Stephen Davies, Philosophy, University of Auckland

Important note: This is an altered version and differs from the definitive version, which is published in **British Journal of Aesthetics,** 28 (1988): 216-227.. I have been assured by the University of Auckland's research office that if they have made this publicly available then it does not violate the publisher's copyright rules.

"Transcription, Authenticity, and Performance"

My aim here is to provide an account of musical transcription and of the authenticity of transcriptions. Performing and transcribing are compared and contrasted in the final sections.

I

What is transcription? In this first section I attempt to elucidate what is meant by the notion. Though I realize that a transcription might take the form of an impromptu performance, I shall talk in the following of transcriptions as specifications for musical performance (and these specifications will usually be musical scores).

It is a necessary condition of a musical score's being a transcription that it be intended as such. So, if a musical score is a transcription of a musical work, X, it must be the intention of the producer of the score to write a work faithful to the musical content of X while writing for and in a way appropriate to a medium other than that for which X is written. However, the mere presence of the appropriate intention is not a sufficient condition for the score's being a transcription. It is also a necessary condition for transcription that the musical content of the transcriber's score should adequately resemble and preserve the musical content of the original work. The joint realization of these two conditions is a sufficient condition for the success of an attempt at transcription. Just what the realization of these conditions amounts to is the subject of the discussion in the remainder of this section.

Transcription presupposes the prior existence of an independently identifiable work. The transcriber's intention is to transcribe that work and the successful realization of that intention is possible only where there exists such a work to be transcribed. This trivial point is worth making in order to distinguish cases of transcription from those, such as the following, that in other respects are very similar. The orchestration of The Wedding gave Stravinsky a great deal of trouble. He wrote the accompaniment to the vocal soloists and choir first for a very large orchestra, then for player pianos, and finally for four pianos and percussion (in the version we know). Although the final version no doubt was similar to and derived from the earlier versions, it is not a transcription. What Stravinsky was doing was struggling with the work's composition and the work was not finished until the completion of the third version. (This would remain true even if Stravinsky had made available the earlier versions.) The final version could not be a transcription because there was at the time it was written no independently existing work to which it could stand as a transcription.

Since musical works are not individuatable solely by reference to their composer, there is no difficulty, in general, in allowing that a composer can transcribe his own works. Stravinsky transcribed Pulcinella three times—in 1925 for violin and piano, in 1932 as Italian Suite for cello and piano, and in 1933, also as Italian Suite, for violin and piano. Mozart transcribed parts of his operas for the type of woodwind ensemble that commonly played in the streets. And a great many composers have made piano reductions of their orchestral works.

A transcription must depart far enough from the original to count as a distinct piece and not merely as a copy of the original. Some aspect of the original must be altered in the transcription. Usually, there is a significant alteration in the medium for which the work is written. And, usually, a change in medium involves a change in instrumentation (and note changes consequent on this). It is possible to produce a new piece through a change in instrumentation, because most musical works are medium-specific. That is to say, one of the complex of identity criteria in terms of which Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is the work that it is, is the fact of its being written for a standard symphony orchestra (including trombones and piccolo). (Works that are not obviously medium-specific, such as J. S. Bach's The Art of the Fugue, are rare.) For the most part, the possibility of musical transcription relies on the fact that one can write a new piece, while preserving the musical content of the original piece on which the new piece is based, by altering the medium through which those contents are presented. So, an orchestral work may be transcribed for piano, or wind band, or cello duet, or vice versa.

A change from one musical medium to another cannot be achieved mechanically or even automatically by the specification of a change in instrumentation. One does not transcribe a harpsichord concerto merely by crossing out the word 'harpsichord' on the score and replacing it with the word 'piano'. Although a change in instrumentation has been specified, the instruments are played in a similar way and share membership in the family of keyboard instruments. Stravinsky's re-orchestration of Petrushka, which involved reductions in the number of wind parts and suchlike alterations, provides a similar example. What Stravinsky produced (and intended to produce) was another version of the same work and not a transcription of it, because the new version does not involve a change in medium and (hence) does not differ enough from the original to qualify as a transcription.

