

Musicology and Performance: The Common Ground

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The way in which one views the relationship between musicology and performance would, I think, be determined by one's idea of what an education in music should be. And I think that few musicians find themselves comfortable with their basic education. While it is true that all schooling, and especially professional schooling, is now being questioned profoundly, I believe, nonetheless, that serious problems of education in music in this country long antedate the current upheaval.

Obviously, one cannot be well versed in all aspects of music, particularly since musicologists have made available such a wealth of music, while travel and recordings have introduced music of other cultures. Nevertheless, there must be some qualities common to all musicians. Too often musicology becomes words without music, and performance, sound without meaning. Hearing—how well the ear perceives—is the beginning. The acuity of perception of the qualities or properties of sound at any given moment and that same acuity of perception of the relationships of successive sounds are fundamental. There are so many different emphases that may be given to an organization of sounds that it is difficult to develop one's perceptions sufficiently to comprehend all of the music known to us. Moreover, each person has certain proclivities or ways of hearing within the world of sound. But the scope of that hearing, along with the techniques of translating those perceptions into action, is what makes a professional musician. The latter is distinguished from the amateur with a well-developed ear by the consciousness of that hearing, by the ability to utilize it in ways beyond superficial imitation. Furthermore, the professional musician must be able to experience these highly developed perceptions directly from the printed score: the score must *be* the sound.

Perhaps, with the amount and extent of music presently available, one could begin the study of theory in a different way. One might simply consider the properties of sound that can be organized, namely, length, range, timbre, and amplitude, and begin exercises in that primitive but more abstract way, thereby arriving at the traditional studies as special cases with particular emphases. This kind of beginning could facilitate hearing which aspects of sound were predominant at a given time and which were simply functions of other aspects. And, hopefully, one would experience both greater freedom and greater control over the use of these elements of sound.

What does differentiate one musical specialist from another? Given that all musicians have this highly developed, useful ear (or, more properly, "inner ear"), one might say that they are differentiated in great measure by the nonmusical aspects of their work. A musician becomes a performer by the

addition of considerable athletic and dramatic prowess; a historian, by skills in research, writing, languages, and possibly a gift for gossip; an aesthetician, by knowledge of philosophy and psychology. The composer and the theoretician are perhaps more completely involved purely in the organization of sound. The theoretician has the duty and the luxury of scrutinizing many techniques of composition. The composer, too, needs to investigate these but must then ignore many areas in order to develop fully his or her ideas and gifts. Composing requires constant choice, and, therefore, constant relinquishment.

I think that this listing of the nonmusical requirements of various musical specialties recalls the deficiencies mentioned earlier: many musical specialists concentrate on nonmusical aspects of their work to such an extent that it becomes uninteresting, misleading, or without center. This is not to diminish a real problem: the demands of each specialty are so great at present that it is difficult to achieve proportion. Yet, I think that this is a period desperately in need of just that sense of proportion.

And specialties change. For example, in recent years we have seen the reentry of physical scientists and mathematicians into the field of music. This fact has been responsible for both extraordinarily interesting developments and lamentably nonmusical conclusions. If one is connected with the world of sound in a direct way, then the changes can be a source of stimulation rather than of despair.

My own schooling in music was in many ways typical for an instrumentalist. It began very early with "ear-training" and piano lessons. Traditional theory studies were started in early childhood and were, perhaps, more extensive than is usual. Let me hasten to add, lest it seem that I am promoting my own kind of schooling, that it has nonetheless been my deficiencies in music theory which have proven the most troublesome. There was a severe lack of rhythmic studies and a superabundance of traditional harmony (without real attention to the rhythm of harmonic change). There were years of counterpoint without careful attention to certain aspects of single-line construction, the kind of study necessary, for example, for understanding a Bach solo cello suite and also crucial for the coherent hearing of Webern (the registral stepwise connections). One can explain many of these things in a few minutes, but long studies (exercises) are required in order that they be sufficiently internalized as abstract principles of movement. I had no early education in pre-17th-century music; my later lack in that area was due to the peculiarities of my own schooling. That my experience was not totally idiosyncratic is borne out by my musician friends. And I do know that too much of my adult life has been occupied with filling gaps in my education. I am not referring to the kind of self-education that goes on forever; I mean basic gaps in schooling.

We are living in times which offer too much exposure to an enormous variety of stimuli for us to depend upon purely imitative teaching (even with the most worthy model). This kind of teaching may be sufficient in a more

simple or closed society, where the exposure to limited stimuli permits a more profound engagement. The abstractions available through broad and thorough investigations in all the areas of music are crucial if we are to become anything other than victims, mindlessly latching onto what is at hand at the moment, with no real involvement.