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"I have finished today another new concerto..."

Jo Ellen Jacobs argues that musical works and performances are the same.¹ The work is realized, which is to say completed, only when the possibilities recorded in the score are actualized by the performer. Different performances based on the same score actualize different works which share a "family resemblance."² The individuals which interest us are performances. Jacobs claims that her theory accounts for our "judgments" about music; that it is more consistent with the way in which we talk about music than are Platonist views regarding musical works as abstract, pure sound-structures. Though we appear to distinguish the properties of works from the properties of performances of them, in fact the distinction we draw is between the work realized in a particular performance and the potential for the creation of works present in the score. I find most of these claims unconvincing.

One kind of musical work fits the model described by Jacobs - that in which the work consists of a definitive or master tape the creation of which involved the contribution of actual performers. Such

¹ 'Identifying Musical Works of Art', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 24 (4) (1990): 75-85.

² The examples chosen often suggest that it is interpretations, rather than performances as such, which constitute the work on her view. The same orchestra may play the same interpretation of the same score on successive nights, so interpretations cannot so easily be equated with performances.

a work is constituted through its original performance and sketches or “scores” for that performance precede the completion of the work. Such a work has a status like that of a film - it involves performance but is not itself a work for performance. I believe that musical works display considerable ontic variety, of which this is one type, but I also believe that works of this type are not common or typical of musical works in general.

Another kind of musical work, outwardly similar to that discussed above, differs from Jacob’s model - that in which the work is written onto tape without being performed. For example, the composer works at a computer with digitalized sounds to produce the tape which constitutes the work. It is difficult to see how such works are the same as performances, since their creation does not involve performance as that term commonly is understood and the works are not for performance.

Most musical works are written for performance. In such cases, the composer provides a specification for the creation of performances or a model instance of the work. Where the former course is followed, the work is completed when the score is finished, though the work is not the score. In a letter to his father dated 10 April 1784, Mozart refers to his K 453 in saying: “I have finished today another new concerto for Fraülein Ployer.” Note that, though the first performance of the work did not take place until several days later, Mozart claims to have completed the concerto, not merely its score. Had the score never been performed, we would maintain, nevertheless, that Mozart had written a piano concerto. In this respect, works for performance, such as plays with scripts and musical works with scores, differ from non-performance works, such as singular statues and paintings.³ A statue does not yet exist as an artwork if it exists only in plan, but Shakespeare’s plays did exist prior to their performances when the texts of those plays were completed. In the case of works for performance, performances instance the

³ For a discussion of this distinction, see my “Performance” in The Blackwell Companion to Aesthetics, editor David Cooper (Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming).

works, rather than complete them. Performances are treated as interpretations of works which are identifiable, via the text or score, as independent of any particular instances. If such works are presented through the creation of a model instance, at least some of the properties of that instance are regarded as distinct from the properties of the work so created.

It is true, of course, that we are interested in the properties of individual performances. It might be Kiri Te Kanawa's Donna Elvira which I wish to hear. Equally it is true, though, that we are concerned with works, as well as with their performances, and, more particularly, we are interested in those works as the works of their composers. It seems to me that this kind of concern, which I regard as fundamental, is lost from Jacob's account. She allows that different "works" (i.e. performances) might share the same "surname" in that they derive from the actualization of a single score. But her view treats this fact as of concern only to someone interested in the causal history of the given "work." On this account, common family membership is a matter of mere historical detail, since the aesthetic interest in "works" is an interest not in family membership, but in individuals; it is an interest in "forenames" rather than "surnames." I do not believe that the nature of our involvement with musical works conceives as contingent in the way suggested by Jacob's theory the fact that Mozart, say, wrote the work's score.

For the above reason I do not think that Jacob's distinction between judgments of particular "works" (i.e. performances) and judgments of the score's potential captures all that we mean when we seem to contrast the properties of works with the properties of their performances. Not all works for performance have scores, so her gloss of the distinction does not cover all cases. More to the point, what is it that has the potential she identifies? Not themes, since different scores might contain the same themes. Not musical materials in general, since there is no practical limit to their potential. A non-trivial specification of what it is that has the potential she identifies will lead us back to talk of works identifiable independently of their performances, I believe.

Jacobs develops her theory in reaction to a view of musical works according to which they pay little heed to the physical, sensuous properties of sounds, to the skills and difficulties involved in coaxing sounds from actual instruments, and to the creative contribution of performers. The view to which she objects is ethnocentric, in tending to ignore the music of other cultures, and narrow, in tending to focus on “classical” works written between 1500 and 1900. I, too, have voiced such complaints.⁴ But I do not think they are to be answered as Jacobs does. It is possible to argue that instrumentation, for example, is constitutive of musical works, and not merely incidental, and that such works are firmly embedded in cultural contexts in which conventions of musical practice contribute to making them the individuals they are, without equating the musical work with performances as such.

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⁴ See my 'Authenticity in Musical Performance', The British Journal of Aesthetics, 27 (1987): 39-50; 'Transcription, Authenticity and Performance', The British Journal of Aesthetics, 28 (1988): 216-227; 'Violins or Viols? - a Reason to Fret', The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 48 (1990): 147-151; 'The Ontology of Musical Works and the Authenticity of their Performances', Noûs, 25 (1991): 21-41.

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