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‘The authenticity movement can become a positivistic purgatory, literalistic and dehumanizing’

Richard Taruskin

I was struck, recently, to read what Sylvia Townsend Warner told Vaughan Williams when he asked her, ‘a little sternly’, why she had given up composing for a literary career. ‘I didn’t do it authentically enough,’ she explained, ‘whereas when I turned to writing I never had a doubt as to what I meant to say.’ Here, though very casually put, was an exigent conception of authenticity indeed—one with a long and illustrious history, but one that is nevertheless very much with us still in many areas of life. Woody Allen, for example, in one of his covertly moralizing comedies, observes (in character) that when one is confronting death, one’s life all at once assumes an authenticity it might have lacked before. His obvious meaning—that one’s values and priorities take on a previously unacknowledged and compelling clarity—strikes a responsive chord in each of us.

Authenticity, in this sense, is more than just saying what you mean. That is mere sincerity, what Stravinsky called ‘a *sine qua non* that at the same time guarantees nothing’. It carries little or no moral weight. In fact, to acknowledge someone’s sincerity is generally a patronizing prelude to dismissal. Authenticity, on the other hand, is knowing what you mean and whence comes that knowledge. And more than that, even, authenticity is knowing what you are, and acting in accordance with that knowledge. It is having what Rousseau called a ‘sentiment of being’ that is independent of the values, opinions and demands of others.

But nowadays, in the area of musical performance, it sometimes seems as if authenticity, as word and as concept, had been stood on its head. In a recent favourable review of an early music performance, a critic for the *New York Times* who prides himself on his philosophical training praised the performers’ ‘conviction’, noting that because of it their performances were ‘more than just authentic’, they were ‘passionate contemporary statements’. In other words, by transcending authenticity they had achieved authenticity. Elsewhere

in the review he made reference to what he called the ‘“authenticity” movement’, implying by the use of quotes a kind of conformism that is quite contrary to anything Rousseau (or even Woody Allen) could have had in mind. Clearly, an authenticity that needs ironical quotation marks, one that arises from the observance of pieties and unreflective adherence to fashion, is no authenticity. The word needs either to be rescued from its current purveyors or to be dropped by those who would aspire to the values it properly signifies. A thicket of misperceptions has grown up around it as applied to musical performance, obstructing the view not only of the public and its appointed spokesmen, but of many practitioners, too. Some fresh perspectives, partly drawn from other fields, may help to clear away some of the underbrush.

Let us, to begin with, recognize that the word ‘authentic’ is used in many areas other than moral philosophy, and in some perfectly legitimate senses that are quite unrelated to those outlined above. With reference to works of art, the most common meaning is simply ‘genuine’, that is, traceable to a stipulated origin. The first task that confronts the discoverer of a ‘new’ painting by an old master, after all, is that of authentication. It must be ascertained that the painting is not by a lesser master, let alone a forger. And one important reason why this must be done, and hence why art ‘connoisseurship’ is such an exacting and well-remunerated skill, is obvious. Of course, huge sums are not usually involved in authentications made in the field of music (except in the borderline case of violins): when a ‘new’ Mozart symphony was discovered in Denmark no one’s fortune was made. Nor was anyone impoverished when Mozart’s ‘37th Symphony’ was exposed as unauthentic apart from its slow introduction. And yet the material value placed on authorship in Western society is such that the cultural value of a work of art, as much

as its pecuniary value, can be crucially affected by it. Just try, for example, to get a record company to issue a collection of anonymi! And whatever happened to 'Josquin's' *Missa 'Dapacem'* since Edgar Sparks gave it to Bauldeweyn? It used to be regarded as one of the exemplary Netherlands masses, and, in particular, as a paradigm of Josquin's mature style. It has, in effect, become a lesser work since it was attributed to a lesser man. In a recent study in the realm of musical sociology, John Spitzer has shown how the critical assessments of Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante* in E flat K297b have varied depending on received opinion as to its authenticity. Knowledge of authorship, it would seem, relieves a critic of the need to make his own evaluation. In extreme cases it paralyses critical evaluation altogether. We have here a small but pernicious paradox involving two meanings of authenticity. The establishment of a work as authentic can take the place of authentic critical judgement of it.

