inevitable, to some degree, in any notated composition? I fear that Haynes has missed the point of Goehr and others whom he cites: it is not actual Romantic music that somehow embodied fixed intentions, but rather it was a uniquely Romantic idea, characteristic of the idealizing or essentializing strand in nineteenth- and


early twentieth-century musical thought, that there could be such a thing as a score that does this.

The issue of works and their notation shades into the question of authenticity, which ultimately concerns the identity of what is being performed. Haynes is not embarrassed to use the term authentic to describe musical performances, but what he means by it is elusive. He considers it wrong to suppose that “Period [sic] musicking is meant to clone an actual concert that once took place” (p. 144). Yet some of the most illuminating performances of early music have tried to replicate particular parameters, especially the performing forces, of specific performances or venues: Handel’s 1754 Messiah at the Foundling Hospital (recorded by Christopher Hogwood in 1980), Bach’s 1727 St. Matthew Passion and 1733 Missa (recorded by Paul McCreesh in 2003 and Rifkin in 1981–82, respectively). Of course these were no more or less authentic than those reenactments of Civil War battles that so engage military-history buffs; some things doubtless accorded with what actually happened, others not.

Haynes argues that “Period instruments . . . have little direct effect on a player’s stylistic approach to the music” (p. 153, original emphasis). But how does one distinguish a “direct” from an indirect effect? In fact Haynes regards use of historical instruments as crucial for understanding early music, entitling his chapter 9 “The Medium Is the Message.” As agreeable as it may be to assert that “authenticity is not a product of the instrument being played, but of the musician’s sense of style” (p. 153), this becomes a tautology if authenticity is considered, as Haynes does here, an attribute of performance style. In fact it is hard to see how Rhetorical performing style could have been rediscovered without, among other things, good replicas of Baroque oboes. On this subject, incidentally, Haynes regards Charles Rosen as arguing “against old instruments” (p. 156). In fact, Rosen discovers a fundamental value in their use, pointing to the questions that early music raises about certain assumptions underlying mainstream performance: that there are no uncertainties about how works have been meant to sound, that it makes sense to perform the entire repertory using the same instruments.

20. McCreesh’s apparently was not the first “OVPP” (one-voice-per-part) recording of the St. Matthew Passion, as Haynes claims (p. 131); various websites (e.g., http://americanbach.org) list Jeffrey Thomas’s live performance, recorded during the 1996 Berkeley Early Music Festival, as having been released in 2000 on the Koch International label. Whether the Kyrie and Gloria of the “B-Minor Mass” were actually performed at Dresden in 1733 is uncertain; the Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei, also recorded by Rifkin, were later additions to the work, which Bach never performed integrally.

Elsewhere Haynes makes authenticity an attribute not of performance but of performer, as in the observation: “Authenticity seems to be a statement of intent” (p. 10). Presumably, then, in calling his performances authentic, Haynes expresses his own intent to make them “historically accurate.” This is to return to the problem of the book’s title, to what Haynes means by history. He quotes Collingwood’s famous definition of historical thinking as “interpreting all the available evidence with the maximum degree of critical skill” (p. 226). Yet Haynes concludes on the same page that “our ultimate concern is trying to approach historical performing” (original emphasis). This is to suppose that the truth is out there, somewhere, in the form of an unknowable but authentic performance of every work. But this is precisely the sort of thing that Collingwood says historical thinking is not.

Doubtless many, perhaps most classical musicians—not just “early” ones—take inspiration from the fantasy of recreating a lost original. Many listeners probably think along similar lines, even if the more careful authors of program notes and preconcert lectures avoid encouraging it. The fantasy is harmless so long as there is no confusion between an imaginative artistic pursuit and the actual doing of history. But Haynes’s essentialist notion of authenticity as an ideal for early music introduces precisely that confusion. It also explains why his discussion of authenticity leads down a tangent to an analog of Period performance that he calls “Period composition” (p. 210). By this Haynes means composing in historical styles, understanding the latter as fixed essences, ways of writing that a present-day musician can adopt unproblematically. But whereas he finds “mid-eighteenth-century Berlin style and later German styles” (p. 213) in the purported compositions of one Giovanni Paolo Simonetti—actually by Winifred Michel—I sense here the same “stylistic anomalies” that have been found in Michel’s reconstruction of a fragmentary work by Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. Compositional styles in this sense are the analytical constructions of music historians, just as performance styles and styles of improvised embellishment are the inventions of musicians—no matter how historically informed.

In his concluding pages, Haynes writes of Period performance as a “perpetual revolution,” borrowing a phrase used by Joshua Rifkin. For Rifkin, however, the expression was not merely a “cheerful term” (p. 221) for historically


inspired performance. Rifkin continued: “In this post-modern era, we are
tired of perpetual revolution,” adding that revolution “really has to be the
motor of the exercise if the exercise is to have any meaning.”24 That is to say
that early music should involve a constant overturning of ideas—including
one’s own—about how to perform particular compositions. Haynes fails to
convey the struggle that “revolution” implies in this context; the eggshells
that are broken are strongly held convictions that must be cast aside as one
discovers that fundamental facts, such as the presumed choral nature of Bach’s
vocal works, have become falsified. Mere “changing taste” (p. 221) hardly
constitutes a revolution, which involves rather the type of paradigm shift that
leads one generation to value old performance styles where another disre-
garded them, or where recognition that there were old performance styles dif-
f erent from those of today leads to a contextualized understanding of the style
in which one was brought up.

Peter Walls has considered many of these same issues in another recent
book.25 Unlike Haynes, he makes no claims for the emergence of a new, au-
thentic style of performance during the last few decades, nor does he single
out early music as a site for developments in performance style, discussing
nineteenth- and even twentieth-century compositions as well. This does not
mean that Haynes’s hypothesis is wrong. But whether the advent of so-called
authentic performance involved something substantively new, even revolu-
tionary, in the way musicians and listeners understand music has become a
historical question. It could be settled only by historical research and interpre-
tation, by sifting and weighing evidence that would include not only recorded
performances but concert and record reviews, syllabi for conservatory and
university courses, and testimony from informants who participated in the
movement (or at least thought they were doing so).

Whatever its limitations as music history, Haynes’s book is valuable as testi-
mony for the views of one such participant. It will be useful to students of his-
torical performance practice and instructors of courses on that topic, not only
for its extensive quotations and audio samples but for its lively, provocative
style. Despite the reservations expressed above, this year I am using Haynes—
alongside Walls—in my own teaching.

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and Reception: An Examination of the B Minor Mass on Record” (PhD diss., King’s College,
Cambridge, 2005; online at http://edocs.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/volltexte/2005/3077/pdf/
GolombUri.pdf), 128, who in turn cites “Rifkin, in interview with the author, November 2002.”
Golomb includes this under the chapter subhead “The ideal of perpetual revolution.”

25. Peter Walls, History, Imagination, and the Performance of Music (Woodbridge, UK, and