There is at least one further way the specification of a change of instrumentation does not amount to a change of medium—namely, that in which the attempt at change fails because the specification is not easily realizable. For example, one cannot transcribe an orchestral work for piano merely by transferring the notes played by the orchestra on to treble and bass staves and specifying that the resultant score should be played on the piano, because the resultant score probably would be unplayable on the piano, or painfully unpianistic if playable. One cannot be properly said to be writing for a particular medium unless one takes account of what is involved for musicians in working with and within that medium. As I shall discuss in greater detail later, transcription is creative precisely in that it seeks to reconcile the musical content of the original work with the limitations and advantages of a medium for which that content was not designed.

There is no rule to say how far a transcriber may depart from the contents of the original in accommodating those contents to the medium for which she is writing. But there is such a thing as going too far, so that an attempt at transcription fails as a result of modifying too extensively the musical contents of the original. It is not sufficient that the composer of transcriptions take a work as her model and that this model be acknowledged in the resulting composition. The composer of 'arrangements on', 'variations on', and 'homages to' does this much without producing transcriptions. A successful attempt at transcription aims at and achieves greater faithfulness to the musical contents of the original than does, for example, a successful attempt to write a set of variations on another's theme. An attempt at transcription that fails through its lack of faithfulness to the musical contents of the original might have been a successful homage had the composer's intentions been different. Where the attempt at transcription is successful and the transcription alters the notes found in the original, then those alterations do not destroy the configurations giving the original its musical character; instead, they re-create within the medium for which the transcription is written equivalent configurations. (I mention some of the techniques employed by transcribers, in discussing the creativity involved in transcription, in the third section.)

Some examples illustrate the way transcriptions must be heard as respecting the musical contents of their models. Debussy's piano piece (of about 1910) 'Homage to Haydn', Stravinsky's ballet The Fairy's Kiss,based on Tchaikovsky's music, and Beethoven's Diabelli Variations, based on Diabelli's theme, all would have been failures had they been intended as transcriptions, because they depart too far from their sources to count as transcriptions of those sources. Each of these works acknowledges the source of its musical inspiration but goes on to recompose and decompose the musical content of its source (in a way perfectly appropriate to its being a homage, an arrangement on, or a set of variations, but in a way that would not have been appropriate to the realization of an intention to produce a transcription). By contrast, the orchestrations of piano pieces by Chopin brought together as the ballet Les Sylphides are properly counted as transcriptions because they aim at and succeed in preserving the musical contents of their model. Because they are so faithful to the originals it is not inappropriate that the work is attributed to Chopin. (Indeed, the names of the transcribers who collaborated on the work are not now widely known.) Two further examples of transcription come closer to the risk of failure in being more adventurous. Tchaikovsky's Suite No. 4, Op. 61, known as 'Mozartiana', transcribes for orchestra music by (or attributed to) Mozart. In this case the orchestration is as much Tchaikovskian as Mozartian. Yet more interesting is Stravinsky's Pulcinella. Stravinsky does more than re-orchestrate Pergolesi's music, he adds to it. But he does so with a light touch, aiming to add an 'edge' to the sound rather than to re-compose Pergolesi's piece. So, though Pulcinella has a Stravinsky-like sound one would not associate with Pergolesi, the work is more like a transcription than anything else. It is a work by Pergolesi/Stravinsky, not by Stravinsky alone.

One matter has not yet been made fully explicit, perhaps because it seems so obvious, but it deserves mention for all that. Transcriptions are transcriptions of musical works, and the contents of the original preserved in the different medium of the transcription are its musical contents. A musical work might be inspired by Shakespeare's Hamlet or Leonardo's 'Last Supper' but no musical work could be a transcription of these works of art, because

nothing could count as the successful realization of an intention to produce a musical transcription of their respective propositional and representational contents. Of course, one can transcribe a musical work that sets a text. But the fact that one can transcribe a musical work presenting a propositional content does not entail that a transcription of that propositional content alone is possible. If the text is preserved in a musical transcription, it is preserved by being repeated. So far as the preservation of the propositional content of the text is concerned, there is no change of medium from the original to the transcription, for that propositional content is sung or spoken in both cases. So, where a transcription preserves the text of the original work, it is not a transcription by virtue of doing so—faithfulness to this aspect of the original work does not involve a change of medium and it is at least by virtue of its change of medium from the original that the transcription qualifies as a transcription.

