Dorottya Fabian, *A Musicology of Performance: Theory and Method Based on Bach's Solos for Violin.* OpenBook Publishers, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-78374153-3 (hardcover) $52.95. ISBN: 978-178374152-6 (Paperback) $29.95.

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THE study of recordings as evidence of interpretation and performance style is without a doubt one of the most seminal revolutions in contemporary musicological research. Over the years, this vast abundance of documented data has been gradually recognized as fundamental in the identification of prevailing norms of practice, influential personalities, and changes of performance style occurring over time.

Within the growing community of scholars engaged in the topic, Dorottya Fabian has long been considered a central figure in the study of violin recorded performances. This book serves as a continuation of her detailed investigation of recordings made over the years of Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin - a study which has been ongoing for more than two decades.

While previous research has been mainly focused on Bach's violin set recordings made from the beginning of the last century to around the 1970s, the book focuses on contemporary recordings made during recent decades (roughly comprising the period between 1980-2010). As such, it aims to examine current performance traits while addressing some of the most intriguing issues connected to the study of performance.

CHAPTERS 1 & 2: PRESENTING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

From the very opening page we are tossed towards the most fundamental and elusive question: why and how should we study music performance? A brief outline of issues such as the relation between music and gesture or the multi-modal perception of music paves the way to this book's principle aim: "an analytical, contemplative framework that relies on rich, empirically derived data and a transdisciplinary approach". (p.7)

Subsequently a review of some of the keynote discourses related to the study of music performance are presented, to be addressed later on during the course of the work. Among them, the long-held notion regarding individuality and originality as characteristic of the "golden age" of recordings (traditionally regarded as comprising the period between 1900-1930), much more so than performances of later periods. This view, quite refuted in more recent studies, linked homogeneity and uniformity of interpretation profiles to musicians of the second half of the twentieth-century, and was accounted for by the flourishing of the recording industry. Recordings were seen as bringing about canonization and as glorifying technical skills over novelty and imagination.[2] Linked to this was the view that modern players display a formal and rather 'literalist' approach to the musical score, "obsessed with the external details of text, edition, and instrumentation" - to use David Milsom's remark presented as late as 2003 (Milsom, 2003, p.208). Early performers, on the other hand, were considered as having regarded music as an interdependent, integral entirety - an idea enabling extreme alterations and modifications to the written text. While such discernment is well established in regard to early recordings, more recent investigations have found performers of later decades to have certainly exhibited liberal, autonomous, and unrestricted interpretations of the music (see for example Katz, 2003; Cheng & Chew, 2008; Leech-Wilkinson, 2009; Dimov, 2010; Sarlo, 2015).

Another discussion point is the issue of 'historically informed performance' (HIP) aesthetics and its impact on modern 'mainstream' performances (MSP). Starting from the late 1970s, a growing number of performers begun focusing on retracing historical performance conventions, reviving long-neglected compositions through a great deal of recording output while fostering a wide variety of performance devices. However, questions posed throughout the years have questioned the plausibility of reconstructing bygone performance traditions, amidst challenging the very quest for historical accuracy (For a review of the literature, see Taruskin, 1995; Butt, 2002; Walls, 2003; Haynes, 2007; Kuijken, 2013).

The implication of modern and postmodern doctrines on both HIP and MSP is yet another subject presented: adverting to Richard Taruskin's perception of HIP as virtually representative of the modernist aesthetics (Taruskin, 1995), alongside John Butt's observation of current performance trends

as coinciding with the postmodern pursuit for personal insight and intuition (Butt, 2002), the effect of contemporary philosophical models on present day performances is being called for investigation.

