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PERFORMANCE AS IDEOLOGY
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Schools of thought which link of issues of musical composition with wider social and political concerns have been extensively developed in many parts of the world, and especially in Germany, though the very fact of making such links still remains a highly contentious issue. To a great many people in the classical music world in particular, it can be almost sacreligious to suggest their implied pure aestheticism is in actuality by no means independent of the social world within which they exist. Certainly in Britain and America, discourse about music-making that seeks to relate abstract musical concerns to social processes tends to be met with a large degree of hostility, which to me speaks volumes about the dominant class composition of those able to participate in that musical scene.

Under the influence of the writings of Theodor Adorno writings in particular, however, a discourse in this fashion exists with respect to contemporary composition. Whether or not one accepts some of his paradigms or the particular musicological methodologies that he inherited from German high bourgeois culture is of course a separate issue. For those engaging with folk musics, jazz and other popular music, it is hardly so controversial to examine the nature of the commercial infrastructure which enables musical production and consider how this might affect the actual musical results. In jazz in particular, the demarcation between 'composer' and 'performer' is nothing like as clear cut as it is the 'classical' field, and this sort of discourse might equally well be applied to either type of musical worker.

I wish to take this sort of debate further, with a particular focus on classical music which is my own primary field. I want to suggest ways in which we might find more viable ways of engaging with *performance* as a specifically *ideological* field of aesthetic activity. In the relatively short space of time I have today, I can't possibly offer a comprehensive model for such study. What instead I wish to do is simply to suggest some ways in which common aesthetic concerns mask deeper ideological assumptions, so as to imply how this attitude might fruitfully be applied. Above all, I want to suggest the role performance might have as part of the process of musical *appropriation,* to my mind a much more fundamental role than has hitherto been assumed.

This has become a concern to me in particular from observing certain aesthetic tendencies within the field of contemporary classical music, my own specialist field. I have observed progressively how the performance aesthetics surrounding radical modernist work, as expressed in critical discourse and other more informal arenas, has come to privilege those styles and attitudes that blunt and distill this radicalism by various means. To me, this is part of (perhaps unconscious) strategy to render the very immediacy and potency of modernist concerns as little more than some commodified 'style', no different to any other supermarket product, as befits post-modern consumerist ideologies. To explain how this occurs would require more time than I have today, and a detailed examination of comparative performances of some modernist works. I want instead to outline some developments in performing

aesthetics in the latter half of the 20th century, so as to suggest ways of perceiving their ideological determinants. The implications for music of all eras should hopefully become apparent.

As a practising performer myself, an impetus to engage with these issues stemmed from a gradual realisation of the situation that Sartre described with respect to the 19th century French novelists – writing for a bourgeoisie who in reality they detested. I wouldn't by any means wish to make ridiculous claims for some revolutionary potential in musical performance. Nonetheless, one's audience is frequently constituted from the reactionary bourgeoisie – for a socialist musician, surely to deliver the type of performance that causes no disturbance within this class's complacent and self-serving view of culture would be a form of complicity and possible hypocrisy?

An aesthetic debate around performance and its objectives has become relatively sophisticated in the classical field in the last few decades, as a result of the thrashing out of charged positions relating to the phenomenon of 'historically-informed performance'. This movement, which has come to prominence in the post-war era, constituted a break with the notion that one essentially interprets a musical text in the light of whatever the performance aesthetics of one's time happen to me. This previous conviction relied upon an idea of continual progress which for obvious reasons had lost some currency in all cultural fields in the aftermath of the second world war. At the same time performers were rediscovering a wide range of early music, for which some study of performance practice was necessary in order to make any sense of the texts that were bequeathed. So extensive study was embarked upon into conventions of interpretation, instruments used, all sorts of stylistic factors, which naturally led to a greater study of the social and cultural context within which the music was performed. This process gradually extended through the classical repertoire until such metholodogies were applied to the more standard repertoire, including the music of Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and beyond. When radically different approaches were then being offered in the context of the repertoire which was the mainstay of most other performers, it was inevitable that battle-lines would be drawn, especially as the new performers could claim some ideal of 'historical authenticity' to validate their approaches.