II

In this section I discuss the point served by transcription; I discuss the function from which it derives its value and attraction for us. In fact, there seem to be four ways the practice of transcription or its products are likely to be of interest to us. Of these, it is perhaps the second of those discussed that explains the former prevalence of the practice and the fourth that explains the continuing appeal transcriptions hold for us.

In the first instance, transcription may have a pedagogical use. It is used in the teaching and mastery of orchestration, of counterpoint, of harmony, and so on. Exercises in transcription give the student direct and practical experience that cannot be easily obtained in other ways in the handling of musical materials. By transcribing for orchestra a piano piece that is already a transcription of an orchestral work, the student is able to compare his efforts with the composer's. The primary motivation for J. S. Bach's and Mozart's transcriptions of works by Vivaldi would seem to have been pedagogical.

The 'market' for pedagogical uses of transcription has always been too limited, however, to account for the number of transcriptions produced. A more important function of transcription once was to make musical works more readily available than they would have been in their original form. Works were transcribed for the instruments commonly found in the home, which explains the popularity of Intabulierung (for lute) in the fifteenth century and of piano transcriptions in the nineteenth century. (Similarly, the expense and inconvenience of assembling orchestras for training and rehearsal sessions for opera singers, choirs, ballet groups, and concerto soloists accounts for the commonness of piano transcriptions of the orchestral parts of operas, choral works, ballets, and concertos.) Transcriptions were undoubtedly valued for providing greater accessibility to composers' works to a wide audience interested in music. Indeed, it is unlikely the practice of transcription would have achieved the importance it has done if it had not been the case that it served this socially useful function.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that we cannot account for the continuing interest in transcriptions solely in this pragmatic fashion. Stokowski's orchestral transcription of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor for Organ, BWV 565, probably is less accessible than the original, but it is no less interesting or

valuable as a transcription for that fact. A yet more impressive consideration is the following: Nowadays technology has made performances of music more readily available than ever before. Radios, record players, tape players, etc. make performances of a vast variety of music accessible to a wide public. It is easier now to hear music by learning how to turn a knob than by learning how to play the piano. So, if transcriptions attracted us merely as a means of access to the original and not in their own right, we would no longer be concerned to hear or play transcriptions. If transcriptions were like translations—to be rejected in favor of the original where possible—these technological changes would have scotched our interest in and valuing of transcriptions. But this has not happened. This suggests that musical transcriptions are taken to have intrinsic worth and are not merely 'poor substitutes for the real thing'.

One reason for valuing a transcription in its own right might be for the compositional skill shown by the transcriber. But such an interest in a transcription would not explain how it is valued as a transcription; the fact of the work's being a transcription is incidental to that interest. The fact of the work's being a transcription would be relevant, however, where the focus fell on the transcriber's compositional skill as a transcriber in adapting the musical contents of the original to the medium for which the transcription is written. But, though such an interest might lend to a transcription a worth in its own right, it does not explain in general why the activity of transcription should continue to be of relevance and value. Admiring the skill shown by a master of some activity does not at all require one's admiring that activity. One's admiration of the marksmanship of an assassin need not imply any admiration for the activity in which the assassin is engaged.

The fourth and final reason for valuing and taking an interest in transcriptions qua transcriptions explains, I think, the source of their continuing significance to us. As I have mentioned already, transcription is a creative activity (in a way that recording and copying are not). It is inevitable that the transcriber presents the musical contents of the original from a personal perspective, although presenting them in a way that is faithful given that those contents are filtered through a different medium. Because a transcription is more than a mere copy of its model, it reflects on its model through the way it re-presents its model. A transcription cannot help but comment on the original in re-presenting the musical contents of the original, so a transcription invites reconsideration of and comparison with the original. Rather than being valued merely for making the musical contents of their models more accessible, transcriptions are also valued for enriching our understanding and appreciation of the merits (and demerits) of their models.