Nor is the value we attach to this kind of authenticity solely material. When the Renaissance discovered the classics, the precious ancient heritage was immediately seen to have been transmitted through a haze of imperfect documents. So textual criticism, the art or science (opinions differ) of establishing authentic texts, was born. Sophisticated techniques have been developed over centuries, and are still being developed, to rid texts of errors and accretions, and these have been well codified and taught to generations of scholars, first in classics, then in biblical studies, and latterly in the realm of modern literature. Only in the last 150 years or so have modern techniques of textual criticism been applied to musical texts: first to Gregorian chant by the monks of Solesmes, then to medieval and Renaissance polyphony, and now to everything—Rossini's operas, Gilbert and Sullivan, Scott Joplin, Bob Dylan.

Criticism presupposes a critic, and a critic is one who judges and chooses. But we often encounter a curious reluctance on the part of textual editors to exercise that function. Instead there has been a quixotic quest for mechanistically infallible techniques. The ostensible motive is to eliminate human error, but the underlying motive is the wish to eliminate the responsibility of applying judgement. In place of a multitude of small arbitrary decisions, many textual critics prefer to make a few big arbitrary decisions they then call 'laws': for example, that printed editions are in principle more trustworthy than manuscripts, or that manuscripts are in principle more trustworthy than printed editions. Or, to cite one classic debate, that 'sincere' sources are

more trustworthy than 'interpolated' ones, however otherwise corrupt they may be. Lately there has been a tendency (and this has been especially true of musicologists) to renounce choice among available variants altogether, even though this perverts the whole aim of textual criticism as originally conceived. Since the Renaissance, the aim of a critical edition has always been precisely to be critical: that is, to subject all sources to scrutiny and to arrive at a text that is more correct (i.e. more authentic) than any extant source. But as that requires the courage of commitment and choice, and the multifarious exercise of personal judgement, editors today more typically aim lower: they fasten on a single extant source (arriving at their choice by methods that are not always very critical) and elevate it to the status of authority. The assumption seems to be that the errors or accretions of old are preferable to the errors

Modern performers seem to regard their performances as texts rather than acts.

and accretions of today: let us grant them authority and thus be spared the risk of making our own mistakes. A spurious 'authenticity', this, further reflected in the current fashion of editing and publishing sources rather than works; of issuing transcriptions and even recordings of individual chansonniers and codices, tacitly raising what are, after all, mere redactions to the status of authentic texts.

Many, if not most, of us who concern ourselves with 'authentic' interpretation of music approach musical performance with the attitudes of textual critics, and fail to make the fundamental distinction between music as tones-in-motion and music as notes-on-page. This may be simply because we are, on the whole, textual critics by trade, not performers. How else explain the strange case of the Rossini expert who informs us that 'an Italian opera in the first half of the nineteenth century . . . was treated as a collection of individual units that could be rearranged, substituted or omitted depending on local conditions of performance, local taste or, on many occasions, whim' and then excoriates the conductor of a revival of one such opera for treating it precisely as he described, for the reason that the version thus arrived at did not conform to any that could be documented from Rossini's own lifetime and therefore lacked 'authenticity'? How Rossini, of all composers, would laugh at the zeal with which the sanctity of his 'intentions' is defended!



Vera Stravinsky



Central Press Photos



Peters

1 (left to right) Woody Allen, Igor Stravinsky, T. S. Eliot, Milton Babbitt: varieties of authenticity

Sometimes a scholar who engages professionally in textual criticism and authentication also performs, and may bring his scholarly rectitude excessively to bear on his attitude towards performance. This, at least, is how I choose to understand the categorical assertion made recently in print by a well-known performing scholar that all performers labour under 'an absolute injunction to try to find out all that can be known about the performance traditions and the sound-world of any piece that is to be performed, and to try to duplicate these as faithfully as possible'. Without labouring the point that literally to do so would spell the immediate end of the early music concert as we know it, and probably of the early music boom as well, it must be obvious that to invoke absolute injunctions in a field so hedged around and booby-trapped with variables of all kinds as musical performance (or textual criticism, for that matter) can only represent once more that eagerness we have already noted to evade the responsibility of judgement and choice. Why is one never told to duplicate those traditions and that sound-world 'as faithfully as one sees fit'? For that, after all, is what we do. The line we draw between our idea of the historical realities and our present-day performance practices is never determined solely by feasibility. There is always an element of choice and taste involved; but that is often, indeed usually, left unmentioned or even hidden behind a smokescreen of musicological rationalization, in the name of 'authenticity'.