As a result, deep questions were raised about both the possibility and the value of attaining some sort of historical 'authenticity', for reasons that relatively clear to understand. It was asked whether we can possibly imagine how music sounded in its own time, conditioned as we are to hear everything that has occurred in the interim period (including in non-classical music). The generally empirical methodology (involving extensive study of primary source documents, including treatises, composers' letters, first-hand accounts, study of historical instrument manufacture, etc.) that was generally applied also came under rigorous scrutiny, raising deeper questions of historiography. Some critics would challenge the alleged claims of historical verisimilitude claimed by the early historically-aware performers, pointing out that their methods could only reveal a very fragmentary picture, and was excessively biased in favour of that performance information that happened to be written down. A great deal of information conveyed merely through oral tradition, not to mention unconscious conventions rarely questioned by performers of the previous historical times, could never really be ascertained using these methods. One might see

a parallel with attempts to re-enact historical modes of pronunciation and diction, with similar difficulties. Over and above this, as anyone learning a foreign language knows, the personalised deviations that a native speaker makes use of can be as defining an attribute of the language as that which can be summarised in terms of 'rules'. As a consequence, it has been suggested that historically-aware performers, by the very nature of their endeavour, tend to situate a work of music primarily within a field of generalised historical conventions in a manner that overshadows the individuality of a particular composer and work.

Another important question that has been raised concerns the value of locating a musical work in the past rather than the present. Would such works not be rendered more amenable to a musical museum culture (which bourgeois listeners might value all the more) as a result of such processes? Should we not be instead concentrating on what these works mean 'now' rather than 'then'? This question is somewhat more multifaceted than it appears in the arguments of the protagonists, I believe. Since relatively early in the 20th century, there has been an unprecendented move on the part of performers away from a primary engagement with music of their own time, as had existed in previous eras. The vast majority of classical performers and students nowadays will perform a repertoire vastly dominated by music written from a period approximately from the mid 17th-century until the mid-20th at best, with the occasional foray into earlier or later repertoire. As such, the idioms they develop are predicated upon this work, and contemporary perceptions of it, rather than deriving from the music composed in their own time. Some would say that a certain late-romantic style of performance, albeit with various modifications, became 'frozen in time' at a certain point towards mid-century, divorced from the new idioms required by modernist developments in composition. This style perhaps had a potency and a contemporaneity in the earlier 20th century from which it originated, but subsequently descended into the level of reified mannerism. Those who choose to passively inhabit this style of course have little interest in the inner dialectics that existed when it was itself a vibrant and living concern, connected to contemporary reality, rather than the empty nostalgia for idealised past times that has come to represent since then.

The point I am trying to make here is that the question of relating past music to 'now' would be more viable if we could speak of an active tradition of contemporary music making, concentrating on the works of our own time. Of course there is such a field, of which I count myself part, but it continues to exist on the margins of classical music-making. Some of the protagonists in the historically aware field, most notably the conductor Nicolaus Harnoncourt, have argued this point most cogently, maintaining the need for critical engagement and study of past idioms when living musical traditions no longer exist in the manner they did in the past. Critics of this movement, most notably the American writer Richard Taruskin, claim that most supposedly historically-aware performances are highly selective in their use of historical data, looking primarily for that which they can find which corresponds to a modernistic aesthetic. Thus modernity is presented under the auspices of antiquity. Now Taruskin is in many senses an anti-modernist ideologue, and his arguments need to be viewed in light of this fact. Whilst recognising that some of his specific examples certainly warrant attention, I would suggest that one can turn his convictions on their head. If one views musical modernism not as an isolated stylistic moment, as Taruskin might like to, but rather as an extension of various musical aspects that reach back far in history, then there is no reason to suppose that

Harnoncourt et al are doing other than illuminating this deeper modernist history. This is of course not what a reactionary ideologue like Taruskin would like to believe, conflicting as it does with his implied view of musical history in terms of isolated individualistic romantic expression transcending its time and place, against which the dialectical interactions that modernism forced onto the aesthetic agenda appear as a temporary aberration.