In the remainder of this section, I sketch an analogy that, it is hoped, will help to clarify and crystallize the points made above. In this analogy the painterly art of portraiture is contrasted with photographic 'snapping' as a parallel to the contrast between transcription and the reproduction (for example on record) of (performances of) music.

The foolproof camera (which, let us suppose, is proof also against the skills of the professional photographer and film developer) now performs the function once fulfilled by the practice of realistic portraiture. If the camera had always been with us it is unlikely that the genre of realistic portraiture would have developed to the extent that it did. But these facts are consistent with one's

now painting a realistic portrait, although it would be strange (admittedly) if one's sole purpose in painting the picture were to record a likeness of the sitter. More importantly, these facts are consistent with a continuing fascination with the realistic portraits of persons with whom one is familiar in 'snaps' or in person. Such an interest, as well as concerning itself perhaps with the painterly skills displayed by the artist, would involve attention to the look of the sitter as that look was perceived by the artist. The interest in the portrait might differ from the pragmatic interest in the 'snap' as showing how the person actually looked. This is evident from the fact that the 'snap' (showing how the person now looks) would cease to be of importance in the presence of the actual person, whereas the portrait (showing how the person now looks) would usually continue to be of as much significance, and might be of much more, in the presence of the actual person. Even where portraiture takes as its aim the faithful depiction of the sitter's appearance, it is in the very nature of the activity that this is achieved creatively. Such a portrait inevitably comments on, as well as recording, the appearance of the sitter. And, hence, the portrait continues to be of interest in the presence of the sitter or in the presence of mechanical reproductions of the sitter's appearance.

III

In this third section I develop a comparison between transcription and performance, especially with respect to the notion of authenticity. In particular, I emphasize how both practices are essentially creative in pursuing the goal of faithfully interpreting the composer's text.

On the account offered so far, transcription involves the interpretation of the composer's work by a transcriber who stands between the composer and his or her audience. Also, the transcriber's aim is to re-create faithfully the composer's work. In these respects the transcriber's role is not unlike that of a performer of the composer's work. Moreover, performance, like transcription, necessarily involves both an appropriate intention and the recognizable preservation of the musical contents of the work. Both performance and transcription take faithfulness to the composer's recorded musical ideas as one of their primary goals and in both cases the realization of this goal requires the exercise of creative initiative. Because transcriptions may be more or less faithful, like performances they may be assessed for their degree of authenticity. Authenticity in transcription is a relative notion that operates within the gap between transcriptions that are barely recognizable as such and transcriptions that preserve the musical content of the original work as fully as is consistent with respecting the characteristics of the medium for which the transcription is written.

Although both the transcriber and the performer take faithfulness to the composer's specification as among their primary aims, the transcriber is less constrained than the performer in the pursuit of this goal. The basis for this discrepancy is not difficult to discern. The composer is able to express in a musical notation many of her intentions as to the way the work is to be performed in virtue of her knowledge of notational conventions, this knowledge being held in common with musicians who perform the composer's score. According to these conventions, some of the composer's expressed intentions are determinative of what must be played in faithfully realizing the work in performance. And, according to these conventions, other of the

composer's expressed intentions are recommendatory only (and not determinative). An ideally authentic performance is a performance that is faithful to what is determined in the musical notation according to the conventions appropriate to the interpretation of that notation. By contrast, the transcriber works in a medium other than that used by the composer and it is not always possible in the medium of the transcription to duplicate what is determinative in the score of the work being transcribed. What is easily and characteristically presented in one medium may not be so readily expressible in another. Whereas the performer can best attempt to realize the composer's musical ideas by rendering the score faithfully, the transcriber has more license to depart from the composer's score in the attempt to present the composer's ideas in a way that takes account of the medium into which they are transcribed. The transcriber has more freedom than does the performer not because the point of each enterprise is different but (rather) because their point is the same. In both cases, the aim of the activity is to mediate between the composer and his or her audience in a way allowing for the faithful presentation of what the composer intended and successfully represented in the notation. The greater freedom of the transcriber acknowledges that the way the goal of faithfulness is achieved differs between performance and transcription as a consequence of the fact that the transcriber works in a musical medium other than that for which the composer wrote. But in both cases a concern with authenticity takes its point ultimately from the authority of authorship, from a concern to present accurately (to an audience) what the composer had 'to say'.

