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# **'Authenticity' and performance practice**

**- a recovery mission to rescue a violated term**

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## 1 Introduction –

### Authenticity: Exploration of the Battlefield

The issue of 'Authenticity and Performance Practice' – what authenticity means, if one should strive for authenticity in music performance, and even if there is such a thing as authenticity – has been one of great dispute over the last few decades and has even been referred to as a 'battlefield' by Will Crutchfield in the *New York Times*, ('A Report From the Battlefield' 1985).<sup>1</sup> There are two main camps – one side devotes itself completely to the most 'historically correct' performance practice, collecting every fact that can possibly be gathered about the composition in question – and another side that prefers a less dictatorial approach to historical music and is primarily concerned with contemporary issues instead. Nowadays they are joined by a third camp of performers who have access to historical evidence, but use this information more selectively, instead of letting it rule dogmatically over their performance ideas.<sup>2</sup>

The term authenticity has been misused, its meaning has been stifled, and thus some voices call for the phrase to be abandoned, as they believe it is antiquated and limited in its connotations. This is certainly not just a recent observation as Taruskin expressed his concerns as far back as 1984 in his opening essay to the discussion 'The Limits of Authenticity' in *Early Music*.<sup>3</sup> This essay is an attempt to rescue the term authenticity and will try to free it from the numerous incomplete interpretations and misconceptions.

A discourse on authenticity has been present over the last century, but until the 1970s the debate was rather un-philosophical; the main contributions were from performers and for performers. Naturally the issues were how to perform authentically or in a historically correct manner, rarely the underlying concept of authenticity itself was questioned. This changed suddenly - the discussion of authenticity was newly resumed after authentic performance practice became a kind of marketing tool of the rapidly growing recording industry in the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> With the popularity of the historical performance movement, critics of the term

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<sup>1</sup> Crutchfield, Will, 'A Report from the Battlefield', in *The New York Times*, (Sunday, 28 July 1985), cited in Taruskin, Richard: 'The Pastness Of The Present And The Presence Of The Past', in Kenyon, Nicholas, (ed.), *Authenticity and Early Music, A Symposium* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press 1988), p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> Butt, John: *Playing With History, The Historical Approach to Musical Performance*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002), p. 42, also p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Taruskin, Richard: 'The Limits of Authenticity: A Discussion' in *Early Music*, vol. 12/1, (1984), p. 3, [jstor.org](http://jstor.org), accessed 04/01/2007.

<sup>4</sup> Butt, John: 'Authenticity' in Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* vol.2 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Macmillan 2001), pp. 241-242.

and concepts of authenticity increased. Key figures are amongst others Joseph Kerman, Richard Taruskin, John Butt and Peter Kivy. Although a lot has been said in various ways already, nothing has been finally solved and the ongoing argument remains interesting. This essay is to be seen as a comment on the actual discussion with the position of redefining authenticity as a term. A lot will have been said before, but certain viewpoints will be from a different angle, to bring some new life into the debate.

No battle can be won without an idea of the history of the field; hence, first of all, this essay will give a brief overview over the development of the idea of authenticity. Having explored the ground the next chapter will try to establish the literal meaning of authenticity, taking into account the numerous ways in which various people have conceived it. I will then investigate several concepts of authenticity and its complications, and finally draw my conclusions at the very end.

The authenticity debate has been centred mainly on the historical performance movement, although many similar questions arise in more recent twentieth century and contemporary music. Naturally certain questions apply more to older music than to younger, but for the sake of completeness I will try to include all concerns, independent from the musical epoch to which they relate.

## 2 History of the Development of the Idea of Authenticity – an Impression

Concerns about authenticity and historical performance practice are not only a phenomenon of the second half of the last century, although the debate became more vibrant than ever in the last few decades. There is no 'how it all started', although commonly counted as a pioneer of authentic historical performance practice is Arnold Dolmetsch, founder of the International Dolmetsch Early Music Festival in 1925. He is famous for his instrument-making workshop in Haslemere where he built copies of period instruments, largely responsibly for the revival of the recorder, and author of the book *The Interpretation of the Music of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Century* published in 1915. He was a pioneer, but not the only or first fighter for the early music revival and the use of period instruments.<sup>5</sup>

What Dolmetsch was for the recorder, Wanda Landowska was for the harpsichord, which she helped to re-establish as a concert instrument through some very convincing performances. Also August Wenzinger needs to be

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<sup>5</sup> Ritchie, Stanley: 'Authentic Reconstruction of Musical Performance: History and Influence', p. 68, in *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Reconstruction (Autumn 1984), pp. 67-73.

mentioned as the key figure, who restored performance and repertoires of the viola da gamba.<sup>6</sup> All three were great contributors to the early music revival, but although they contributed to the slowly starting scholarly discourse with some publications, their main work was done in practice – they introduced period instruments (or copies of them) to the public and managed to convince the listeners through performing and teaching.

