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"Authenticity in Musical Performance"

In this paper I discuss musical performances and their authenticity with respect to the independently identifiable musical pieces of which they are performances.¹

The adjective 'authentic' has a number of meanings that no doubt are related. But I am not here interested in the unity of the concept, nor in the relative primacy of these different meanings. Nor shall I discuss one familiar notion of musical authenticity—that in which a performance is authentic with respect to a style or genre. My limited interest is in the authenticity of musical performances as performances of particular compositions (which are independently identified with event specifications that, in the case of the Western cultural tradition on which I shall concentrate, take the form of musical scores). That is, if I talk of the authenticity of a performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, I am interested in its authenticity as a member of the class of performances recognizable as performances of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and not with it as a member of other classes of performances to which it may also belong, such as that of the nineteenth-century symphony.

The view for which I argue characterizes authenticity in musical performance as follows: A performance that aims to realize the composer's score faithfully in sound may be judged for authenticity. A performance of X is more authentic the more faithful it is to the intentions publicly expressed in the score by the composer (where those intentions are determinative and not merely recommendatory of performance practice). Because the composer's score underdetermines the sound of a faithful performance, the authenticity of any particular performance is judged against (the appropriate members of) a set of ideally faithful performances. As a commendatory term, 'authentic' is used to acknowledge the creative role of the performer in faithfully realizing the composer's specifications.

The chapter is divided into six sections. The first four concentrate on the aim of faithfulness in securing authenticity; as well as an attempt to define authenticity, these sections contain a characterization of what is involved in faithfully realizing a composer's intentions. In the penultimate section I discuss why authenticity in musical performance is value-conferring. In the final section I emphasize the creative nature of the performer's role.

I

¹ Though it might be argued, for example, that rehearsals are not performances, this is a subtlety I ignore.

In this first section I argue that the pursuit of authenticity involves the attempt to produce musical sounds as opposed to the social milieu within which those sounds were originally created.

Over the past fifty years there has been a growing interest in authenticity in musical performance. The same period has also seen a developing interest in the performance of premodern music. These parallel developments are probably related. Where modern music is written for modern instruments and notated in the standard fashion, a high degree of authenticity will be achieved in performance by a competent musician. But the more foreign the styles of performance and the more unfamiliar the instruments employed, the harder will it be for musicians to produce authentic performances without the benefit of scholarly advice and instruction.

A moment's reflection shows that the pursuit of authenticity in musical performance has been highly selective. The price of admission, the dress of the audience, the method by which the program is printed—each of these and much else in the context of music's performance is decidedly modern. The search for musical authenticity takes a very particular direction. A highly authentic performance is likely to be one using instruments contemporary to the period of composition (or replicas of such instruments) in its performance, involving an interpretation of the score in the light of stylistic practices and performance conventions of the time when the work was composed, employing ensembles of the same size and disposition as accord with the composer's specification, and so forth.

The selectivity displayed in the search for authenticity in musical performance has been systematic in a way suggesting that the quest may be characterized as aiming at the production of a particular sound rather than at the production of, for example, the social ambience within which the music would or could be presented by the composer's contemporaries. This point is effectively illustrated as follows: Orchestral music composed in the latter half of the eighteenth century might have been standardly performed in wood-paneled rooms. Nowadays such works would be performed in concert halls. Modern concert halls are designed with modifiable acoustics, the adjustments being made by the use of baffles, etc. In performing music of the period in question, the acoustics of the concert hall would be set with a reverberation period such as one might find in a wood-paneled room containing a small audience. Though the music now is performed in a large hall in front of a large audience, the acoustic properties of the modern building are so arranged that they duplicate the acoustic properties of the sort of room where the music would have been performed in the composer's day. Though one might prefer the intimacy of music performed in salons, I take it that it will be accepted that the use of concert halls that reproduce the acoustic properties of wood-paneled rooms would be considered not merely as an adequate compromise between the demands of authenticity and, say, economic considerations but, instead, would be accepted as a full-blooded attempt at authentic performance.²

² As implied here, the desirability of musical authenticity may sometimes be outweighed by other factors—musical, pragmatic, or even moral. (I assume that arguments against the use of trained castrati in opera seria are of the latter kind.) Of course, where the choice is between no performance at all and a less than ideally authentic performance, the latter may be preferable.