Taruskin associates both historically-informed and modernistic performance (for him the two are relatively synonymous) with qualities of objectivity and geometry. One can often find in historically-aware performance such qualities as regularity of rhythm and pulse, acuity of accentuation , and an emphasis upon clarity of line and individual parts even within orchestral performance, certainly in comparison to late romantic styles. Harnoncourt has written of the clear sense of hierarchies, of line, part-writing, harmonic and rhythmic relationships, etc. that were implicit and understood within music of the baroque and classical eras in particular. Again I wish to look at the possible ideological connotations of these things. It could be claimed that an elucidation of the clear hierarchical structures in this music represents some nostalgia for a world where classes, genders, races were clearly stratified (ethnicity can have a direct musical representation as for example in the use of Turkish music in the work of Mozart and Beethoven). So a performance that brings these things out might return us to such a world where 'everyone knew their place', as opposed to the more complex reality of today, represented in music by more fluid and problematic inner interactions. But I think this is untrue. On one hand, I believe the inner hierarchies implicit in late romantic performance idioms to be every bit as fixed and immutable, for reasons I don't have time to elaborate here. But the earlier music that Harnoncourt is referring to is by no means 'passive' in the sense that Adorno suggests. On the contrary, it inhabits a hierarchical idiom and problematises it. Beethoven's music, to my mind, does not represent an organic closed totality; on the contrary it sets up highly dialectical relationships between musical materials, on many levels and sub-levels, in a manner that is by no means brought to a tidy conclusion by the end of a piece. This is a fundamental part of Beethoven's visionary modernity which if not dampened down in performance, can present a very different view of the composer and his work than that the culture industry prefers, by which he moves and stirs the listener, but rarely leaves them in type of uncomfortable or questioning state. When the inner hierarchies in Beethoven and others' music are played down in performance, so is the composer's critical and dialectical engagement with these very hierarchies, with result that the whole work becomes more mellifluous in nature. By re-etching the hierarchies, Harnoncourt could be seen to be viewing the work more readily in terms of its critical relationship to its time and place, which in a Benjamin-like manner I would suggest increases its ability to project into the present.

But this depends of course on the ways in which the hierarchies are enacted and the individual piece's relationship to them. The ideas of the German theorist and nationalist Heinrich Schenker most definitely privileged hierarchical musical organisation, but with the crucial caveat that all the inner dialectics of a work were goal-oriented towards a final resolution. As such, a piece is dialectical from moment to moment, but in totality is a closed and self-contained object, whose interaction with anything outside of itself is profoundly undialectical. In this sense, Schenker (who supplied some notes on performance aesthetics in the light of this) advocates a view

of (primarily German) music which is perfectly amenable to the needs of the entertainment industry, however inwardly complex the works themselves may be. In general, it should be clear that I don't believe issues of authenticity or verisimilitude to be those of primary importance; rather we would do better to examine the very social purpose towards which these ideologies are enlisted. The ways in which this social relation is made manifest can as much a result of the motivation behind the methodologies as the methodologies themselves.

Contemporary views of musical history commonly privilege the ideal of the 'great man', who 'transcends their time and place'. Understandably, feminist critics have been amongst the first to criticise this ideological viewpoint of artistic creation. Sometimes this has been from a point of view that is sceptical towards such individualism and as a result placing greater value upon more collective forms of music-making (this viewpoint is at the heart of the, to my mind highly misguided and naïve, arguments of the American feminist critic Susan McClary). Types of performance (not to mention contexts of programming) which present a work as a particular instance of a more generalised practice could be said to downplay such individualist ideologies (the cults of 'alienated masculinity' in the eyes of McClary and her followers). The individual work is then viewed more as a historical artefact rather than a 'great work of art'; it has been suggested that some of the qualities commonly associated with such works that connotate 'greatness' are as much the result of particular schools of performance practice, which provide such an aura, as anything more specific to the work itself. I will return to this point.