The word 'pioneer' maybe a bit misleading – performance of historical music and discussion about how to perform it *the right way* was part of the whole 19<sup>th</sup> century already. Examples of this era are people like G. Kiesewetter, who founded a choir in 1816 with which he concentrated on forgotten repertoire and tried to achieve genuine performances by applying findings of his music-historical research, or Fr. Heimsoeth, who published thoughts that were aimed on a more historically correct performance practice.<sup>7</sup> At the same time other people or groups tried to recreate historical music through arranging and adjusting it to their needs and taste – e.g. Mendelssohn's arrangement of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, which he shortened to about a third of its original length and re-orchestrated in a Romantic manner, or Thibaut's Händel performances.<sup>8</sup> Nowadays, the free revising of a musical score is not considered *appropriate* and said to violate the dogma of the composer's authority, but it was present until the beginning of the twentieth century (e.g. F. Mottl, Ph. Wolfrum).<sup>9</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> century historicism is different from 20<sup>th</sup> historical performance - the point is though, that the issue of historical performance practise didn't suddenly appear on the agenda in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it grew its roots long before.

Historical performance practice gave birth to editions like *Denkmähler der Tonkunst* that stands out as an example of the connection from historical performance practices and editing. The aim was and is to provide a musical text based on all available evidence and sources; it signifies the beginning of critical or *Urtext* editions of musical scores. Until the Second World War, the common, very positivistic view of historical performance practice and musical scholarship was that one could only achieve a genuine performance of music through sufficient research and practice. The debate was primarily between the different opinions of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Gutenknecht, Dieter: 'Aufführungspraxis', in Ludwig Finscher, ed., *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. Sachteil 1 (2nd ed., Kassel et. al.: Bärenreiter-Verlag 1989), p. 955-956.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 957-958, also Haskell, Harry: *The Early Music Revival, A History* (London: Thames and Huson 1988), p. 15-16.

<sup>9</sup> Gutenknecht 1989, p. 957.

what is historically correct in early music performance, and never seemed to question whether or not a historically accurate result was actually possible. Since around the 1950s, people have begun to question, whether or not one can achieve complete historical objective authenticity in music performance.

By no means do I claim this historical overview to be complete - thus, I called it 'an Impression' - but within the size of this paper it fulfils to the needs of the discussion. Also because of their nature, the next few chapters feature more historical facts that do not need to be repeated. The next chapter will explore the unvarnished meaning of authenticity, and - to give an idea on how authenticity has been understood - make use of various statements and ideas by different individuals.

### 3 Understanding the Subject of Dispute: Denotations of Authenticity

Interestingly enough it is not all that easy to find the roots of the terms authentic or authenticity in musical terminology – perhaps because it was initially un-related to music and performance practice in the first place. It seems that the term came in use and became an ideology in performance practice, without a framing of the meaning by any scholars at the very early stage. Taruskin identifies the possibly earliest use of the term in scholarly musicological writing in an essay by Donald J. Grout 1957, "On Historical Authenticity in the Performance of Old Music".<sup>10</sup> At this time nobody challenged the term and its connotations, the writing deals with practical questions, rather than philosophical concerns. By the time authenticity comes into the line of fire of the music-philosophical discourse, the main question is not what the term itself means, but what is wrong with the concepts of authenticity and how best to substitute the term. Similarly un-introduced terms such as 'historical informed performance' or 'historical aware performance' also appear on the scene, and today are about to supplant authentic performance, but the questions of performance practice that keep the debate alive and the issues with the claim of historical correctness remain the same. Going step by step, the first thing to do is to break down the term authentic to its very unembellished meaning and progress from this foundation to investigate what its implications for performance practice are.

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<sup>10</sup> Donald J. Grout in Taruskin: 'The Pastness Of The Present', p. 139-140, footnote 8.

The most obvious thing to do is to look up the term in the most universal source of English vocabulary, which is the *Oxford English Dictionary*.<sup>11</sup> The following selection of meanings seem to be applicable to our subject matter (the order of this list has no hierarchical intention):

1. Of authority, authoritative (properly as possessing original or inherent authority, but also as duly authorized).
2. Original, first-hand, prototypical; as opposed to copied.
3. Real, actual, 'genuine.' (Opposed to imaginary, pretended.)
4. Really proceeding from its reputed source or author; of undisputed origin, genuine. (Opposed to counterfeit, forged, apocryphal.)
5. Acting of itself, self-originated, automatic.<sup>12</sup>

When it is transcribed into meaningful terminology for this topic, authentic, in the first three senses, stands for historical performances based on the evidence of a musical piece, the original source and the composer's intention, which have first authority. Kivy believes that the first point highlights the authority of musical evidence more emphatically, while the second authentic can be seen as how the music sounded and the third puts the composer's intention into the foreground.<sup>13</sup> The second explanation also creates a connection to senses four and five because of its addition 'as opposed to copied', which touches the needs of artistic expressiveness and originality in performance. Without that a performance would easily reprobate to a copy of another performance. Senses four and five take musical fact as a starting point, but the performance is proceeding from its source rather than clutching to it solely. These explanations give more room to musical expressivity, and allow the musicians a certain freedom, to bring themselves to a piece of music.

All meanings share the desire of a kind of a genuine truth, but of which kind is open for discussion. Therefore, an *authentic* performance should be truthful and real, as opposed to false and unreal. Personal interpretation is not excluded by the term authentic itself; instead it has been not proscribed, but simply ignored by the spokesmen of pure positivistic historically correct performance practice. Personal

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<sup>11</sup> I am not the first to start the discussion like this, *OED* definitions as a starting point, Peter Kivy had a similar approach to the subject 1995 in his book *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1995), p.3. Before him Will Crutchfield in his essay 'Fashion, Conviction, and Performance Style in an Age of Revivals' in Kenyon: *Authenticity and Early Music*, pp.19-26 features a brief hint on the definitions of the *OED*. While Crutchfield just mentions the philological relationship, Kivy dives deep into his analysis of the definitions by the *OED* and gives a philosophical, very interpretative and wide elaborated feed back. I have no intention to copy any of the two writers, but think it is a suggestive start from the very basement into the debate, and some findings may naturally be close to Kivy's.