That modern acoustic technology might serve the aim of authenticity in this way suggests strongly that musical authenticity aims at the creation of a particular sound and not at the production of a particular visual, social, or other effect.

Some performances are less authentic for being given in buildings other than that for which the work was written, but this is true only of performances of works written with an ear to the unique acoustic properties of a particular building. That is, it is true of performances of Stravinsky's *Canticum Sacrum* and of many works by Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli, which were written for San Marco in Venice, and it is not true of Verdi's *Aïda*, which was written for the opera house in Cairo, because, whereas the acoustics of the opera house in Cairo are not distinctively different from those of other opera houses, the acoustics of San Marco are unlike those of other buildings. These examples do not count against the point that a concern with the authenticity of a performance is a concern with its sound.

II

In this second section I suggest that one might best hope to make a performance authentic by recreating the musical sound of a performance that might have been heard by the composer's contemporaries. (Why this is a formula for success is a matter considered in the next section.) I argue also that the sound to which an authentic performance aspires is that of a possible, rather than any actual, performance; that is, authenticity in musical performance is judged against an ideal.

So far, I have said a performance is more or less authentic in a way that depends on its sound. One might ask—the sound of what? A musical work is comprised of notes and relationships between them, so an authentic performance of a given work must be a performance that concerns itself with producing the notes that constitute the work. The sound of an authentic performance will be the sound of those notes.

But it is not easy to specify the set of notes that constitute a given work (see Ziff 1973, Sircello 1973, and Walton 1973). The notes recorded in the score are often not the notes the performer should play; there are conventions frequently known both to composers and performers governing ways the written notes are to be modified (for example by accidentals or embellishment). So, an interest in discrepancies between what is written and what is conventionally played is of practical and not merely scholarly significance. Debates about the problems of *musica ficta* in music written pre-1600 strongly reflect a desire to achieve authentic performances of the music in question.

Even where the conventions by which the score should be read are known, it is not always a straightforward matter to say which notes should be played. Consider music written at about the end of the seventeenth century when pitches were as much as a minor third lower than now. The modern performer might play the work at the modern pitch level but vocal and wind parts would then sound strained even if sung or played

brilliantly and correctly.³ Or, the performer might tune down modern instruments, as a result of which their tone will suffer, or transpose orchestral parts, in which case the sound is affected by alterations in fingerings and embouchure, by changes in register, by shifts to harmonics, etc. In view of such difficulties it is understandable that performers have turned to the use of instruments from the period of composition, or to replicas of such instruments, so that vocal and instrumental parts 'lie' comfortably to the voice and hands. The use of such instruments is ultimately justified by the resulting sound of the performance.

However, despite the use of instruments and the appeal to musical conventions from the time of composition, clearly it is inadequate to characterize authenticity in musical performance in terms of the sound heard by the composer's contemporaries. His contemporaries could perform the work in question in ways that were relatively inauthentic.⁴ Typically, this would occur where the performance contained wrong notes or where the composer's specifications were misrepresented in some other way. The musicians who sight-read the overture to *Don Giovanni* from orchestral parts on which the ink was still wet probably gave a performance that was not as authentic as it could have been. Since the performances heard by the composer's contemporaries often were less authentic than was possible, authenticity in musical performance cannot be defined in terms of the sounds actually heard by the composer's contemporaries. This suggests that, in striving for authenticity, the performer aims at an ideal sound rather than at the sound of some actual, former performance.

III

In this third section I consider the relevance of the composer's intentions in an assessment of the authenticity of a performance of the composer's work. I suggest that only those intentions that are accepted by convention as determinative are relevant to judgments of authenticity; other of the composer's intentions or wishes might be ignored in an ideally authentic performance. Because the composer's determinative intentions underdetermine the sound of an ideally authentic performance of 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.

³ Competent musicians do not usually stumble over fast passages, lose the tempo, or produce gross tonal contrasts but, despite this, hard music sounds hard to play (Mark 1980).