But a diametrically opposed ideological viewpoint is also possible, if one feels an affinity with the ideas of Adorno, who McClary cites but seems little to appreciate. The very interaction of the subjective will within the field of historical cultural practice is precisely what enables the dialectical nature for a work, and (with a nod in the direction of Walter Benjamin's view on German tragic drama) makes it possible for such a work to project into the present. In Adorno's view, an art work which simply inhabited the conventions of its time undialectically, was 'passive' and had no critical function whatsoever; worse it espoused a deindividualising aesthetic which Adorno came to associate with the authoritarian personality and fascistic tendencies.

A superficial type of artistic individualism, which Adorno located in jazz (though I believe his comments on the subject were too sweeping), involved a change in surface details while the deeper conventions and structure remained an absolute constant. This can of course be observed in many of the products of the culture industry today, notably in some popular music through a move away from the cult of the individual 'star' in favour of more generalised 'styles' (house, rave, jungle, garage, techno, etc.). Individual variations within these stylistic categories are of extremely secondary importance compared to the overarching and clearly identifiable nature of the styles themselves. It is almost as if the pretences of individual emancipation have been discarded in favour of the naked promotion of a wholly manufactured product.

McClary examines gospel music, and in particular looks at the nature of individual solos within the genre. She concludes that for all the ornamental variety that the soloist exhibits at such moments, ultimately their solo serves to reinforce the underlying harmonic patterns that exist also in the choruses. So the soloist never ultimately strays from the group identity, they simply offer some decorative variation

upon it. This to McClary is collectivist and good. Adorno observes a similar process in jazz, but the value judgement he applies is as different as could be imagined. The absolute necessity that a soloist never strays too far from the underlying patterns is to him indicative of the undialectical nature of the relationship between soloist and ensemble, and as such passive and dehumanising. Adorno's particular modus operandi of analysing music in this way still shows, in my opinion, the limitations of his high-bourgeois training, taking insufficient account of such matters as timbre or vocal/instrumental inflection that for example demonstrate a most pronouncedly individualistic quality in the trumpet playing of Louis Armstrong, say. Nonetheless, one only has to look at how readily the culture industry appropriates such forms of so-called collectivist music-making to feel some scepticism towards McClary's espousal of their supposedly subversive potential. Of course the very harmonic patterns themselves contained in gospel and other music can and indeed did enter into a critical engagement with the conventions they inherited, but this does not seem to be the reason for McClary's celebration of them. One could potentially make similar claims for numbers sung by members of the Hitler Youth or the Klu Klux Klan, say, as McClary does about gospel. In this sense McClary's positive view of collectivism speaks more about cults of conformity in American society, beneath the veneer of pseudo-individualism that such a society likes to propagate, then of any genuinely subversive potential. Like many a middle-class American feminist, she presents her own American petty-bourgeois values as being those of 'everywoman'. She succeeds in saying much more about the sanctioned ideologies in her elite circle than any deeper feminist concerns.

What I am arguing is very general, and I would like to play you two performances of a work to give a concrete representation of the processes I believe to be at work. This is the Schubert Gb major Impromptu, the third piece from the D899 set. I will play you a bit from two performances, firstly that by Edwin Fischer, made in 1938, the second by Lambert Orkis, made in 1989. Fischer plays a concert grand (I do not know the exact make) of a type which is in most essential characteristics relatively similar to those common to the concert platforms today; Orkis plays a 1826 Conrad Graf piano, of a type that would have been highly familiar to Schubert in the Vienna of his day.

