Musicology and the Practice of Music: Thoughts from the Work of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis

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I

In view of their common subject matter, one can easily see why the question of the relationship between scholarship and the practice of music has been raised time and again since the birth of modern musicology, and why the discussion has been conducted essentially from the side of scholarship. To begin with, one of the duties of scholarship is to seek perpetually to elucidate itself through reflection and thereby to clarify its connections with related activities. But beyond that, musicology was born into an era which, in its immediate relationship to music, generally tended to value practical application above perception and understanding. Also, as the result of an estrangement between cognition and application, delineated ever more sharply since the middle of the 18th century, these two fields came to stand in an opposition which, because it had never been fully argued out, gave only the appearance of reconciliation. Accordingly, the various possibilities for speaking about music had become more and more widely separated because of several factors: (1) the petrifaction of music theory, which was less and less fitted to the diversity of the compositional styles of the time; (2) the change in social circumstances, which had led to the bourgeois concert business and, subsequently, to a related music criticism; (3) the evolution of aesthetics under the influence of philosophical systems; (4) the rise of acoustics as a result of new developments in the natural sciences; and (5) the increase in historical studies and projects.

In addition, the representatives of the new discipline of musicology were as a rule practicing musicians and even composers. Their backgrounds ranged from music criticism or classical philology to the science of history. Therefore, the question of the relationship between scholarship and the practice of music was for them an inherent and peculiarly personal problem, though in each case it took on a different form; and their responses, whether systematically formulated or deducible from the consequences, produced quite different results. These responses ranged from the juxtaposition (peaceful at best) of the representatives of "Science of the Arts and Art," as viewed by Philipp Spitta,[1] to the amalgamation in the work of Hugo Riemann[2] of the systematic conceptions of the musician and thinker with his music-historical observations, an amalgamation at once problematic and stimulating, though not easily dissolved.

We look back into the history of musicology essentially because it helps us to understand our present situation, for the problems which became clear at the end of the last century decide to this day the relationship between scholarship and the practice of music. We must not overlook the fact, how-

ever, that 20th-century discussions of the aim of musicology produced fresh points of view concerning the relationship between historical knowledge and musical performance.[3] In spite of this it must be stated that those encounters in which each field attempts to do justice to its particular mission remain today the exception rather than the rule. In fact, such encounters, in view of the manifold juxtaposition of opinions determined today by the self-understanding of practice as well as scholarship, are in most cases to be considered neither necessary nor desirable.

Thus, it is incomprehensible that a historian doing purely philological work should seek an encounter with musical performance. In fact, sometimes a researcher, whose scholarly work deals with the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, will as a practicing musician be inclined rather toward the 18th or 19th century. This is not necessarily an anachronism but is due to his personal interest or professional connections. And this can happen not only in the study of sources or in work on early music theory, but even in problems of textual criticism, which provide access to the structure of the music but not necessarily an idea of the sound of a given piece. Parallel circumstances arise in other types of historical inquiry, in sociological investigations, or in works dealing with the psychology of music.

Similarly, within the practice of music, can we really reproach an interpreter who takes as his point of departure the score of a Mozart work with but little consideration for all the historical circumstances under which the composition was created? Can we insist that a performer should discover the proper interpretation chiefly through scholarship? The same holds true when the interpreter speaks about music from a practical position. When he, in an amalgam of psychoanalytical, musical, and historical facts, explains the characteristics of a Beethoven movement by means of the "psychic disposition" of the composer, the historian can register no complaint, no matter how much such commentary may have annoyed him, as long as the performer does not claim that his is a definitive historical pronouncement.[4]

Of course, the above discussion has not dealt with all of the possible positions. Thus, the musicologist must enter the realm of practical music in some questions of paleography, but he has to go much further when, from his standpoint as a historian of the arts, he is concerned with the comprehension of that which is specifically artistic in his subject, especially when studying the creative process of composition or attempting to approach the sound by means of his inner ear. Correspondingly, the practical musician, insofar as he is concerned with the special characteristics of the music of the past, cannot avoid opening himself up to scholarship. Furthermore, we must remember that present-day scholarship has made us all aware that the essence of a musical work is not limited to its aural reality. In fact, as Carl Dahlhaus has emphasized, the tension between (1) what is "stated by the notation," i.e., that which is common to all performances, (2) the "musical sense," i.e., the aurally and intellectually perceivable "relationship among the tones which make up the work," and (3) the aural realization which changes from

interpretation to interpretation, belong, themselves, to the essence of the musical work.[5] But nowhere does the cooperation of musicology with the practice of music become more indispensable than in the performance of old music in the light of its historical background. This is the situation at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis.

II

The Schola Cantorum Basiliensis was founded in 1933 as an "Institute for the teaching and research of old music." Its mission was considered to be "the exploration and practical testing of all questions relating to the revival of old music," "old" being defined as music dating from the Middle Ages through the middle of the 18th century.[6] This revival was to take place as a continual juxtaposition of the "spirit of the time" on the one hand with the artistic claim of "performance with outstanding musical forces" on the other, and it required the "cooperation of artist and scholar," with the "goal of producing a lively and reciprocal interaction between scholarship and the practice of music."