There are, conversely, performers who sometimes find themselves cast willy-nilly in the role of textual critics. One excellent gambist, who recently brought out a lavish edition of the first book of viol pieces by Marais, performed a really first-class, indeed Herculean job of textual collation in ascertaining what he described as the 'terminal state' of Marais' intentions with

regard to the secondary aspects of the text: bowing, ornamentation, fingering etc. But is not the term misleading? If the second printing (1689) of the book shows that in the three years since the first printing Marais' way of playing the pieces had changed, why should we not assume that another three years later there were yet more changes in his performances, and so on to the end of his life? To call the edition of 1689 'terminal' is to impute the attitudes of a 20th-century textual critic to an 18th-century performing musician. It changes what the editor's own research has shown to have been a descriptive notation of the composer's own fluid performance practice into a prescriptive one, by implication binding and setting limits on performers today.

One more pertinent example of this need to establish the Urtext comes to mind from my own performing experience. Recording some 15th-century chansons under the direction of a scholar-performer with exacting standards of textual authenticity, my instrumentalist colleagues and I ornamented the cadences in a manner derived from variations observed in the sources transmitting this repertory. The director, who had made his own transcriptions from the sources he preferred, insisted that we refrain from tampering with them. The ensuing quarrel was resolved by a compromise: the director made a collation of all the sources for the pieces we were to record, and supplied us with embellishments drawn from alternative sources for the passages we wished to decorate. In this way he could be satisfied that our ornaments were 'authentic'. From that moment, I should say, date my doubts about the way musical scholars understand the nature of authenticity.

Since then I have continued to be dismayed at the extent to which it is the textual critic's, rather than the moral philosopher's, definition of authenticity that has

set the tone for our movement, that is, the definition that equates it with mere freedom from error or anachronism. Modern performers seem to regard their performances as texts rather than acts, and to prepare for them with the same goal as present-day textual editors: to clear away accretions. Not that this is not a laudable and necessary step; but what is an ultimate step for an editor should be only a first step for a performer, as the very temporal relationship between the functions of editing and performing already suggests. Once the accretions have been removed, what is to take their place? All too often the answer is: nothing. All too often the sound of a modern 'authentic' performance of old music presents the aural equivalent of an Urtext score: the notes and rests are presented with complete accuracy and an equally complete neutrality (and this seems to be most characteristic—dare I say it?—of English performances). Nothing is allowed to intrude into the performance that cannot be 'authenticated'. And this means nothing can be allowed that will give the performance, in the sense in which we first defined the word, the authenticity of conviction. For the first thing that must go in a critical edition, as in the kind of 'authentic' performance I am describing, is any sense of the editor's or performer's own presence; any sentiment, as Rousseau would have said, of his being.

We seem to have paid a heavy price indeed for the literacy that sets Western musical culture so much apart and makes its past available in the first place, if the text must be so venerated. Is the text only an exacting responsibility? And if so, to what or whom is the responsibility due? Can the text not be an opportunity—for the exercise of imagination, the communication of delight, even the sharing of emotion? Or does that necessarily violate it in some way? Can there be no reconciliation between the two authenticities, that is, the authenticity of the object performed and the authenticity of the subject performing? And is a musical performance to be regarded as an 'object' at all?