⁴ It might be objected to what I have said that judgments of authenticity apply only to performances that are historically removed from the period of composition, or culturally removed from the place or style of composition, or in some other way distanced from the composition. On my view, judgments of authenticity tend to reduce to judgments of accuracy. But this does not mean that a performance by the composer's contemporaries (for whom the score is 'transparent' to the conventions by which it should be read) is not distanced from the work in a way that leaves room for judgments of authenticity. Performance involves a creative element that is integral and not merely appended to the faithfulness of the performance. This creative element distances any particular performance from the work of which it is a performance.

There are conventions in terms of which musical scores are to be read. The composer is able to express her intentions in a musical notation only because the conventions for realizing in sound that notation are known both to the composer and to the performer of the day. Those conventions provide not only a vehicle for but also a limitation on the intentions that may be expressed in the score. Not all of the intentions that the conventions allow to be expressed are determinative of what can be required in the name of authenticity. Non-determinative intentions (as expressed in the score or in other ways) have the status of recommendations. I take it that exact metronome indications are non-determinative, in that tempo may be varied to suit the performance conditions. Both the composer and the performing musician who is her contemporary are usually familiar with the conventions and know which of the expressed intentions are determinative and which are not determinative of that at which an authentic performance must aim.

The conventions by which musical scores are to be read change over time in ways affecting what the composer may determine with respect to the performer's attempt to produce an authentic performance. Phrasing was not notationally determined in the early seventeenth century but was notationally determined by the nineteenth century. At some time, before the convention was established, composers notated phrasings would have been rightly understood as recommendations for, rather than as determinative of, what should be played. At that time, the composer's indications of phrasing might be disregarded without any diminution in the authenticity of the performance (though the performance may have been less good as a result on other grounds). (These changes in convention sometimes arise from composers' rebelling against the existing conventions, but such rebellions reject only a few conventions at any one time and do so against a wider background of accepted conventions.) Because conventions of determinativeness change through time, the conventions appropriate to the authentic performance of a score are those with which the composer would have taken musicians of the day to be familiar. It is this fact that explains what I have emphasized in the previous section—that an attempt at an authentic performance is likely to be successful by aiming to recreate the sound of an accurate performance by the composer's contemporaries.⁵

⁵ The claim that the conventions of score reading and/or performance practice establish which of the composer's publicly expressed intentions are determinative may be defeated where there are grounds for believing that the composer was not familiar with the conventions or that the composer believed that the musicians who would perform the piece were not familiar with all the relevant conventions. These double-take and triple-take situations are unusual. An example: If the composer had only ever heard violins with a thin and reedy tone and by the indication 'violin' on the score meant to designate instruments of that type, then the fact that Guarneri's violins were extant at the time would not license their use in performances of the composer's works in the name of authenticity, not even if the composer had wished that the instruments she knew as violins had a richer, fruitier tone. (To avoid such problem cases I should relativize all claims about the role of the relevant conventions to the composer's knowledge of those conventions and beliefs about the performers' knowledge of those conventions.)

Sometimes it is possible to infer from what is written in the score that the composer would have preferred to write something else had the instruments or the performers been capable of accommodating her intentions. For example, a sequential pattern might be interrupted by an octave transposition where a continuation of the pattern would have exceeded the singer's or the instrument's range. In these cases, it is appropriate to talk of the composer's wishes (rather than intentions). Sometimes nowadays, with the wider range of some instruments and the greater proficiency of many musicians, these wishes could be realized and there would be a musical point to doing so. However, such wishes have no more a bearing on the authenticity of a performance than do the composer's non-determinative intentions. Both the work and the performance may be better for the modification, but not because the alteration makes the performance more authentic. If it were accepted that mere wishes could set the standards of authenticity, it would be accepted also that many works could not have been performed authentically by the composer's contemporaries and some could not be performed authentically at all.