<sup>12</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, see <http://dictionary.oed.com> > 'authentic', accessed 04/01/2007.

<sup>13</sup> Kivy: *Authenticities*, p. 3-6.

interpretation has just been out of the question for many performers without any philological justification.

If no personal interpretation was required to achieve an authentic performance, what other approaches create authenticity from a music(ologic)al perspective? John Butt gives a descriptive definition of authentic performance in his article on 'Authenticity' in the *New Grove Dictionary*:

'Authentic' performance may refer to one or any combination of the following approaches: use of instruments from the composer's own era; use of performing techniques documented in the composer's era; performance based on the implications of the original sources for a particular work; fidelity to the composer's intentions for performance or to the type of performance a composer desired or achieved; an attempt to re-create the context of the original performance; and an attempt to recreate the musical experience of the original audience.<sup>14</sup>

It is obvious that the ongoing argument on authenticity has left marks in this article, since Butt is very careful in formulating what an "'authentic" performance *may* refer to' rather than what it actually *is*. Had this article been written two or three decades earlier it probably would have said "'authentic" performance *is* the approach to perform a piece of music in the most genuine way possible, the attempt to reconstruct the musical sound as close as possible to the composer's intention, or to what it would have sounded like in the composer's lifetime.' The 'may' in Butt's description would have been a 'should' or 'must'.

And yes, in 1986, *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* outlines authentic as: 'in performance practice, instruments or styles of playing that are historically appropriate to the music being performed'.<sup>15</sup> The definition seems more concrete than the descriptive definition of Butt fifteen years later, but again it leaves much room for guesswork; for instance what does 'appropriate' mean in this context? First, what authority is going to judge what *appropriate* is and what it is not? Secondly the term is very value-laden. As Taruskin puts it, who is going to say "'I prefer inauthenticity to authenticity," or, "I prefer inappropriateness to appropriateness?"'<sup>16</sup>

Butt describes authentic performance as any possible combination of various approaches. So, can one consider a performance authentic if it is, for example, played on period instruments, but in the Sydney Opera House, which was only opened in 1973, and, therefore, is certainly not an original environment of any early music piece? Or is a performance of a baroque piece, played on modern

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<sup>14</sup> Butt: 'Authenticity', p. 241.

<sup>15</sup> Randel, Don Michael, (ed.): *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986), 60-1 (as cited in Taruskin: 'The Pastness Of The Present', p. 137).

<sup>16</sup> Taruskin: 'The Pastness Of The Present', p. 137.



instruments, but in meantone temperament, authentic? Can a performance of a piece, however historically correct, be authentic, if the context is wrong? And then, is there any possibility to play a piece of some centuries ago in an original context? The question remains – what, actually, is authenticity? What is an authentic performance?

In 1954, Harnoncourt stated

An interpretation must be attempted in which the entire romantic tradition of performance is ignored ... Today we only want to accept the composition itself as a source, and present it as our own responsibility. The attempt must thus again be made today, with Bach's masterpieces in particular, to hear and perform them as if they had never been interpreted before, as though they had never been formed nor distorted.<sup>17</sup>

At this stage, obviously, romantic music was not yet considered to be vital to the historical performance movement - this is a more recent development. Harnoncourt is clearly in favour of the authenticity of the musical source and of how it would have been played historically, although he does not use the phrase authenticity yet. He already speaks of interpretation, acknowledging – maybe unintended – that a composition is the beginning of the process on the way to the performance. And this process is filled with decision making of the performer – the choice of what is an important musical fact depends on the musician's point of view, thus is essentially a matter of personal interpretation.<sup>18</sup>

1957 Donald Grout states, 'an ideal performance is one that perfectly realizes the composer's intentions'.<sup>19</sup> The word *ideal* implies the impossibility of such a case, since many of the composer's original intentions are guesswork for the modern performer, and no one can know all of them, or know if he guessed right. Still Grout wants the performer to strive towards this ideal situation. The very same essay of which this citation originates may be the very first using the term authenticity according to Taruskin.<sup>20</sup>

Christopher Hogwood stands for 'historical faithfulness to the past' and wants as little as possible to be added to a historically authentic performance, musical and historical fact have first authority.<sup>21</sup> As cited by Taruskin, Hogwood would like to establish 'rules and regulations' for the performance of nineteenth-

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<sup>17</sup> Nicholas Hanoncourt 1954 cited in Kenyon, Nicholas: 'Introduction, Authenticity and Early Music: Some Issues and Questions', in Kenyon, *Authenticity and Early Music*, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Kenyon: 'Introduction, Authenticity and Early Music', p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Grout cited in Taruskin: 'The Pastness Of The Present', p. 145.

<sup>20</sup> Donald J. Grout in Taruskin: 'The Pastness Of The Present', p. 139-140, footnote 8.