This is a complex and daunting set of questions. And needless to say, the situation that gives rise to them is not so simply determined as I seem to have made out. In another essay, 'On Letting the Music Speak for Itself', published in 1982 in the *Journal of Musicology*, I attempted to set the authenticity movement within a broader context of modernist objectivity and impersonalism. Some thought my thesis harsh and pessimistic, but for real pessimism we might turn to Lionel Trilling's beautiful and disquieting set of lectures, *Sincerity and*

Authenticity, a book with many insights to offer any musician in this field. For Trilling, authenticity is 'a word of ominous import... part of the moral slang of our day, [which] points to the peculiar nature of our fallen condition, our anxiety over the credibility of existence and of individual existences'. What started as the first impulse towards Romantic egoism—Rousseau's happily self-validating sentiment of being—has become a stick we use (with considerable assistance from Freud and the existentialists) to beat our psyches into submission. The artist today is in a tough predicament. He is heir to what Trilling calls 'two centuries of aesthetic theory and artistic practice which have been less and less willing to take account of the habitual preferences of the audience'—and virtually all important artistic movements since Romanticism (including, of course, our authenticity movement) have shared in this con-

Our historical outlook is totally relativistic. Every age is regarded as its perfect embodiment.

tempt for the public as arbiter of taste, whatever their differences may otherwise have been—and yet he no longer has the cast-iron Romantic stomach it takes to proclaim that (in Trilling's words) 'his reference is to himself only'. For, as any popular cultural historian will tell you, the Romantic sense of self seems irrevocably lost to modern man. So instead he appeals (we appeal) 'to some transcendent power which—or who—has decreed his enterprise and alone is worthy to judge it'. We are back, in other words, to a sort of pre-Renaissance abjectness of spirit in which the authenticating function once exercised by religion with regard to the creations of man has been arrogated to impersonal secular gods.

What—or who—are they? Surely the most exigent has been the sense of history, a god whose manifestations have been extremely various. So much of what has happened since the 19th century has been motivated, or at least justified, by appeal to 'historical inevitability', and this applies to the arts no less than to anything else. Schoenberg tended to explain what he had done in terms practically borrowed from Hegel, casting himself in the role of reluctant 'world-historical individual' compelled to satisfy the demands of history. But at the opposite pole, Stravinsky, too, justified himself in terms not dissimilar. His neo-classicism was a *reprise de contact* with the healthy historical mainstream after the

unfortunate neurotic vagaries of Romanticism. There is scarcely an artist at work today who has not the kind of precise consciousness of his place in history described by T. S. Eliot in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', and a heavy attendant sense of responsibility to that place, and this applies as well to radicals as to conservatives. Even performers tend to see themselves and to be seen in historical terms. The more intellectual critics of today like to describe the performances they review as part of the history of the music performed. History is something 'bigger than both of us'—creator (or performer) and audience—and therefore not to be fought. The past has never been so much with us, whatever our relationship or attitude to 'musicology'.

And never have we judged it less. Our historical outlook is totally relativistic. Every age is regarded, Spinoza-fashion, as its own perfect embodiment. We are trained not to look for teleologies, and especially not to regard our own age as any kind of summit. How smugly naïve Burney and Hawkins look to us now (to say nothing of Parry or Wooldridge). We all take our bearings from the German historicists who sought to discover and empathetically comprehend the historical 'Ding an sich'. We are enjoined to call no composer 'transitional', nor any period 'pre' or 'post'. Haydn's symphonies are not more 'advanced' than Stamitz's, nor Bach's fugues more advanced than Böhm's. And for some of us, it seems, they are no more valuable. We are taught, in short, not to discriminate, not to interpolate our own judgement, if we are to have an 'authentic' sense of the past. It is the same wish to apprehend the past directly and without the distorting lens of modern values that leads us to the old instruments and old performance practices we prize so highly.

But it is nonetheless an error to assume that the self-evident heuristic value of this approach translates *ipso facto* into a self-evident aesthetic value. Old instruments and old performance practices are in themselves of no aesthetic value. The claim of self-evidence for the value of old instruments, like the claim of self-evidence for the virtue of adhering to a composer's 'intentions', is really nothing but a mystique, and more often than one can tell, that is the only justification offered. Consequently, though he is happily less in evidence than before, the naked emperor still parades through halls where 'authentic' performances are heard.