Clearly, in taking the line I have, I must deny that authenticity in musical performance is judged against the sound of some particular performance that was envisaged by the composer. I have said that not all of the composer's expressed intentions are determinative of what must be accurately rendered in an ideally authentic performance, in which case I must also hold that the sound of an ideally authentic performance is underdetermined by the intentions in terms of which its authenticity is judged. The way we talk of authenticity favors my view, I claim, rather than the view that authenticity is measured against the sound of a performance that the composer had in mind. First, in reaching judgments about the authenticity of performances, we do not seem to face the epistemological difficulties that would inevitably arise if the standard for authenticity was a sound that may never have been realized. Second, rather than taking composer's performances as definitive models that performers are obliged to copy slavishly, we take them to be revealing of what we expect to be an interesting interpretation. In a performance, the composer may make her intentions as regards the sound of a performance more explicit than could be done in the score, but what is made explicit is not thereby made definitive. Other performers are left with the job of interpreting the score for themselves.⁶ Third, we would not (as we do) accept that different-sounding performances of a single work might be equally and ideally authentic if authenticity were judged against the sound of a particular performance imagined by the composer. It is (a member of) a set of ideal performances against which the authenticity of an actual performance is judged.

This last point deserves emphasis. Because an ideally authentic performance faithfully preserves the composer's determinative intentions and because those intentions underdetermine the sound of a faithful performance, different-sounding performances may be equally and ideally authentic. For example, many combinations of vocal and instrumental resources are compatible with what is determinative in the score

⁶ A pertinent discussion of musical authenticity and the relevance of composers' intentions may be found in Taruskin 1982. The status of the composer's intentions is interestingly discussed in Dipert 1980b. The philosophical literature on the subject of artist's intentions is immense. Two of my own papers bear on the topic—see Davies 1982 and 1983a.

of Guillaume de Machaut's Messe de Nostre Dame. Even if the composer wrote for a particular combination of singers and instruments (such as were assembled for the coronation of Charles V in 1364, perhaps) the conventions of the day allow that performances by quite different combinations would be no less authentic. As long as two performances are faithful to the score and are consistent with the performance practices in terms of which it is to be rendered, they may be equally authentic while sounding different. Compare, for example, performances of Beethoven's symphonies as conducted by Klemperer and Toscanini, both of whom have been praised as interpreters of the works. Klemperer tends to take the pieces at the slowest tempo consistent with Beethoven's instructions and he emphasizes the structural qualities of the music so that, for example, climaxes at relatively weak structural points receive less weight than do those in structurally important places, even where the dynamics indicated in the score are the same in both places. Toscanini takes the works at a brisk tempo and concentrates on the drama or beauty of each individual passage, investing every note and phrase with its full potential of power. Without Klemperer's staid approach, the grandeur and architectonic qualities of Beethoven's music could not be presented. Without Toscanini's volatile approach, the dynamism and verve of Beethoven's music could not be appreciated. So, the ideally authentic performance has no particular sound because it is no particular performance. Rather, the standard against which the authenticity of performances of a work is judged is comprised of a set of performances each of which is faithful to the composer's determinative intentions.

In view of the above I offer the following account: A performance will be more authentic if it successfully (re-)creates the sound of a contemporary performance of the work in question such as could be given by good musicians playing good instruments under good conditions (of rehearsal time, etc.), where 'good' is relativized to the best of what was known by the composer to be available at the time, whether or not those resources were available for the composer's use.

IV

In this fourth section I analyze musical performance as involving both certain intentions on the part of the performer and a relationship of invariance between the composer's sound specification and the performer's realization of that score. Performing is briefly contrasted with improvising and fantasizing. The point of authenticity is said to be the faithful realization of the composer's score in sound.

The notion of performance must be analyzed in terms of the performer's intentions. If the production of some set of sounds is a performance of X, then it must be the intention of the producer of the sounds to generate a sound faithful to an X-specification. However, the intention to perform X is defeasible; where the sound produced is not recognizable as a realization of the X-specification the attempt at performance has failed. The notion of authenticity operates within the range set on the one hand by performances that are barely recognizable as such and on the other hand by performances that are ideally accurate. The closer a performance, recognizable as such, comes to the sound of an ideal performance of the work in question, the more authentic is that performance.⁷

⁷ It is controversial, I realize, to regard a barely recognizable performance as authentic. Of course, the level of authenticity expected in a competent performance