<sup>21</sup> Kenyon: 'Introduction, Authenticity and Early Music', p. 6.

century music.<sup>22</sup> Trevor Pinnock was more doubtful about authenticity in performance practice, but believed strongly in power of period instruments – by playing them they would reveal their own truthful sound and style.<sup>23</sup>

Of this list Gustav Leonhardt stands out: in the notes to his recording of the *Brandenburg Concertos* he emphasizes that music needs more than 'just' authenticity: 'If one strives only to be authentic, it will never be convincing. If one is convincing, what is offered will leave an authentic impression.'<sup>24</sup> He is the only one to point out clearly that authenticity cannot be everything in a performance.

As recent as 1995, David Fuller still pleads in his programme note "'Authenticity'" that historical reconstruction is essential for musical performance and we come to see that he believes the whole debate has overshot the mark, and is a waste of time as such. As he says, 'the pursuit of authenticity is not the same thing as the claim of authenticity', meaning that indeed no historical performance can be one hundred percent correct historical recreated, but one can at least try – it is the way that counts.<sup>25</sup>

In the same year of Fuller's statements, Peter Kivy published another philosophical discourse on the theory and concepts of authenticity: *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance*.<sup>26</sup> In this book and more recently in his essay 'On the Historically Informed Performance' (2002)<sup>27</sup>, Kivy divides authenticity into four main concepts, what seems helpful: 'authenticity of intention', 'authenticity of sound', 'authenticity of practice' and 'personal authenticity'.<sup>28</sup>

'Authenticity of intention' is rather self-explanatory. It is concerned with the initial performing intentions of the composer, and therefore describes the concept of performance practice where the musicians try to re-establish what the composer truly wanted, which is not necessarily what it really sounded like, e.g. due the often apparent lack of professionalism of performers. Performers, who want to achieve pure 'authenticity of sound', try to restore how a piece of music would have sounded at the time that it was written in. The performer that follows

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<sup>22</sup> Taruskin: 'The Pastness Of The Present', p. 145.

<sup>23</sup> Kenyon: 'Introduction, Authenticity and Early Music', p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Gustav Leonhardt cited in *ibid.*, p. 5-6.

<sup>25</sup> Fuller, David: "'Authenticity'" in Dixon, Susan R: *Program Guide: The Age of Elegance* (Ithaca: New York State Early Music Association 1994), pp. 2-7.

<sup>26</sup> Kivy: *Authenticities*.

<sup>27</sup> Kivy, Peter: 'On the Historically Informed Performance' in *The British Journal of Aesthetics* vol. 42/2 (2002), pp. 128-144. See [doi:10.1093/bjaesthetics/42.2.128](https://doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/42.2.128), accessed 04/01/2007.

<sup>28</sup> Kivy: 'On the Historically Informed Performance', pp. 133-134 and Kivy: *Authenticities*, pp. 6-7.

the authenticity of practice tries to resemble the performance practice of the time when the composition originally was performed. Finally 'personal authenticity' is the concept in which the artist remains truthful to his personal style and own intention, remains original.

The division into these four categories seems particularly helpful to me, since they cover all different forms of apparent authenticities and correlate with the suggested meanings of the *OED* (which is not so much of a surprise, since Kivy himself uses the *OED* as a starting point). Certainly, there is overlapping, but for the theorising, understanding and also criticising of the main concepts it is good to look at these approaches separately.

#### 4 Concepts of Authenticity and their Complications

Richard Taruskin is one of the loudest voices in the critical discourse on authenticity and one of his major points is the concept of *authenticity of intention*. In a very persuasive manner he shows several complications with this concept and very simply suggests that we listen to the different recordings Stravinsky himself made of *Le sacre du Printemps*. Apart from the question of whether a composer is necessarily a good conductor, these recordings differ quite a lot from each other. There we have the rare blessing of five recordings that all reveal different intentions of the same composer and piece (one generally cannot speak of one single intention per piece anyhow). Which are the intentions to follow? Is there one recording that stands out most? Why did Stravinsky record the same piece over and over again? Was he not satisfied with the outcome of his previous recording? The composer certainly knew what he intended in each particular recording, but why did his intentions change? Or was he not able to communicate his intentions? But if he was not, how could anybody else know his intentions by reading the bare musical fact? Or are the changes of intentions the products of, for instance, different contexts, because of the different orchestras with which he worked? And if the changes were due to the different contexts, how would anybody know in a new, contemporary performance – and, once more, another context – what other intentions Stravinsky would have created for this particular situation?

Stravinsky, like Ravel<sup>29</sup>, committed himself completely to the concept of authenticity of intention, as following statement shows:

Music should not be transmitted and not interpreted, because interpretation reveals the personality of the interpreter rather than of the author, and who can guarantee that such an executant will reflect the author's vision without distortion?<sup>30</sup>

Especially when big personalities and composers express their ideals about how their music should be performed, out of respect one is likely and willing to follow these claims, but as demonstrated with the unanswered questions above that seems a rather difficult venture. What authority is there to judge whether a performer was right in his approach to satisfy the composer's intentions?

Not that the process of trying to do justice to the composer's intention in itself is wrong; rather, it is the claim that this should be the one and only way of performing a piece that is problematic. Our western notation system is highly developed and allows a composer to indicate a lot of facts, but one simply cannot document every intention.<sup>31</sup> Every *crescendo* needs to be interpreted, every *ritardando* needs to be estimated, thousands of decisions have to be made – and these decisions, commonly called *interpretation*, are personal and nothing else.

