

## *Do the Findings of Musicology Help the Performer?*

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I imagine that the aim of musicology and of its relationship to performance is the achievement of an "authentic" presentation of a score. However, an "authentic" performance is not of necessity identical with a "successful" one. To assess the influence of musicological research on my own performances, I will first have to clarify the role of the performer and what constitutes a "successful" performance.

I believe that the performer is the interpreter of the composer. The former must thoroughly understand the intentions of the latter in a re-creative blend of thought and intuition and then let his particular talent be the medium for these intentions. Only in this way is a convincing performance possible. The composer, whether present himself or represented by musicological findings, must not look over the shoulder of the performer in an inhibiting manner. The success of the performance is measured by the extent to which the convictions of the performer are communicated to the public.

The re-creative talent of the performer must be constantly stimulated, and few data regarding a score are ever irrelevant, since the performer responds both consciously and subconsciously to somewhat mysterious stimuli. It is here that musicological studies are indispensable. Comparative studies of different editions, manuscripts, and sets of parts illuminate questions of thematic relationships, of phrasing, of expression marks. The performer wants to saturate himself with the ideas of the composer and understand fully the latter's objectives. The discovery of slight differences between the initial statement of a theme and its reappearance in the recapitulation, variants which a study of contemporary orchestral scores reveals as either erroneous or definitely desirable, is a very useful product of musicological research. Drawing attention to the many sins of omission and writing errors due to excessive haste is most helpful, even necessary, to the performer. While these studies make the performer look more closely at the score, other studies, such as those which explore the performance practices of the composer's era, often make the performer *more* flexible with regard to indications in the music. Occasionally, biographical studies may also help to clarify perplexing notations.

Let me illustrate how these musicological studies are utilized by the performer. As a conductor, I will discuss orchestral scores; let me begin with Mozart's Haffner Serenade, K. 250. The original score is in the Meisterarchiv in Vienna. In addition, there is a later score in which the work is reduced from an eight-movement serenade to a five-movement symphony (*not* the Haffner Symphony, K. 385) by omitting the second, third, and fourth movements of the original. The source of this version, already used during Mozart's lifetime, is the set of sixteen orchestral parts prepared by a copyist and housed today in the Prussian State Library in Berlin. A comparison of the two

versions discloses discrepancies with regard to the violas, bassoons, oboes, and an optional timpani part. These parts contain indications in Mozart's handwriting; musicologists therefore believe that they were once in Mozart's own library. Here the musicologists' findings have aided immensely in deciding which reading to choose, the earlier eight-movement score or the later five-movement one with Mozart's indications.

Of great help, too, are the many musicological studies of the performance practices of each period. For the performance of Baroque masterpieces, such studies provide a wealth of information which permits one to understand the intent of the composer without committing oneself to a lifeless imitation of a style which functioned under different performing conditions. Questions about the role of the cembalo, the size of the orchestra and chorus, figured bass, ornaments, and string phrasings are given answers which provide the musical imagination with basic stylistic criteria. To attain a stylistically "pure" performance seems to me neither possible nor even desirable, for, as Nietzsche once said, "The really historical performance would talk to ghosts." However, one does learn the "sound" of each style and can decide such matters as which editions of Handel's oratorios and operas to utilize, whether to accept the Schmitt-Lewicki additions to Mozart's C Minor Mass, or how to select from the various endings and additions of the same composer's Requiem. The performer must familiarize himself with the performance practices of the Classic era, too, and thus he again seeks musicological guidance. The melodic nakedness of many an *andante* in Mozart's concertos and the thinness of his accompaniments become clearer when we learn that these were just outlines which the artist considered a challenge to his improvisatory capabilities.

Here is another example from the Classic era. Some strange dynamic markings in Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto become clearer when one knows the properties of the piano for which it was written. There is a thundering piano solo in the development section of the first movement, starting with m. 210. The strings and woodwinds are directed to play softly against this, since Beethoven was afraid that the strings would obscure the piano. The strings actually develop the main motive, however, and should be heard clearly. I thus take this orchestral marking with a large grain of salt because the modern grand piano has no difficulty being heard.

The aesthetics of our time favor a historical consciousness and therefore condemn Weingartner's reorchestrations of Beethoven or the various attempts to "rescue" the Schumann symphonies by conductors who believe that their own ideals of sonority should be superimposed on those of the composers, who, in their opinion, either orchestrated poorly or had instruments with limitations that no longer exist. I, however, like to hear an orchestral sound which reflects the old instrumental limitations, because every great composer has used such limitations creatively.

An example in which the biographical research of musicologists has proven to be of immense help to the performer can be seen in Beethoven's *Missa*

*Solemnis*. In the orchestral score, the quartet sings “Pleni sunt coeli” at m. 84 in the Sanctus and continues until the Benedictus. The vocal score, however, shows the chorus starting at m. 84. In terms of orchestral texture and other considerations of balance and textual interpretation, one would think that the editor of the vocal score is correct. However, a passage in Schindler’s biography specifically quotes Beethoven as having weighed the question of letting the chorus enter and rejected it in favor of the quartet. Therefore, the indications of the orchestral score should be followed.

The foregoing have been examples of the ways in which I have been aided in my musical interpretations by the broad scope of musicological research. Yet, all this cultivates only the roots from which a good performance must grow. I am a composer myself and have worked with many other composers while I was preparing to conduct their works. I have discovered how many things they imagined to have put in their scores and how often they miscalculated intended effects. The creative spark remains hard to capture in print. But I do not see anything tragic in this fact. On the contrary, it is the mark of the gifted interpreter to read the signposts of a score and then to convey the intent. This gives a performance the subjective stamp which is the secret of a good performance. The audience can sense the conviction of a performance rooted in knowledge and projected by intuition. Intuition is a much maligned word in an era of so-called objectivity, machines, metronomes, and precision. I insist on thorough preparation and sound scholarship, but only as a ritual of physical and mental immersion. The spiritual experience of the ritual is what the performer then brings to the performance from the well of his sensitivity to the composer’s style, his love of and admiration for the score, and the conviction which rational comprehension gives to the execution of technical details.

Nothing takes the place of the intuitive welding of all assembled data supplied by musicology. C. P. E. Bach said: “Interpretation is nothing else but the capacity to make musical thoughts clear according to their true content and affection—whether one sings or plays.” The true content of a piece is revealed by musicology, but the “affection” must be sensed by the performer. How often Arnold Schoenberg wrote at the start of a movement that “the metronome markings are not to be taken literally—they merely give a suggestion of tempo.” And even Stravinsky, who said that conductors should be like sergeants whose duty it is to make sure that every musician obeys the composer’s indication, fluctuated considerably as an interpreter when I heard him conduct a score of his own at various times. That is not meant as criticism, but rather to point out that Stravinsky as a composer and Stravinsky as a performer did not share identical views.

With the current interest in (often rightfully) forgotten Romantic scores, I see a hunger for excitement during a performance in which letter and spirit are not identical, and where one inspires the other. In these Romantic works much leeway is given to the performer. In fact, the “objective” approach to performance was in a large measure a reaction to the exaggerated

view of the virtuoso. However, this reaction has reached unreasonable proportions. An element of unpredictability must be left to the performers, in order that something “extra” can coalesce during the concert, once the *technical details* have been thoroughly assimilated.

Musicology takes care of these technical details for me; it clarifies them or at least poses them as questions to which interpretive answers can be given intelligently. *Then* the performer in me can truly function, even though a critic might later disagree with some of my interpretive solutions to problematic spots.