To understand this presumed self-evidence, we must look to another modern god to which artists have sacrificed their egos in the name of authenticity: the autonomous work of art. 'New criticism' crystallized in



2 *The Chorus*: engraving (1734) by William Hogarth (1697–1764) depicting a performance of Willem De Fesch's oratorio *Judith*

literary studies half a century ago, and after a few decades of hegemony it was challenged and demoted from its position of pre-eminence. Undaunted, it brushed itself off and went to music, where, under the rubrics 'theory' and 'analysis', it reigns supreme. This profoundly modernist viewpoint decrees that the work of art is not to be described or valued for its effects (e.g. on an audience) or its human interest (e.g. with respect to its creator), but strictly on its own formal, quasi-mechanistic or quasi-organic terms. And further, that all of the arts aspire to the purity of their respective media. In music, whose 'absoluteness' as a medium has always been the envy of the other arts (at least in the modernist view), we can observe best the translation, once again, of what started out as a heuristic principle into an aesthetic one. Moreover, there is a noticeable split among musical autonomists between those who regard the absolute 'meaning' of a work of art as a matter of abstract internal relationships, and those who would limit the meaning (or rather, perhaps, the essence) quite simply and stringently to the physical reality, that is, to the sounds themselves. The split is perhaps most evident in the realm of composition (the Babbitts on the one hand and the Cages on the other). But it profoundly affects performance values as well.

The 'relationist' viewpoint is well exemplified by the once so fashionable performances of, say, Bach on the Moog synthesizer. We may look back on this fad as a mere commercial venture or a bastard child of pop culture, but in its short-lived heyday it was seen quite otherwise by many. Walter Carlos, its driving force, was an electronic composer with a serious approach, whose motives in recomposing Bach for the synthesizer were as pure (at the outset, anyway) as Milton Babbitt's in composing directly for that instrument: to achieve the utter impersonality and freedom from 'human' intrusion their view of music as autonomous structure demanded. And the early 'Switched-on Bach' records were greeted enthusiastically by Glenn Gould, whose unconventional pianism (as unrelated to normal piano technique in his performances of Bach as it was to that of 'historical' instruments) was similarly motivated: to strip away the veneer of medium and reveal the message.

The claim of self-evidence for the value of old instruments is really nothing but a mystique.

Well, that approach has given way to the even more stringently modernist one that the medium is the message, a position that owes everything to the spirit of positivism, that rosy-eyed philosophy which holds, as one writer has put it, 'that the world is reflected with perfect literalness in the will-less mind of the observer'. The relationship between positivist thinking and musical interpretation cannot be better summarized than in the words of the hermeneuticist E. D. Hirsch, whose *Aims of Interpretation* is one of the most stimulating books anyone interested in current interpretative issues (in any medium) could read. 'Under positivism', writes Hirsch:

the mystical distinction between the letter and the spirit is repudiated. The interpreter should ignore the ghost in the verbal machine and simply explain how the verbal machine actually functions. If the rules and canons are made precise, and if the tools of linguistic analysis are sharpened and refined, the problems of interpretation will be resolved into operational procedures . . . The spirit killeth, but the letter giveth life. Hence, for positivism, meaning is an epiphenomenon, a secondary quality of linguistic forms themselves. Positivism assumes a congruence of the signified with the signifier; of that which is represented with the vehicle of its representation. Thence comes the doctrine that style is itself part of the meaning it represents . . . Within its context, a

particular style requires a particular meaning. The letter compelleth the spirit.

Hirsch is talking about literary hermeneutics; but *mutatis mutandis* his description fits the authenticity movement like a glove. We can begin to understand what seemed the unaccountably pugnacious assertion set forth in these very pages a few years ago by an excellent fortepianist in no need whatever of special pleading: 'Perhaps it is wrong to put the instrument before the artist, but I have begun to feel that it must be done.' For if what is represented is congruent with the vehicle of its representation, then the 'right instrument', yielding the 'right sound', holds an automatic key to the music, while the difference between one artist and another is but an ephemeral one between two personalities. And the difference between their interpretations is a mere 'epiphenomenon' compared with the essential matter of the actual sound of the instrument. Hirsch's brilliant encapsulation of the positivist promise, 'the problems of interpretation will be resolved into operational procedures', encapsulates one of the chief claims—perhaps the major claim—of the authenticity movement as well. The instrument compelleth the music.