Going further back in music history even, more problems with the 'authenticity of intention' occur, and there we have no authentic recordings – recordings by the composers themselves - to help out. First of all there is no such thing as *work concept* at least until the classical era. Compositions were functional but not absolute – a notion that began to change in the classical period. Beethoven, as earliest *freelance* composer, was the first to compose music just for music's sake, which then became the conception of the romantic era. Before the classical period, no composer intended his music to be played posthumously.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ravel famously stated "I do not ask for my music to be interpreted, but only for it to be played", cited in Walls, Peter: 'Historical Performance and the modern performer', p. 17, in John Rink: *Musical Performance: A Guide to Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002), pp. 17-34.

<sup>30</sup> Stravinsky cited in *ibid*.

<sup>31</sup> See Brown, Howard Mayer: 'Pedantry or Liberation? A Sketch of the Historical Performance Movement', in Kenyon: *Authenticity and Early Music*, p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> More recently, Lydia Goehr (amongst others) has proposed this notion of the work concept as a phenomenon located after 1800 in her book *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*. But as responses to her book show, there is actually quite a disagreement apparent about this notion of the work concept. Harry White, for instance, disputes this in his article "'If it's Baroque, Don't Fix It'", and finds the 'significance of high baroque style [misread]', p. 103. It is a fact, though, that at some stage in history music developed an awareness of being an artistic subject (just like other subjects), and not a craft. However, this does not mean that pieces written before that point cannot be considered art works. In art history, for example, this moment is commonly marked with the introduction of the signature to art by Michelangelo, who was the first to sign his work, and, therefore, distinguish art from craft. Obviously, there are different statuses of ontological awareness, but these ontological statuses of musical (or art) works do not actually indicate any value. A Giotto-Fresco is still a masterpiece of art, although Giotto himself did think

Although there was often an interest in music of the past, this was more for theoretical and educational reasons, rarely for performing purposes. Bach would probably have raised his eyebrows with great surprise if one would have told him that his music was part of the work canon in the twentieth and now twenty-first century. One can imagine the question, What about the temporary composers? - Whether there exists no living tradition, and why one would waste your time with music that certainly has to be old-fashioned two to three hundred years after it was written.<sup>33</sup> So if the composer did not intend his music to be performed after his lifetime, would it not be a blow against the concept of 'authenticity of intention', to perform such pieces?

If we accept this discrepancy, (and I think I speak for everybody if I say we do, since I otherwise we would miss a lot of music that is commonly part of our work canon), various other problems remain. What do we do with a composition that was written for a particular musician? (Amongst others Mozart tended to write *Arias* of his operas for particular mostly female singers.) Following the 'authenticity of intention' in a dogmatic manner, no one could ever perform such pieces, intended for a particular occasion or a particular performer, again.

Since nobody wants to exclude any music due to reasons of authenticities, the more practical questions needs to be ask, some of which Howard Mayer Brown articulates in the introduction of his essay 'Pedantry or Liberation':

How fixed were his [the composers] intentions? However fixed they were, how closely should we feel obliged to follow them? How should we deal with those elements, which the composer himself would have taken to be variable? And how should we deal with those aspects of performance that are not documented (and in many cases not documentable)?<sup>34</sup>

Moving on to the 'authenticity of sound' the most obvious difficulty is that – in early music – we just do not know what it sounded like, but also that our perception has changed. To take Kivy's own example,

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of his work being craft. I do not want to over-emphasise this argument in this essay, as it is a discussion in itself. But most works before 1800 are actually written with a certain event or purpose in mind rather than just for the music's sake, while later composers have been writing autonomous music without any particular function in mind apart from it being performed. These functional factors are as much part of the history of a piece as all other parameters and cannot just be dismissed.

Goehr, Lydia: *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992) and White, Harry: "'If It's Baroque, Don't Fix It": Reflections on Lydia Goehr's "Work-Concept" and the Historical Integrity of Musical Composition" in *Acta Musicologica*, Vol. 69, Fasc. 1. (Jan. - Jun., 1997), pp. 94-104. [jstor.org](http://jstor.org), accessed 20/02/2007.

<sup>33</sup> Grout similarly asked "Have we no living tradition of music, that we must be seeking to revive a dead one?", cited in Taruskin: 'The Pastness of the Present', p. 141.

<sup>34</sup> Brown: 'Pedantry or Liberation', p. 27.

a performing force that might have seemed massive to Bach's audience seems intimate chamber music to our Wagnerian ears, which means that we might need twice or more the number of performers used, each to produce the same effect on us that his forces produced on his contemporaries.<sup>35</sup>

But it is not only the perception of numbers and volume that changed, it is also the perception of dissonance and the understanding of music. Nobody had yet opened a Symphony with a seventh chord as Beethoven did in his very first Symphony (C7) – for Beethoven's audiences this is still strikingly different and unexpected, while for today's audiences this is barely noticeable as a dissonant chord, and for Bach's audiences it would probably have been extremely painful. Beethoven's contemporary audience was far from being able to understand for instance his late, elaborated string quartets. Today we generally have a much better understanding of Beethoven than his contemporaries, and thus, 'we are the more authentic players of it [Beethoven's music].'<sup>36</sup>