The director of the first group was Paul Sacher, and he had both practicing musicians, such as Ina Lohr and August Wenzinger, and musicologists Arnold Geering and Walter Nef to help realize the basic idea of the Schola. As it worked out, the differences between the two positions, in self-understanding as well as in their common work, became insignificant in the face of everyone's enthusiasm for the idea. This was the "lively interaction" towards which all were striving. Nevertheless, if one tries to go beyond the statements of position made above and to ascertain the relationship between scholarship and the practice of music which prevailed in the Schola at that time, it cannot be denied that the center of gravity lay with the artists, who had themselves become quite deeply involved in scholarship. Accordingly, the "nucleus of the school" was to be formed by a "colloquium of teachers," composed of "singers and skilled players of all the more important old instruments." At the same time, the "representatives of musicology" were to "stimulate and support" the discussion by means of "their advice and judgment," as well as "by making the group aware of any historical conditions."

The Schola thus demonstrated that it was being carried along on the wave of enthusiasm which the revival of old music had created, especially in the 1920's. Those who subscribed to this attitude accepted the results of the new discipline of musicology with an enthusiasm characteristic of the Youth Movement, the efforts at reform in Protestant church music, and the Organ Movement. Without such enthusiasm the "Renaissance of Old Music" and the secure position which old music enjoys today would never have been possible. Yet, as the performance of old music with old instruments became even more natural and acceptable in the decades which followed, the awareness of the fact that the results of every occupation with old music could only

be relative gave way to a preoccupation with didactic and purely artistic work, and it was only natural that the Schola reflected this development.[7]

In contrast to all of this, the 1960's brought a far-reaching consideration of special problems in the revival of old music.[8] This deliberation led not only to thoroughgoing changes in instrument construction and matters of interpretation but also to a redefining of the roles of scholar and performer. The effect of this on the Schola was that the original goal of a dialogue between the two returned to the foreground. Characteristic of this dialogue is the tension between the personal intuition and the creative power of the artist, whose obligations to his own time are stronger by nature, and the historian's knowledge, which is indispensable but never definitive. This tension, moreover, is the most essential feature of any performance of early music which is done with the consciousness of its historical conditionality. But because the practice of art cannot be imagined without knowledge, nor the science of art without intuition, the resulting implication for the actual work is that each person must ascertain his own position between these two poles and take his own individuality into consideration. Furthermore, one's own position is, and must always be, subject to change, precisely because of this constant tension. Obviously this situation poses its own special problems for the performing artist; yet, last but not least, it is this situation from which arises the fascination of the dialogue between scholarship and practice within their common work on old music.

Thus, in its teaching, the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis may not content itself with imparting finished results but must help each person to find his own standpoint. Accordingly, in instrumental classes, practical instruction is accompanied by the joint reading of sources, which has, in fact, often revealed the position of the teacher. The encounter between scholarship and the practice of music has especially important effects in the so-called "theoretical" courses. Ear training, for example, attempts to impart not merely the usual general skills but concentrates on the ability to hear the music of previous eras in terms of its own structure. This generally means that the student who has come from a conservatory must first be led away from hearing habits developed by functional tonality and introduced to the perception of monophonic and polyphonic modality. In order to awaken the understanding of the succession of sounds in Machaut or Monteverdi (an understanding which is prerequisite to perception), "Historical Composition" (*Satzlehre*) offers an outline of the practice of composition from the 13th to the 18th century; analytical and practical exercises are included. Thoroughbass is learned at the keyboard, as soon as its most important theoretical foundations have been provided, and a realization is to be written out only as a method of review and control. Again, the study of paleography offers a further point of contact between scholarship and the practice of music, in that one of its aims is to make the students thoroughly familiar with the authentic performance of music from the 13th to the 17th century; this is done by working with original sources. There are also courses

in organology and in the history and the techniques of tuning. In addition, efforts are made to restore the practice of improvisation, not only as embellishment but also as playing over a model bass line. Finally, the Schola strives to make the historic dances known, so that the connection between music and movement, so essential in deciding questions of tempo in old music, can be better understood. We feel, also, that it is always crucial to remain open to creative experiments.

It is assumed that this encounter between scholarship and the practice of music can take place only against the background of a historical "instrumentarium," which in Basel means the large collection of instruments housed in the nearby Historical Museum, and that a library with collections of microfilms is available for day-to-day work. Moreover, one must point out the close cooperation between the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis and the Conservatory (which, like the Schola, is part of the Music Academy of the City of Basel), and between the Schola and the Institute of Musicology at the University of Basel.

III

The Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, as was emphasized at the time of its founding, stands between "conservatory" and "university," and, because of its special purposes, it can be compared with other institutions only in certain ways. Nevertheless, in looking back at its historical development as we did above, it seems justified to claim that, in fact, the encounter between scholarship and the practice of music as undertaken at the Schola has been quite beneficial to the conception by each of itself.