Yet most absorbing is the passage examining the gap between musicological pursuit and performance. A well-worn matter of contention invokes on analysts' attempts to prescribe the appropriate means of practice in order to coincide with 'historical sources', which seems at odds with performers' own choices and eventual offshoots. However, Fabian points to the fact that generating rule-based systems is far from being exclusive to scholars indulged in modeling the notated score: It also distends to the growing community of researchers engaged in empirical performance studies, who "remain paradigmatic of the modernist approach, working with abstract forms of meaning (representation) and central control".(p.49) Rather than constructing formulas of period performance conventions, she ushers us to embrace a new insight - one that incorporates intuitive interactions with the music together with "the musical context, the quality of the measured gesture and the historically-culturally defined aesthetic expectations". (p.50) In short: a holistic approach that fosters a complex mix of "non linear dynamical systems", where established conventions and tailor-made classifications are intertwined with listeners' impressions or performers' emotional ambiance. What we face here is a quest for an undivided perspective, one that grasps the validity of performers' aural and visual communication (physical/emotional gestures, sounds, reflections) together with theoretical knowledge and written ideas. In fact, verbalized information is considered all but pertinent in attempting to grasp what is basically an oral phenomenon, one "that thrives on imitation and variation rather than abstraction and analysis". (p.72)

CHAPTER 3: OVERALL FINDINGS OF PERFORMANCE TRENDS

Having framed the main issues predominating the study of performance, the work is put forward in full gear, guided by the underlying aim to generate "a method that engages with music performance in its complexity". (p.74) It begins with Chapter Three, which seeks to contextualize the analyzed violinists by framing their biographical and cultural background, while providing a broad overview of their performance style. Alongside significant information as to performers' teachers, school affiliation and career highlights, the text surveys some of the main conclusions drawn from the observations made in the following chapters, with special emphasis given to absorbing mutual influences of HIP and MSP.

However captivating, this chapter discloses a drawback, for using such structure is perplexing in many ways. For example, the first section aims to provide the analyzed violinists' main biographical overview. It is based on information regarding some of the violinists' principle teachers and career paths, yet is occasionally combined with brief passages summarizing the 'overall description' of one's performance style. This is presented alongside sporadic mention of recording reviews and performers' personal reflections of either their Bach performances, or of wider issues connected to performance. Casual engagements with such diverse angles might serve well in captivating the reader's attention. Yet such strategy runs the risk of failing to adhere to consistent and thorough inquiry of the various aspects, forcing the reader to anxiously wait for the following chapter in order to probe into the author's claims.

A paramount issue that calls for attention is the somewhat conclusive classification to either HIP or MSP presented in the chapter's various sections, set in direct contrast to claims so vehemently featured throughout the manuscript as to the indistinctiveness nature of such categorization. Indeed, several characteristics emerged over the years as apparent indicants of the HIP style, for which the use of Baroque violin coupled with the utilization of gut strings and assorted bows, or the employment of 'Baroque performance features' such as low pitch tuning, serve as but partial constituents. Earlier in the book Fabian makes the distinction by pointing to MSP as "those who play on modern violins and perform the broad gamut of the violin repertoire", whereas HIP is classified as "those playing with eighteenth-century violins and bows...and specializing in performing largely pre-1800 repertoire". (p.20) These attributes, together with player's schooling background, have been long guiding scholars in making the distinction between the two style-categories, and Fabian is no exception. However, taking into account the substantial amount of present-day investigations which have found similarity between both groups in many of aspects, it seems that the criteria used for such groupings should have been more reluctantly presented from the very start: various studies, including Fabian's own findings presented in some of her former research, have shown the impact of HIP on contemporary violin performance as gradually becoming all-embracing, affecting the performance aesthetics of MSP players who have adopted its intrinsic features (see for example Ornoy, 2006; 2008; Fabian, 2009; Leech-Wilkinson, 2009; Dimov, 2010; Liebman et al., 2012; Fabian, 2013). After all (to play the devil's advocate), possessing variegated bows has been part of a violinist’s arsenal for years, and in case schooling- profile serves to differentiate between the two assumed camps, engaging with HIP specialists throughout ones' long years of instrumental training is considered, for most contemporary violinists, a standard route of the discipline.