The article 'On the Evolution of Musical Perception' by Zofia Lissa and Eugenia Tanska investigates the change of musical perception and underpins this argument from a musicological and psychological perspective.<sup>37</sup> So if we are to follow the belief of 'authenticity of sound', do we want to achieve the factual sound or do we want a sound translated into today's equivalent? Very important in this relationship is the question of tuning – audiences today are familiar with the standard well-tempered tuning, for which Bach, amongst others, fought so much. Audiences until Bach's lifetime were used to the predecessor of our tuning system, the *meantone temperament*. Each key had a slightly different intonation, thus, different keys had distinct characteristics. These *key-colours* got flattened in our *well temperament*, which instead makes it possible to modulate freely into more distant keys without suddenly sounding extremely false, a verity that Bach explores in his *Wohltemperirte Clavier*. Followers of the 'authenticity of sound' often chose a *meantone temperament* for historical performances, with the danger that their performance to people with a sensitive and conditioned pitch sounds false. Because of our different conditioning and training to baroque- and pre-baroque-audiences, contemporary audiences possibly do not notice many of the key characteristics, which were essential to the older audience.

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<sup>35</sup> Kivy: 'On the Historically Informed Performance', p. 134.

<sup>36</sup> Hans Keller as cited in Kenyon: 'Introduction, Authenticity and Early Music', p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> Lissa, Zofia and Eugenia Tanska: 'On the Evolution of Musical Perception' in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Winter 1965), pp. 273-286. [Jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org), accessed 15/10/2006.

Some other variables are hard to recreate in today's performances, as they simply do not exist anymore – such as the sound of a castrato singer, although we have a slight idea of what the general sound of a voice of a castrato was like. Certainly nobody wishes to castrate young boys in order to achieve the most authentic possibly sound, so one has to search for different solutions. Often female singers substitute for the castrato, and with particular singing techniques even some male singers can achieve the necessary range of a castrato, but both give no authentic sound impression. In the movie *Farinelli* (which is based on historical facts, although doubtless with a lot of story-making personal interpretation of the movie makers) the sound directors took a different approach to recreate an authentic sound of Farinelli's singing voice – they recorded the singing of a soprano, Ewa Malas-Godlewska, and a countertenor, Derek Lee Ragin, and merged them digitally in order to create the sound quality they believed a voice like Farinelli's had.<sup>38</sup> This, of course, is never possible in live performances, and questionable if desired generally, but it is an interesting attempt to achieve sonic authenticity.

Other variables of factual sound are hardly desirable to recreate. As Peter Phillips phrases it, 'we can guess at the type of sound produced by sixteenth-century choirs, and the evidence suggests that imitation of them would be highly undesirable.'<sup>39</sup> Composers (conductors) had to deal with choirs in sacred music until the Baroque era, which were purely male, the singers were normally school boys, with the consequences that they were too young to have sufficiently trained voices. Also often the composer could barely select his singers, but had to work with what he got. Boys who had alto and soprano ranges were the younger members of the choir, so that their voices naturally must have had a lack of strength and training. Tenors and basses on the other side were boys whose voices only recently broke, so they still had to learn to control their new sound. Moreover, the boys in the middle, whose voices were just breaking, hopefully did not sing too loud. I do not hope to hear any attempt to recreate these conditions, and to refer back to the 'authenticity of intention', I am pretty sure that if any composer (conductor) had the chance to work and perform with contemporary choirs, by all means they would have chosen "our" resources instead. To quote Taruskin once more, „I [Taruskin] dare say we ought to do better than the band of

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<sup>38</sup> See <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farinelli>, accessed 09/01/07.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Phillips as cited in Taruskin: 'The Pastness of the Present', p. 143.

amateurs who trashed their uncomplicated rhythmical way through the first performance of the Eroica, too."<sup>40</sup>

Another major point to cover is the use of period instruments, which actually forms a bridge between the four concepts of authenticity. Obviously composers wrote with the instruments of their lifetime in mind; but these composers did not know about our modern instruments or the changes and improvements in the building of old instruments, the changes of playing techniques and also the changes of venues. Composers might have easily chosen different, modern, instruments, if they had just known about them.

One of many examples is the family of the viola da gamba-instruments, which were built for a chamber setting, with a soft and warm, but not very loud, sound. They were not originally built for solo performances, and with the development of the solo concerto this clearly became a lack. The volume of the instrument was too quiet to compete with an orchestra, the bridge too low to perform the required fast sections. The instrument was built for a chamber setting, not for a big concert hall, where its sound gets lost without the help of electronic devices. Gradually these instruments were replaced by more modern string-instruments, which met the modern requirements better. Surely it is justified to ask why one should move back to old instruments, if the modern instruments suit the purposes of a performance often much better.