I have suggested that there must be, as well as the appropriate intentions, an invariant relationship between the composer's specification and a performance of that specification as a necessary condition of the success of the attempt at performance. There must be some common factor (or tolerance across a range of features) necessary for a performance's being a performance of X rather than of Y, and necessary for different-sounding performances all to be performances of the same X. Now, clearly the standard by which an attempted performance is minimally recognizable as such falls far short of a standard that identifies the work with the totality of notes constituting it. By this standard only a perfectly accurate performance could count as a performance of the work in question, yet we all know that the school orchestra may play wrong notes, play out of tune, and fail to play together while performing what is unmistakably Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. It is because musical works are comprised of large numbers of notes, not all of which contribute equally to the overall effect, that the identity of the work survives the performance of wrong notes. So, what is invariant between performances of the same work is patterns of notes (or aspects, *gestalts*, emergent properties, functions, of notes) plus a tolerance for deviation from these patterns. Musical works are so complex that there are patterns of notes within patterns of notes and these various patterns may remain recognizable despite changes in or omissions of individual notes. The standard of adequacy that must be met in a successful attempt to perform the composer's score need not be one that requires a high degree of accuracy.⁸ It is within the gap between a set of ideally faithful interpretations of a work and of barely recognizable performances of that work that the notion of authenticity operates. A performance is the more authentic the further beyond the minimum standard of adequacy it falls. The more faithful is a musical performance to the work's specification the more authentic is that performance.

The difference between a performance of X, an improvisation on X, and an X-inspired fantasia lies in the musician's intentions, the aim being to realize a higher level of invariance with respect to the work's specification in performance than in improvisation and in improvisation than in fantasizing. Whereas authenticity is appropriately predicated of performances of particular works, it is not appropriately predicated of improvisations or fantasias inspired by particular works; that is, authenticity applies only where there is intended to be more rather than less invariance between the specification of the work and its rendition in sound. This suggests that the notion of authenticity applies where a 'text' (usually a written score in literate music

is far higher than the minimum at which a performance is barely recognizable as such. A minimally recognizable performance is inauthentic when authenticity is relativized to a standard of acceptability at the level of a competent performance.

⁸ The same kind of point may be made with respect to other musical parameters. A performance on the piano of J. S. Bach's Concerto in D minor for Harpsichord, BWV 1052, is a performance of it, despite the change of instrument, and not the performance of a transcription of Bach's work. Conventions in Bach's time allowed quite free interchange between keyboard instruments and, in view of this, merely changing the solo instrument does not transform the work enough for the performance to count as that of a transcription. (One does not transcribe a musical work merely by altering a word in its title, which, in effect, is what happens here.)

cultures and a model rendition in oral music cultures) is interpreted by a mediator who stands between the composer and his audience, and where the point of the interpretation is to render faithfully to the audience what is determined of the sound of the performance in the work's specification. A concern with the authenticity of performances of particular works ultimately takes its interest from a more fundamental concern with the authority of authorship.

A shift of focus to music that is primarily improvisational (i.e. most jazz, a substantial amount of non-Western music and some recent 'classical' music) helps to bring out the point. In such music, where the composer creates a cipher lending itself to improvisational manipulation, we are more likely to be concerned with the authenticity of the style of the performance of any given work than with its authenticity as a performance of that particular work. The less the sound of the performance is determined in a faithful realization of the composer's specification, the less we are concerned with the type of authenticity in performance I have been discussing (and the more the musicians are rated above composers). The less the composer has a hand in the final outcome, the less is a concern with musical authenticity a concern with the authority of authorship.

V

In this fifth section I consider the way authenticity in musical performance is valued. I suggest that though such authenticity would not be valued were it not a means to an independently valued end—the end of presenting the composer's interesting musical ideas—nevertheless, authenticity in musical performance is not valued as a means to this end.