Sometimes the assumption that the sense of the music is identical with the sound of the medium can go to bemusing lengths, and not only in early music, though the attitude is obviously most pervasive there. In reviewing a recent New York concert at which a new work by Milton Babbitt was played on a new Bösendorfer grand, one critic (a well-known enthusiast of period pianos) remarked that at last he was hearing a piano piece as it was meant to be heard, whereas even performances of Brahms or Debussy on such an instrument involved some degree of distorting 'transcription'. Now if I know Babbitt, that piece, insofar as it was conceived for any piano at all, was conceived in terms of some battered old upright in his Princeton office. The equation of sound and sense is by no means the self-evident proposition positivists think it to be, except maybe in the case of orchestral pieces by Rimsky-Korsakov or Respighi. Sometimes one wants to exclaim with Charles Ives, 'My God, what has sound got to do with music!'

Anyone who can appreciate what Ives meant will understand what sometimes depresses me about the authenticity movement. When followed unreflectively it can become a positivistic purgatory, literalistic and dehumanizing, a thing of taboos and contingencies



3 *A Choral Band*: pen and ink drawing by John Hamilton Mortimer (1741–1799) (private collection)

instead of the liberating expansion of horizons and opportunities it could be and was meant to be. At its worst, authenticity is just another name for purism. Trilling caught well the special oxymoronic irony that is implied by the very term 'authenticity movement' (though the term is ours, not his): 'The concerted effort of a culture or of a segment of a culture to achieve authenticity generates its own conventions, its generalities, its commonplaces, its maxims, what Sartre, taking the word from Heidegger, calls the "gabble".' He went on to note drily that Sartre himself contributed more to the gabble than practically anyone else. But that was not necessarily Sartre's fault. Gabble is the creation of followers, not leaders. The gabble that now surrounds the concept of authenticity in musical performance is not to be laid at the door of the movement's inspirers, but rather at the door of those

who have heard the sounds but not the music. And it is only in the nature of things that as the movement gathers momentum the gabble will increase, for even as the authenticity movement has begun to achieve the technical proficiency that is at last gaining it credibility and acceptance in the music world at large, it is unfortunately taking on some of the less attractive characteristics of that world. We now have our own star system, our personality cults and fan magazines, our hype machines and our beautiful people. And above all one encounters self-congratulation and the heaping of scorn upon the mainstream artists from whom we still have many lessons—and some of the most basic ones, at that—to learn. What entitles us to our airs of moral superiority? Our commitment to authenticity? Not if our authenticity is as spurious as I have come to believe, in many ways, it is.

It seems to me that the special opportunity, and the special task, of a movement in musical interpretation that aspires to authenticity is to foster an approach to performance that is founded to an unprecedented degree on personal conviction and on individual response to individual pieces. Such an approach will seek to bring to consciousness and thereby to transcend the constraints that are variously imposed by fashion, by conventional training, by historical evidence, and even, or especially, by our intuition. And this means, ultimately, cultivating an essentially sceptical frame of mind that will allow no 'truth' to pass unexamined.

No one who reads these lines will need to be persuaded to regard modern mainstream performance styles with a jaundiced eye. But the reason for doing so

We now have our own star system, our personality cults, our hype machines and our beautiful people.

ought not to be that they are anachronistic. They are not anachronistic for everything, after all, and we will all differ as to where the line of anachronism is to be drawn. The reason, rather, is that a performer schooled in the mainstream (any mainstream) receives his basic training before he has reached the age of consent, and that therefore his musical responses and tastes will have been formed at a pre-conscious level—will be vested, so to speak, in his spinal column. And there would be nothing wrong with that if our musical culture were the kind of monistic thing it remained, say, until World War I. In fact it would be the best possible thing, as we may still observe in performances of new music; and especially in folk and pop music, where there is a tacit, wholly internalized, integrated and implicit identification of the performer's habits with the demands of the music performed. But now that our classical musical culture has become so wildly pluralistic (which, after all, is in large part the reason why authenticity ever became an issue), the conditioned reflexes of our mainstream performers give rise to a uniformity of performance style (manifested in, for example, those perennial bugbears, vibrato and seamless phrasing) that has seemed ever more essentially and disconcertingly at variance with the enormous stylistic diversity encompassed by their (our) repertoire.