Fabian's main conclusions point to the increasing influence of HIP on MSP over the last 30 years, together with a constant shift towards flexibility of playing, achieved through the use of a wide palette of performance devices. As mentioned above, these findings correspond to previous studies conducted on the subject, which identified reciprocity and mutual interchange between the two style-groups (e.g. Ornoy, 2006; 2008; Fabian, 2009; Leech-Wilkinson, 2009; Dimov, 2010; Liebman et al., 2012). Current research has similarly traced a growing pursuit for innovative features and a blend of stylistic approaches among the newer generation of performers.[3]

An interesting observation is made while discussing the rigid emphasis on the flawless technique and "nice clean sound" characteristic of the American school of playing, mainly associated with Julliard's renowned violin teacher Ivan Galamian. Performance features such as the relative stabilization of tempo and rhythm, the increase of vibrato, or the gradual decline of audible portamento have long been regarded as dominators of the intermediate period of violin recordings (circa 1930-1970). Such praxis has been largely understood to be connected to the rise of the recording industry, downplaying artistic extraversion for the sake of etiquette appropriateness better suited to repeated hearing. Post-war aesthetics have also been considered as linked to the overall downgrading of emotional utterance following WW2 (see Katz, 2006; Leech-Wilkinson, 2009). However, having observed Galamian's influence over a large body of prominent violinists active during the mid-20th century, Fabian points to the so called 'Galamian circle' supremacy as yet another major factor which has played a decisive role in shaping contemporary violin performance aesthetics: "Assuming that many other teachers had similar approaches, it becomes questionable whether it was primarily the demand of the recording industry that fostered uniformity and precision and discouraged risk-taking and experimentation in performance. Conservatoires and competition judges might have played a more crucial role". (p.92)

CHAPTER 4: RECORDING ANALYSIS

The following chapter four presents a comprehensive, systematically detailed analysis of the performance features examined. Employing computer-software devices for the analysis of various music parameters (such as tempo, vibrato or rhythm) is used as a primary tool alongside rudimental aural scrutiny, the latter utilized for features still difficult to detect via standard digital waveform editors (such as bowing, articulation or phrasing). While acknowledging the author's apparent concern regarding an over delineation of technical details, one should point out the lack of a detailed description of the methods used to analyze two of the more factual features (e.g. tempo, certain aspects of rhythmic alterations). Likewise, aural examination of local timbre effects and dynamics (when presented in certain sections) could have been further aided by software programs.

Fabian's description of the results is vivid and stimulating. Many of her findings support scholars' former observations and claims presented throughout the manuscript: tempo choices are dependent on personal preferences, rather than connected to background parameters such as age, recording date or school classification (although a relationship was found between the use of extreme tempos and MSP); vibrato has gradually become more varied over the last decades, together with its increased use as an expressive effect; ornamentation, although found (somewhat surprisingly) to be practiced by a relative minority of the studied recordings and more frequently presented among MSP than HIP, is varyingly portrayed in terms of type, recurrence and location; dotted rhythms are featured in a manner seemingly more in line with 18th century performance conventions when compared to recordings of earlier periods; younger and HIP inspired players feature a wide variety of bowing and articulation and an extensive use of open strings coupled by the use of lower positions; the use of terraced dynamics was found common among all, while contrastive dynamics in repeats or fugal episodes was used more by MSP than among their HIP peers; long-units phrasing was found among older and MSP players, while younger and HIP violinists portray shorter musical gestures by articulating concise arch-phrasing units.