Performance is similar to transcription in another respect: Because the composer's determinative intentions underdetermine the sound of an ideally authentic performance of his or her work, there is a set of ideal performances (and not any single ideal performance) in terms of which the relative authenticity of actual performances is judged. In other words, because any musical notation underdetermines the sound of a faithful performance, different-sounding performances may be equally and ideally authentic. In a similar way, though there must be some common factor (or tolerance across a range of factors) in virtue of which any transcription is recognizable as a transcription of a given work (and hence is a transcription at all), the score of a work underdetermines the score of an authentic transcription; so different transcriptions may be equally and ideally authentic.

In accordance with the above it is not surprising that, for a given work, a transcription into one medium will differ from a transcription into another medium though both transcriptions may be equally authentic. Most popular movements of famous symphonies have been transcribed for brass band and for piano. The 'Ritual Fire Dance' from de Falla's Love the Magician has been transcribed for guitar as well as for piano. Though such transcriptions differ in many ways that reflect the character of their different media, many different transcriptions would be appropriately judged to be highly and equally authentic.

One can also predict that transcriptions into the same medium might differ significantly in many respects without their differing also in their degree of authenticity. Such a case is illustrated by Brahms's and Busoni's transcriptions of J. S. Bach's 'Chaconne' from the Partita No. 2 for Solo Violin, BWV 1004. Both are transcriptions for the piano, they differ markedly, and each might be reasonably judged to be highly authentic. Bach's 'Chaconne' is

extremely demanding technically for the violin, because what is essentially a melodic instrument must constantly play or hint at the chord sequence on which the piece is grounded. If the work were transcribed note for note for the piano its character would be drastically altered. It would sound far too 'thin' in texture for its content. Moreover, because the work would present no difficulties for a competent player, the tension apparent in a performance on the violin would be dissipated in a performance on the piano. Both Brahms and Busoni acknowledged these problems in the way they wrote their transcriptions, but they found quite different solutions for them. Brahms, by the simple expedient of transcribing the work for that special genre 'works for piano left hand', is able to remain very close to Bach's score while creating a transcription that is pianistic (given its genre) and technically demanding to a degree that provides for a tension in performance such as one gets with the original. Busoni, who transcribed the work for piano 'two hands', enriches the texture by the use of octave doublings, etc., so that the transcription is as rich in sound as the original, typically pianistic, and technically difficult. So, both these transcriptions are faithful to the content of the original and both are characteristically pianistic in ways leading both transcriptions to be praised as authentic, but they are very different pieces.

There is yet a further respect in which performance and transcription may be compared and contrasted usefully—each is an intrinsically creative activity. It is because the score of a work underdetermines the sound of a performance of that work that performance is essentially (and not merely incidentally) creative. The creative element in performance is not something added on to the performance after accuracy has been achieved; rather, the artist's creativity is integral to the faithful realization of the work in performance. The act of transforming the notes-as-written into the notes-as-sound involves the performer's bringing more to the work than is (or could be) recorded in the score; so the faithful presentation of the score in performance involves the creative participation of the performer. In a similar way, the role of the transcriber is essentially (and not merely incidentally) creative, because it is the transcriber's job to adapt the composer's score, not to reproduce it, and to adapt it so that it is suitable for the medium into which it is transcribed in order that the composer's musical ideas are preserved rather than distorted by the new medium. This double task of transcription—the faithful presentation of the composer's musical ideas in a way consistent with the medium into which the work is transcribed—provides scope for the creative imagination of the transcriber. Both goals, if either is to be met, must be jointly realized in a single act. To present the composer's ideas faithfully is to reproduce them clearly, and to reproduce them clearly is to present them so that the characteristics of the medium of transcription work effectively toward their clear articulation, which is to write in a manner appropriate to the medium into which the work is transcribed. So, transcription is inherently creative in a way that is analogous to performance.