With respect to musical practice, theory which considers itself an aid to performers' interpretations and is oriented toward particular works and their historical background could stimulate discussion in our schools of music. And with regard to university musicology, at least in the German-speaking world, one can well ask to what extent systematic music theory, with its still customary presentation as "harmony" and "counterpoint," can be replaced by a theory which is more historically oriented, and therefore better connected with musicology. Correspondingly, in the matter of practical exercises—including score-reading, a skill which is still practiced—one should ask how a teaching method proper to musicology should be constituted in the realm determined by the tension between musical scholarship and practice.

Beyond these initial indications of practical consequences, there is still the task of determining the extent to which the insights gained from the work of the Schola contribute to the understanding of general questions concerning the performance of old music and musical life in general. This is true for the question of whether temporal boundaries can be drawn in the definition of "old" music, as is traditionally done, or whether, in fact, when one considers the current receptivity toward history, it should be defined as "the performance of music in the light of its historical conditionality." If so defined, we could, on the one hand, delimit the interpretation of Baroque music on

modern instruments and, on the other, permit the possibility of interpreting music of the 19th and perhaps even of the early 20th century as "old music." Furthermore, from this point of view questions could be raised as to where old music stands in society and how its position has changed along with the changes in hearing that have occurred since the 19th century. In connection with this, the motivation for reviving music of early times should be clarified. Finally, the practice of "old music" in the aforementioned sense leads to the fundamental question of the historical dependence of music in general. And for these reasons the special task of an "institute for the teaching and research of old music" becomes manifest.

(Translated from the German by Thomas W. Baker)

NOTES

[1] Philipp Spitta's view is well characterized in his article "Science of the Arts and Art" ("Kunstwissenschaft und Kunst"). In it he says: "A mutual and more fundamental influence could only lead to the stunting and atrophy of the best which artist and scholar carry within themselves, each according to his gifts and goals in life. Such an influence would take from the artist his feeling of freedom and attenuate the energy of his creative strength; such an influence could easily seduce the scholar into wanting to see a whole where, in reality, there are only fragments before him. Each would thus become untrue to his spirit." And further: "If there is a clear recognition of the goals of both scholar and artist, a crossing of their paths without any hostile encounter is possible. They will arrange matters so that in subjects to which both can lay a claim, 'light and air' will be divided equally between them. A situation is quite conceivable in which they would get along peacefully side by side, each one devoted to his own purpose: the creation of beauty for one, the struggle for truth for the other." In *Zur Musik* (Berlin: Gerbrüder Paetel, 1892), pp. 6, 14.

[2] The best presentation of Riemann's mixture of systematic and philosophical ideas on the one hand and historical ideas on the other is to be found in the studies of Wilibald Gurlitt: "Hugo Riemann und die Musikgeschichte," *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* (1918–19) 1: 571–87; *Hugo Riemann (1849–1919)*, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur (Sitz Mainz), geistes- und sozialwiss. Klasse, 1950, No. 25 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1951; *Riemann Musiklexikon II*, 12 (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1961), pp. 505–10.

[3] *See*, for example, Glen Haydon, "The Scope and Function of Musicology," *Proceedings of the Music Teachers National Association*, 41st Series (1947) 71: 67–71.

[4] *See* Jacques Wildberger, "Versuch über Beethovens späte Streichquartette," *Schweizerische Musikzeitung* (1970) 110: 1–8; and the appended discussion with Willy Hess (*ibid.*, pp. 122–23, 195–96). A revised version of the "Versuch" was published in *Beethoven '70* (Frankfurt/Main: S. Fischer/Verlag, 1970), pp. 31–44.

[5] C. Dahlhaus, *Musikästhetik* (Cologne: Musikverlag H. Gerig, 1967), p. 113; also pp. 23–24 *et passim*; see *idem*, *Analyse und Werturteil* (Mainz: Schott, 1970), pp. 62–65.

[6] This and the following quotes are taken from an unpublished Prospectus which was written before the official opening of the Schola on 1 December 1933. Its fundamental thoughts and wordings were carried over into the official texts and describe the goals of the Institute to this day.

[7] It is significant that the necessity for a "continuing cooperation" between artist and scholar was emphasized at the founding of the Institute, not only for the reasons given but also because it was assumed that "questions of conception and style" were going to "go through various changes." In contrast, the Review for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the

Schola stated that "the attempt to reproduce the original methods of performance is less a historical than an artistic concern," and the scholars at the Schola were characterized at the same time as an "advisory board," which could "also contribute to the understanding of old music." *In* Walter Nef, "Fünfundzwanzig Jahre Schola Cantorum Basiliensis," *Musik-Akademie der Stadt Basel, 92. Jahresbericht* (1958–59), pp. 30 and 36.

[8] They were reflected at the 1967 convention in Kassel: *Alte Musik in unserer Zeit*, Musikalische Zeitfragen XII (Kassel/Basel: Bärenreiter, 1968), and in the colloquium of the same year in Brno: *Musica Antiqua. Colloquium Brno 1967. On the Interpretation of Old Music*, Colloquia in the History and Theory of Music at the International Music Festival in Brno II (Brno: International Music Festival, 1968).