Beyond the level of an acceptably competent performance, authenticity is value-conferring. A musical performance is better for its being more authentic (other things being equal). Because we have an aesthetic concern with the musical interest of the composer's ideas, and because those musical ideas must be mediated by performance, we value authenticity in performance for the degree of faithfulness with which the performance realizes the composer's musical conception as recorded in the score. I am not maintaining that authenticity in performance takes its value from the worth of the musical content contributed by the composer. Rather, my point is this: Were it not for the fact that composers set out to write aesthetically rewarding works, and were it not for the fact that they are usually successful in this, we would not value authenticity in musical performances as we do. But, in any particular instance, authenticity in performance is valued independently and irrespective of the aesthetic value of the work itself. A performance is better for a higher degree of authenticity (other things being equal) whatever the merits of the composition itself. A performance praiseworthy for its authenticity may make evident that the composer wrote a work with little musical interest or merit. It is the creative skill required of the performer in faithfully interpreting the composer's score that is valued in praising the authenticity of performances of that score.⁹

⁹ Indulging in some armchair sociobiology: It is perhaps not surprising in a social species such as ours—which is concerned with successful communication and for which there can be no guarantee that any particular attempt at communication will not fail—that what facilitates communication becomes valued for its own sake and

Of course, authenticity is not the only quality for which a performance might be valued. Where a relatively inauthentic performance is highly valued, it is valued in spite of its inauthenticity. Thus, Schnabel's recorded performances of the Beethoven sonatas are well regarded despite the wrong notes they contain.

VI

In this final section I emphasize how creative is the role of the performer in faithfully realizing the composer's specification. In developing the point, a contrast is drawn between performing and copying.

The performer transforms the notes-as-written into the notes-as-sounds. In talking casually of the notes of a piece, and thereby obscuring this distinction, one might easily lose sight of the creativity of the role enacted by the performer in faithfully converting the one into the other. The sounded notes created by the performer go far beyond the bare peg that the composer provides and on which the musicians hang their art. An authentic performance concerns itself with the production of the notes that constitute the piece and that the composer specified, but the notes-as-sounds produced by the performer involve subtleties of attack, decay, dynamics, tone, and so on that cannot be captured in any notation composers are likely to use. The written notes and the way they are played come together inseparably in the notes-as-sounds, and it is in no way to undervalue the role of the composer as the specifier of the notes-as-written to acknowledge that the musician brings something original to the notes-as-written in rendering them into sound (Harrison 1978). The creative role of the performer, rather than involving a departure from the concern to realize faithfully the composer's intentions, is integral to the execution of that concern.

What is more, rather than consisting of mere aggregations of notes, music is comprised of themes, chords, subjects, answers, sequences, recapitulations, developments, motifs, accompaniments, and so forth. These are *gestalts* (or aspects, etc.) and not mere successions of notes. Because their articulation in sound owes as much or more to the performer as to the composer, it can be seen how extensive and important is the creative role of the performer.

One way of bringing out the creative role of the performer as a necessary intermediary between the composer and the audience is by contrasting performing and copying. Copying need not be intentional; copying may be a mechanical process performed by a machine. And where copying is intentional, the aim of faithfulness is to be contrasted with that of creativity. By contrast, performance is always intentional, because the performer must bring more than is supplied by the composer to a performance that is faithful to the composer's ideas. Performing must go beyond what is given by the composer in order to present that accurately. But nothing not present in the original need be brought to copying. A machine might copy a performance (for

apart from the worth of the contents it helps to communicate. (Not that I think that music can be usefully compared to a language with respect to its meaning—see Davies 1983b.)

example, by recording it on tape), but performing is done only by agents.¹⁰ And copies are authentic only in the sense contrasted with forgery or fakery, whereas performances are authentic in the sense that has here been under discussion. Authenticity is an attribute acknowledging the way the interpretation of a musical score is both necessary in the presentation of the music-as-sounds and is also inherently creative. Authenticity, as a praiseworthy attribute, acknowledges the ineliminability of the performer's contribution to the sound of the performance.

¹⁰ I do not deny that copying by hand an illuminated manuscript might require patience, skill, etc. in a way that suggests that copying is anything but mechanical in this instance. Nor do I wish to deny that there are imaginable cases in which computers are programmed to produce sounds where we would be tempted to say a machine performs. (Just as there are cases in which the musician performs on a violin without our saying the violin performs, so there are cases in which musicians perform on computers—but the example to be imagined is not of this type.) But if there were such computers, talk of them as machines would begin to look inapposite; at such a point one begins thinking in terms of intelligent or agent-like 'machines'.