But simple rejection of the mainstream will only produce a vacuum, and it will not suffice to fill it by merely inferring what can be inferred from the docu-

mentary remains of the past. Such evidence, being as fragmentary and ambiguous as our modern mainstream is oceanic and generalized, is just as suspect, just as needful of being judged and tested. Those who follow the evidence whither it leads will never achieve authenticity in any meaningful sense. Everyone by now agrees (if only for the sake of argument) that we will never really know 'what was. But that is not what we want to find out, anyway. We want to find out what was, or rather, *is* good for the music—and for ourselves. And of course by that I mean ourselves in the actual here and now, not some projection of ourselves into an imaginary past. For as Trilling wrote in his essay 'The Sense of the Past' over 40 years ago, 'to suppose that we can think like men of another time is as much an illusion as to suppose that we can think in a wholly different way'. We need values of our own and the courage to live up to them, whatever the music we perform.

And we won't get them by intuition, either, at least at the outset. For our intuitions are not the fine, free, feral things we may think they are. They are thoroughly domesticated beasts, trained to run along narrow paths by long years of unconscious conditioning, endowed with vast reserves of cliché, naïve posture, and nonsense. If you are a trained musician, what you will find if you scratch your intuition will be the unexamined mainstream, your most ingrained responses, treacherously masquerading as imagination. This was most comically demonstrated a couple of decades ago, when the conductor of a famous American orchestra took it into his head to have his men concoct an aleatory composition extempore, and was faced with Kreutzer études from the fiddles, *Rite of Spring* arpeggios from the wind, and military fanfares from the brass. And it is demonstrated, too, when most early musicians apply embellishments.

So where does one begin? Surely with the music, with one's love for it, with endless study of it, and with the determination to challenge one's every assumption about it, especially the assumptions we do not know we are making because, to quote Whitehead, 'no other way of putting things has ever occurred' to us. Many of our most excellent performers of non-mainstream music have gone far out of their way to devise stratagems to challenge themselves in this way. One musician whom I particularly admire, a lutenist, once told me that when he began to experiment with improvisatory practices to accompany medieval song, he deliberately mistuned his instrument so that his fingers would not be able to run along familiar paths.

And here, in my view, is where the 'old instruments' are valuable and perhaps indispensable in achieving truly authentic performances: as part of the mental process I am describing. The unfamiliarity of the instrument forces mind, hand and ear out of their familiar routines and into more direct confrontation with the music. It has a kind of *Entfremdungseffekt*, which serves the same purpose as in modernist literature. The presentation of a familiar object (the music) in an unfamiliar context (the instrument and the new problems it poses) forces one to see it freshly, more immediately, more observantly—in a word, more authentically. Notice, though, that this is primarily a heuristic benefit to the player, and only secondarily an aesthetic benefit to the listener. The common claim, which I quote from a recent record review in this magazine, that 'Baroque instruments, played in an appropriate manner, have a greater expressive range than their modern equivalents' is the purest gabble. If played in an appropriate manner, modern instruments too would be capable of anything the player wished to produce on

them. But they are not played in that way and, for reasons outlined above, they probably never will be. For players of modern instruments have neither the impulse nor the means to free their minds from their habits in the way the old instruments compel one to do.

Experiments based on historical research serve the same purpose for the performer: they open the mind and ear to new experiences, and enable him to transcend his habitual, and therefore unconsidered, ways of hearing and thinking about the music. We do have an 'absolute injunction' to take history into account, since it offers us another potent challenge. But the object is not to duplicate the sounds of the past, for if that were our aim we would never know whether we had succeeded. What we are aiming at, rather, is the startling shock of newness, of immediacy, the sense of rightness that occurs when after countless frustrating experiments we feel as though we have achieved the identification of performance style with the demands of the music mentioned above as the hallmark of a living tradition. Obviously any and all information we can gather as to



4 *The Choir*. pen and ink drawing by Thomas Rowlandson (1756–1827) (private collection)

contemporary conventions, particularly unwritten conventions, will help us towards that identification. But to limit oneself to positive data is nothing but literalism, leading at best to an impersonation of what Thurston Dart would call the 'dull dogs' of the past. And impersonation of anything, after all, is the opposite of authentic.