[Play excerpts]

I think you'll agree with me that these two performances present a very different view of the music. A great many mainstream schools of piano playing since the early 20th century advocate a style of performance in which one singular voice should generally be foregrounded against others which take a much less prominent view. This is at the heart of the ideal of the 'singing line'; it would be equivalent to demanding the singular prominence of a soloist (who of course can vary) in an orchestra or choir. If this were to be found in a choir, I think one would have little difficult in discerning an implicit social differentiation between the solo singer or singers and the rest of the members. I don't see why this should be any different in the context of a polyphonic piano piece, and thus why it should be any the less connotative of a world which values a few 'special' individuals as being of much greater importance than the rest of the great multitude of humanity; this is typical of petit-bourgeois ideology.

Fischer's performance epitomises what has come to be seen as a type of 'old-world charm', with an unbroken melodic line, maximum continuity, melody always in the foreground, and a type of pathos that could be seen today as sentimental. In Orkis, on the other hand, there is a more intricate relationship between the different parts, the accompaniment figures don't merely underline the melody but interact in a manner that is more dialectical (the attitude to voicing and the lesser sustaining power of the instrument he plays on are crucial here), and much more striking contrasts of texture and timbre (not least through the much greater tonal shift provided by the una corda on the instrument he plays). Fischer's is a performance to sink back, languish and lose oneself in reverie about, whereas Orkis forces a different engagement on the part of the listener with a more complex and occasionally dark reality; this performance has a unity, certainly, but many tensions entailed are by no means resolved comfortably by the time of the final tonic chord. To me, the latter speaks much more about the Vienna that Schubert inhabited, riven by immense poverty, political instability, anti-Semitism, total ostracization of homosexuals, etc.; his consciousness can hardly have been untouched by such factors. In Fischer's performance, on the other hand, I hear an uncritical affirmation of a society that did relatively little for Schubert in his lifetime, but now wants to celebrate his music as the epitome of that culture. In short, Orkis's performance seems much more 'real', and in the sense of representing to my ears a more 'authentic' (!) representation of the individual living in society, is much more genuinely personal than an attitude of nostalgic individualism could attain.

It's highly unlikely that these sorts of ideologies are the result of conscious decisions towards such ends on the parts of the performers, but conscious intention is a very limited concept. The individual performers are in part products of a multitude of determinants, including the dominant ideologies of their own time, which affect their own consciousness. This is not of course to deny the possibility and value of some subjective interaction with such determinants, which I believe even Fischer enacts to some extent within his rather kitschy view of Schubert.

In order to accept the importance of 'cult' composers (or of 'cult' performers), requires a belief that these individuals are somehow 'special' (i.e. somehow 'better people', or more 'interesting'); therefore their own totally inner worlds are a window onto some higher state of consciousness. This is where the notion of art as simple self-expression utterly falls down, in my opinion; it stands as a typical late-romantic affectation that hardly existed in any such form before, and which modernism rightly reacted against. The most intensely personal of music of the last few centuries still embodies an engagement on the part of the composer, whose relationship with the society and culture they inhabit may be askew or alienated, but no less of a relationship itself. These individuals exist 'in the world' rather than retreating into a solipsistic personal mythology of their own. The early romantics saw self-expression and irrationality as a reaction to the formal structures, cultural and social, that had preceded them; this quintessentially dialectical and engaged relationship was emblematic of radical bourgeois consciousness which found its manifestation in the culture of the time. By the time of the consolidation of the position of the bourgeoisie, perhaps to be located most prominently after the failed revolutions of 1848, such self-expression had a very different meaning indeed.

But I find that this sort of engagement in the early romantics can still be meaningful and powerful nowadays, when it isn't all filtered through a late-romantic performing

tradition, reducing the music to the type of naive individualism that the culture industry finds serves its own purpose best (and best fulfills the unspoken perception of art as little more than an entertainment given a certain veneer of high-class respectability).