The creativity of transcription has been illustrated already in the discussion above of Brahms's and Busoni's transcriptions of Bach's 'Chaconne', but further comment is appropriate. Unlike a performance of the work, a transcription is not the less authentic for its systematic unfaithfulness to those aspects of its model that it transforms. Brahms's and Busoni's transcriptions are not the less authentic in being written for the piano. But, in general, an attempt at transcription must preserve the musical contents of the original work if that

attempt is to succeed. Where deviations from the original are necessary as a concession to the medium of transcription and/or where they re-create more effectively the aural experience generated by the original, such deviations might make the transcription more, rather than less, authentic. For example, in transcribing an orchestral work for the piano there need be no loss of authenticity where the effect of the original can be recreated only by specifying that different aggregations of notes be played. This may arise where it is not technically possible to play all the notes of the original on the piano, in which case the transcriber may select only the more important notes (and perhaps those that hint at the missing notes) for the piano. In other cases, the transcriber may be able to achieve the same aural effect only by adding notes. For example, a powerful orchestral unison might best be rendered in octaves on the piano. Sometimes, the transcriber may be able to achieve the appropriate effect only by choosing notes other than those employed in the original. For example, an accompaniment figure used in an orchestral work may be unplayable on the piano and the transcriber may substitute new material fulfilling the same function and generating the same (sort of) sound as the material replaced. And, to go yet further, even where it is possible for the transcriber to use exactly the same notes, it is conceivable that the aural impression of a performance of the original is better created with new material. In transcribing a work for piano, if all that matters at some point is that there be a headlong rush of wildly impetuous sound, then a technically simpler substitute may do the job just as well as an accurate but pianistically awkward copy of the original. Liszt's transcriptions, for example those of Beethoven's symphonies, abound with such imaginative and creative uses of pianistic resources.

A further similarity between transcription and performance follows directly from the fact that each is an inherently creative activity. Just as authenticity in performance is value-conferring in a way acknowledging the creative contribution of the performer in the faithful realization of the composer's specification, so too authenticity in transcription is value-conferring in a way acknowledging the creative contribution of the transcriber in producing a specification of the work for a different medium. It is the performer's and transcriber's creative contributions to the faithful presentation of the composer's musical ideas that are praised. In both cases, this praise takes its point ultimately from an interest in the composer's attempt to create an aesthetically rewarding work.

IV

In this final section I emphasize some of the more important disanalogies between transcription and performance. Performance is ineliminable, and is envisaged as such by the composer, in a way that transcription is not.

Performance is integral to the realization and presentation of musical works to an audience. The composer provides the event specification from which the work takes its identity, but it is the performer who executes this specification and thereby generates tokens of the work. (These points are consistent with cases where the composer is the performer, the performer is his or her own audience, the 'performer' reads the score and creates the 'sound' of a performance in his or her head without touching a musical instrument, and so on.) By contrast, the role of the transcriber is eliminable. A musical work need

not be transcribed as a condition of its being realized and presented to an audience.

The point here is not that technology has done away with a need for transcription while leaving unaffected the need for performance. Technology, facilitating the copying and reproduction of performances, may have reduced the frequency with which new performances are needed or are made. So, the need for performance may be as subject to the influence of technology as is the need for transcription. But the point in distinguishing performance from transcription is this: Composers write for performance but not for transcription; performance is integral to the work as conceived by its creator in a way that transcription is not. So, the activities of the transcriber are, as it were, uninvited and, hence, in need of justification in a way performance is not. That the transcriber brings to the original work a creative dimension is not so obviously grounds for praise as is the creativity shown by the performer because whereas the performer's contribution is anticipated and expected by the composer, the transcriber's contribution is not. How is it, then, that transcription saves itself from the charge of plagiarism or sycophantism, despite its creative aspect? That is, why do we sometimes regard as praiseworthy the transcriber's presentation of the composer's ideas when that presentation is gratuitous? The answer, as outlined in the preceding discussion, is this: transcription is valued not merely as a report of, but also as a commentary on, the composer's original work and, as such, it continues to be of interest even where the original is accessible.