By all means, there are many professionals competent in the use of period instruments. The study of playing techniques, for example, is vital as it can reveal how certain sounds of an instrument can be achieved that you might not have known before, or smooth the musician's playing technique to be able to fulfil the needs of a composition better. But it seems that nowadays one needs to fight for the use of modern instruments, since period instruments nearly have become a must and a label of quality for performances of early music. A lot of repertoires would not be available to us without the use of period instruments – and by no means would I like to miss the recording of Marin Marais' pieces for viola da gamba and theorbo by Hille Perl and Lee Santana. Performers dedicated to music until the fifteenth or sixteenth century do not really have the choice between old and new instruments, since such music can hardly be played on modern

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



instruments.<sup>41</sup> The decision as to which instrument to play should be guided by the needs of the music, not by a dogmatic claim for *authenticity*. As Brown says:

The truth - ... - is that it is more acceptable to play Bach's music on modern instruments than Rameau's, for it can be argued that authentic sonorities and old playing techniques are less important in the one than in the other, and that therefore the essential nature of Bach's music can emerge in a performance that translates the original into modern terms.<sup>42</sup>

Period instruments are also part of the music's original setting, the 'music's choreography', as Kivy explains his third concept, the 'authenticity of practice', which refers more to the visual and contextual facets of a performance.<sup>43</sup> He raises the question of which aspects of performance practice are artistically relevant: are 'the physical setting', 'ritualistic or social function' etc. of importance for a concept of authenticity?<sup>44</sup> The *function* has to do with the context, the context with the occasion and venue where the music is to be performed. That is certainly of importance, since it may influence the choice of instrument, or influence the seating and size of an ensemble. To be authentic in the most doctrinal sense – are women allowed to perform, if they were not during the composer's lifetime? This gender issue is a question in itself, since in many orchestras female professionals traditionally were not allowed – in some cases up to a surprisingly recent day: women are only allowed to become members of the Viennese Philharmonic Orchestra since 1997! Hopefully everybody agrees that gender should not be an artistically relevant aspect.

However, again all these choices that have to be made - regardless of which concept of authenticity the performer is following - are all motivated by personal judgment, interpretation, taste and style – so how can anybody wish to exclude these artistic decisions? 'The choice of what is a historical fact depends on the historian's point of view and is thus essentially a matter of interpretation', as Kenyon formulates it following E. H. Carr.<sup>45</sup> The dream of Christopher Hogwood, who would like to see 'rules and regulations' for the performance of (nineteen-century) music becomes a nightmare if one imagines how many interesting aspects open for interpretation would be flattened, singled out, equalized and lost. One major benefit of the historical performance movement is the diversity of performances and ideas on the market. With rules and regulations all

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<sup>41</sup> Brown: 'Pedantry or Liberation?' p. 28-29.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>43</sup> Kivy: 'On the Historically Informed Performance', p. 135.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Kenyon: 'Introduction, Authenticity and Early Music', p. 13.

performances would become reduced to a single boring pot without differences, each performance would be a copy of another or a repetition of itself – and that is exactly what it should not be, referring back to the meanings of authenticity outlined in the *OED*. We could then easily substitute the performer with a robot or computer, losing the humanity of music and degrading the performer's job to one less than that of industrial craftsmanship.

In his claim for 'personal authenticity' Kivy coincides with Crutchfield and Taruskin. 'Personal authenticity' includes all this musicality that a performance needs to be convincing, and for this musicality we need the personal intentions of the performer, who makes the music into a *meaningful* piece of art – or an empty one if he does badly. It is this concept of 'personal authenticity' that Gustav Leonhardt addresses when he says 'if one strives only to be authentic, it will never be convincing. If one is convincing, what is offered will leave an authentic impression.'<sup>46</sup>

We have yet to exhaust the various viewpoints, philosophical approaches and thoughts on concepts of authenticities. What we have dealt with so far, has lead towards a notion for "personal authenticity"; Gary Tomlinson in his contribution to Kenyons symposium 1988 however tries to set authenticity further apart from personal expressivity and interpretation. He notices, quite rightly, that 'authentic meaning' is not what composer and audience originally invested in it, but what we come to believe its composer and audience did invest in it (*authentic meaning* being an amalgam of Kivy's first three proposed authenticity-concepts of intention, of sound and practice).<sup>47</sup> Although Tomlinson realizes that the simple question – 'what was the intent?' - cannot be answered anymore, paradoxically he sharply attacks the 'Intentional Fallacy' that Taruskin brings into the debate<sup>48</sup>, and takes up the cudgels for the historians since he believes that authentic meanings will be found behind the musical work, 'in the varieties of discourse that give rise to them', as opposed to in the musical work itself.<sup>49</sup>

Tomlinson sees the past as a web of contexts: 'meaning' is created by opposing and relating two or more contexts to each other. He believes that each work of music itself encloses a variety of meanings, which in our time is mirrored

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<sup>46</sup> Gustav Leonhardt cited in *ibid.*, p. 5-6.

<sup>47</sup> Tomlinson, Gary: 'The Historian, the Performer and Authentic Meaning in Music' in Kenyon: *Authenticity and Early Music*, p. 115.

<sup>48</sup> Taruskin: 'The Pastness of the Present', p. 146.

<sup>49</sup> Tomlinson: "The Historian, the Performer and Authentic Meaning in Music", pp. 135-136.

by diversity of performances of musical works.<sup>50</sup> Although Tomlinson distances himself from Taruskin, here is exactly the point where he meets him. For Taruskin the historical performance movement is not historical, but 'completely of our time, and is in fact the most modern style around'.<sup>51</sup> Each performance under the umbrella of the historical performance movement is in fact spawn of modern thought, and thus, true authentic representation of our era, genuine voice of our present time. Tomlinson finds 'authentic meaning' in the creation of contemporary historians, and as what 'we come to believe it' – 'we' indicating that it is situated entirely in 'our' contemporary time. Tomlinson's conclusions though are different. Taruskin situates authenticity in the performer, whereas Tomlinson situates it in the historian. While Taruskin wants to open the term authentic to the concept of *personal authenticity*, recalling on Dahlhaus' 'postulate of originality' – 'music both as to the style of its composition and the style of its performance "should be novel in order to rank as authentic"<sup>52</sup> – Tomlinson limits the performers interpretative and expressive role instead: 'We need not deny the performer the right to self-expression, however, in order to realize that this right is not the only (or even the richest) source of authentic meanings.'<sup>53</sup>