So whence comes the verification that our sense of rightness is right? The whole point of my argument (and, if you like, the rub) is that it can come only from within. The idea of objective, external verifiability, attractive as it is to some, is only one of the many false promises of positivism. It is based on what Hirsch has dubbed the 'fallacy of the homogeneous past' (not that he is by any means alone in having identified it). 'To assume', he writes, 'that *any* cultural environment is homogeneous, even on the very abstract level at which literary history [or performance research] is conducted, is to make an assumption about human communities which experience contradicts.' Human characters, personality types, likes and dislikes differ now, and they just as surely (but tell it not at the *Aufführungspraxis* seminar!) differed then. The 15th century must have had its Toscaninis and its Furtwänglers, the 16th its Horowitzes and its Schnabels, the 17th its Hogwoods and its Leppards. There have always been those who, given *a* and *c*, will hesitate to infer *b*, and those who, given *a* and *b*, are ready to infer *x*, *y* and *z*. Performance styles in the past, no less than in the present, had their proponents and their detractors, and many of the practical and theoretical problems that bedevil us today were bedevils then too, the subject of often acrimonious debate (as we need only read Tinctoris to learn).

Mention of Tinctoris brings a convenient example to mind: that of mensural proportions, surely an unsettled issue if ever there was one, as Arthur Mendel so forcefully pointed out a decade ago. In the time that has since elapsed, musicological opinion has divided rather neatly into two extreme camps: those who insist that successive proportions did possess an unambiguous uniformity in the Renaissance, even if the theorists disagree chaotically and we have therefore not been able to recover it (there have even been one or two misguided attempts to legislate it for the present), and those who have not only despaired of ascertaining it, but have convinced themselves on the basis of the theorists' lack of agreement that they were all talking through their hats and that successive proportions were not arithmetically co-ordinated at all. The scholarship on both sides of the issue has been ample. What

few seem willing to grant is the only answer that I find plausible: that preferences and practices were multifarious, varying not only over time and from place to place, but also according to personalities. I have long since found that my own preferences call for arithmetical co-ordination of successive tempos (what I call gear shifts)—and not only for Renaissance music but for French overtures, too—if my own performances are to give me the sense of rightness I seek. (I have even worked out the numbers for myself.) I do not claim that such relationships have more historical validity than the rough *più* or *meno mosso* others prefer, only that I must observe them if my own performances are to have authenticity.

In the course of over 15 years' experience in conducting Renaissance choral music, in fact, I seem to have built up quite a collection of specific performance practices, as I learnt recently when some members of my choir Cappella Nova presented me with a treatise they had compiled from our week-to-week doings in rehearsal. Hardly any of them is historically sanctioned; but, taken as a whole, they are what give our performances authenticity, of a type that is not a thing achieved but a perpetually self-renewing challenge. For as our own discoveries have changed us, they have given rise to new dissatisfactions and new ideals. Ours is a constantly evolving style of performance that, in the words of one reviewer, 'requires great conviction, and it will not be to everyone's taste'. That is certainly true; indeed, I would have added 'therefore' before the last clause, for that is the nature of convictions. But what else are we (or should we be) talking about when we talk about authenticity?

An authenticity of this type has tremendous moral force and is, regardless of the gabble, what keeps our movement alive and gaining ground. The performances of artists who have, at great personal cost, stripped themselves down and then laboriously built themselves up again in their dedication to their chosen repertory, are, in the words of Sartre's Roquentin, 'beautiful and hard as steel and make people ashamed of their existence'. Many of us who have devoted ourselves to the ideal of authentic interpretation of music can probably trace our first impulse to do so to a shaming experience of this kind. But it matters little if we now use the most accurate instruments, tune to the lowest pitch or read from the most original notation. Unless we put ourselves through that crucible, our performances will never possess an authenticity that matters.