The uses of music for political propaganda are well known – I believe that Beethoven's music was used to this end by Churchill, Hitler and Stalin. One might therefore conclude that the music is ideologically neutral, as it seems to be able to be equally easily appropriated for such different political ideologies. But I don't believe this to be case, it is rather a particular type of *performance* of Beethoven that can be used to these ends, above all when that presents the music as self-contained and 'closed' in the manners I was describing before. And of course other means are regularly used for such purposes, including the extraction of choice snippets as compared to the more intricate arguments that are presented over a work's span. But even when appropriating short, complete, works, performance can play a fundamental part in rendering music amenable in these terms. One socialist comrade bleakly suggested to me that anything can be appropriated one way or another, so there is little point in any artist attempting to resist it. I don't share this pessimistic outlook, which requires a faith in the relative immutability of meaning in an original 'text'. One example in this respect that I have heard cited is the use of the 'Red Flag', which became a mocking signature tune for the 1980s comedy series 'Citizen Smith', about a self-styled popular revolutionary living in a suburban environment, whose deluded sense of the importance of his own activities is at the heart of the comedy. For this signature tune, the 'Red Flag' was whistled at a tempo considerably speeded up from that at which anyone could feasibly sing it, so as to sound jaunty and rather quaintly ridiculous, with none of the inspirational qualities that is often found when it is sung at party meetings and the like. Without wanting to pronounce judgements on how and that what extent revolutionary fervour might be contained within the original song, I simply wish to point out how this form of appropriation necessitated a fundamental change of performance practice. Such performance practice can indeed have an effect on the original 'work' in such a manner as to vitally change its scope of possible meanings. One need only look at Hendrix's rendition of 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at Woodstock in 1969, violent, demented, sexual, full of screeching sounds very reminiscent of those associated with bombings and sirens in the war in Vietnam that was being watched on American television screens at the time. Could anyone really hear this style of performance as a statement of patriotism in the manner that the Sousa original had come to represent?

I would like to suggest one further opinion (one for which I can claim no more rigorous justification other than hunch and subconscious conviction, though further research on this subject should be forthcoming at a later date!). From the 1920s onwards, popular musics gained a much greater level of international prominence than hitherto, as a result of the growth in the recording and sheet music industries. The growth in profile of these musics, on one hand market-driven but also representative of a wider range of class and ethnicity in terms of the musicians, presented a serious challenge to the hegemony of the 'classical' world, an issue that remains with us today. As a result, it is possible that 'classical' musicians, perhaps subconsciously, strove to make more obviously palpable the distinctions between their own styles of performance and those of popular musicians who may have been considered socially or racially inferior. A diminution in such attributes as sharp accentuation, driving

rhythms, vibrato-less playing of string instruments, thinner, drier textures and more individuated voicing, the art of improvisation and embellishment upon basic texts, all serve to make the sound of 'classical' music most distinct from various types of popular idioms. I believe many of these stylistic elements were indeed present in 'classical' performance practice of the nineteenth- century (for example, if we were able to hear Paganini play today, in some ways his style might be closer to, say, an Eastern European folk violinist than to many of the hallowed virtuosos that dominate our concert stages today). All these particular diminutions serve the purpose of mystification, removing music from a realm of lived experience into a more phantasmagoric realm (or 'disinterested appreciation' as John Berger described mystification in art criticism). Such mystical ideals run as deep in classical musical culture as they did in the aesthetic ideologies of any number of imperial monarchies, relying on simultaneous qualities of sumptuousness and aura to create the impression of allure combined with unattainability for those outside that hyper-privileged class. If my convictions are correct, it may be the case that a increased stratification between 'high' and 'low' performing styles are an unfortunate by-product of a broadening of the culture industry's scope. This raises profound questions about the whole construction of the idea of 'classical' music per se, at least as it is understood today.

I would conclude that performers music play a crucial part in rendering the music they play amenable to various ideological purposes and thus propagating a particular social function for if. All performers should be aware of this and address these issues critically whenever preparing a work.