## 5 *Authentic or Historically Informed?* – Truce Talks

In the theoretical discourse the majority agrees that the claim of pure positivistic – I will call it *objective* – authenticity is superseded and replaced by the more personal concept of *subjective* authenticity. Although *authenticity* as a term never excluded the concept of *personal authenticity* and artistic freedom, many voices call for a replacement of the phrase. Most frequent suggestions already in use are *historically informed* or *historical aware performance practice*. With these terms, John Butt starts his article on *authenticity* in *The New Grove Dictionary*: 'The most common use [of authenticity] refers to classes of performance that might synonymously be termed "historically informed" or "historically aware", or employing "period" or "original" instruments and techniques.'<sup>54</sup>

In the historical performance course at Oberlin 'historically informed' substitutes authentic, the American Musicological Society makes use of 'historically

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>51</sup> Taruskin: 'The Pastness of the Present', p. 152.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 194.

<sup>53</sup> Tomlinson: 'The Historian, the Performer and Authentic Meaning in Music', p. 117.

<sup>54</sup> Butt: 'Authenticity', p. 241.

aware', and the New York Concert Series speaks of 'historically accurate' performance in its promotional literature.<sup>55</sup> Three suggestions to replace *authentic*, but do they bear any solution for the asked questions? Do they just dress the wolf in sheep's clothing? Are all the complications with historical performance practice, no matter if *historically aware, accurate or informed*, not still the same?

In 1957, Grout already makes use of the phrase 'historically accurate' synonymously with 'historically authentic' - in the very same essay that might be the first use of the term *authentic*.<sup>56</sup> This phrase, *historically accurate*, stems from the same time as *historically authentic*, detected in the same essay, used synonymously exchangeable, thus, its concept bears the same issues and complications as its counterpart.

Kivy investigates whether or not 'historically informed' really differentiates in meaning to 'historically authentic' – and leaves the question open at the end.<sup>57</sup> An artist that devotes himself or herself to the concept of *historically informed* performance will still have to ask the same questions and have to take the same interpretive decisions. He or she will still 'play [music] as [he or she] thinks is best, in accordance with [his or her] personal judgement and taste.'<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, *historically informed* performance sounds much more liberal than *historically authentic*; it seems to leave more freedom to the performer. Every performer who is a little bit professional will know quite a lot about the period of time the composition was written – music history is part of every performance course and as a musician one would simply have to close eyes and ears to get around without a notion of music history. Thus, every contemporary performer is historically informed to some extent. But how much of this information does he or she put into the performance? If the musician simply needs to be *historically informed* in order to entitle a performance to be historically informed, then there is actually no point in making a distinction and using the term – 'if we make historical informed performance too liberal, than it becomes a trivial notion.'<sup>59</sup> The same counts for *historically aware* performance – even if a musician is *aware* of the historical circumstances of a composition, it is his own decision how much of this awareness goes into his performance.

Kerman's suggestion is 'contextual' instead of authentic, but although the word appears rather neutral it can hardly be used, since all music before 1800 and

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<sup>55</sup> Taruskin: 'The Pastness Of The Present', p. 139-140.

<sup>56</sup> Donald J. Grout cited in *ibid.*, footnote 8.

<sup>57</sup> Kivy: 'On the Historically Informed Performance', pp. 128-144.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

a lot of music after is performed entirely out of context today.<sup>60</sup> Taruskin briefly introduces 'verisimilar' instead of authentic,<sup>61</sup> but would not a *verisimilar* conception once more limit personal interpretation to where there really is no other possibility to fill a gap of knowledge? It depends on how you put it. Synonyms for *verisimilitude* are *realism*, *believability*, *plausibility*, *authenticity*, *credibility*, *lifelikeness*. *Lifelikeness* of the present or of the past? Where does *plausibility* start, where does it become grotesque? What agent gives judgement on *credibility*? The phrase as such is different than other suggestions, but yet again, at the end it collapses into concepts of authenticity or, to the other extreme, becomes trivial.

To me the term authentic still sustains, but we need to recollect the actual meaning of the word and stop excluding senses that are part of it. Authenticity covers it all – all the concepts of intention, sound, practice and personal interpretation. Authenticity frames and gives freedom to all approaches without becoming trivial, since the claim of truthfulness always remains. Authenticity asks for justification of a performance, but its measurement is not how many historical facts were considered or abolished, authenticity asks for conviction. And whether a performance is convincing is still judged by the listener and not one or two agents of certain historical ideas. In the hope of truce, let us recall the true meaning of *authenticity* and all become a bit more flexible, acknowledging that personal interpretation is part of any authentic performance, no matter how much it is based on historical facts or not - and that it is good a thing. Let the researchers do their research and open it for musicians, who decide to use it. Let the performers be the performers, who know what they can and do best to create a meaningful piece of art. And let the listeners be the listeners, who decide if they enjoy a performance or not – after all, we are talking about music, and it is taste that matters.

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<sup>60</sup> Taruskin: 'The Pastness Of The Present', p. 141.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

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