All in all, apart from the extensive use of vibrato and similar bowing employed among older generation MSP, clear-cut class categorization was found to be quite inapplicable: older HIP resembled MSP in bowing while differing from their younger associates, ornamentation has ceased to denote association to any one style-group, and the nuanced interplay of rhythm, articulation or dynamics "became palpable and made the previous attempt at categorizing styles rather futile". (p.198)

Obviously, the overlap absorbed between players of different ages, recording dates or schools calls into question not only the concept of HIP / MSP style boundaries, or the somewhat worn-out notion of homogeneity in later 20th century recordings (spaciously raised in the chapter's conclusion), but the very idea of performance limits. As I myself have recently suggested, observing even a random selection of contemporary recordings clearly shows the vast array of dynamic shadings, articulation devices,

rhythmic nuances, fingerings, bowings, means of vibrato, portamento and the like, utilized to present the widest possible divergence (see Ornoy, 2016). Such variety could well be linked to the post-modern quest for pluralism and elimination of the hierarchical order, as well as to the unprecedented inflation of recording output. In the face of such an overwhelming spectrum, attempting to address the elusive notion of trends and boundaries seems more difficult than ever. And indeed, while struggling with the eternal question of uniformity versus idiosyncrasy of style, Fabian enquires: "The question then is: how many *radically* different readings one can get of a piece? Or rather, to what extent readings must differ from each-other before one starts talking about homogeneity in performance?". Her conclusion is unmistakable: "The final point then is not to deny the existence of trends, but to emphasize their limited scope in helping to map twentieth-century developments of western music performance". (p.200)

Above all, however, stands the inescapable rudiment: as has been often observed throughout the corpus of studies made on the subject, and repeatedly emphasized herewith, performance features could not be autonomously examined as independent, self-determined objects. They are forever intermixed with a web of collateral attributes, forming a most complex net of interactions: bowing, dynamics, rhythmic alterations, timing and articulation do not stand apart, for it is their constant amalgamation that creates the ever-changing phenomena of sound.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTING THE HOLISTIC APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

Unsettled with "the seeming chaos of individual differences caused by the relative and diverse contributions and non-linear interactions of performance features", (p.201) Fabian now turns to a new strategy. Basing her actions on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theory of difference and consistency (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988), she aims in the fifth chapter to indulge into an 'holistic' approach, one that "might be best grasped subjectively paying attention to both measurable and felt features". (p.201)

She starts by comparing MSP and HIP, yet this time through a more general outlook largely based on aurally-conceived impressions. While elements such as tempo, dynamics and articulation still serve as referential points, it is the broad imprint that is now absorbed. Terms such as 'lyrical', 'dance-like', 'melodically' or, 'rhythmically oriented' are combined with figurative rhetoric such as 'lively', 'liberated' or 'non-literalistic'. Upon reconfirming the consistent overlap between the two camps she alludes to Deleuzian terminology: "This differences underscore the complex, heterogeneous and dynamic inter-relationship of bowing, accenting, tempo, dynamics, timing, phrasing, articulation and ornamentation, at times leading away ("deterritorializing") from MSP, other times weakening ("deterritorializing") HIP, or moving towards a "nomad", idiosyncratic "multiplicity". (p.217)

This same strategy is further used to analyze multiple versions made by the same violinist, an examination adjoined by reviews and performers' own stated positions. Her wording is loose and interpretive, with phrases such as 'freer', 'gestural', 'measured' or 'romantic' coming to the forefront. At a later stage, she employs software assisted analysis, which although supports her aural observations (such as in regards to Kremer's flexible and improvisatory style featured in his 1981 version), still seems to obscure the overall picture. Working through the process of weighing and comparing, she once again leads us to the inevitable obstacle: the complexity of music performance makes any attempt for definite deductions seem irrelevant. "The analyst...while trying to describe the moment and account for the perceptual experience, is stuck in the domain of words...[yet] by the time the analysts has accounted for the elements contributing to the experience, the perceived moment has long passed and the multiplicity of heterogeneous elements has already configured a different assemblage". (p.227)

At this stage Fabian turns to quite a daring approach, shaking off pretentious claims for clean, 'objective' lexis in favor of what 'empirical musicology' advocates would have considered pure heresy: drawing from Spitzer and Coutinho's quest for 'the affective dimension' of music interpretation (Spitzer & Coutinho, 2014) , she embarks upon her own personal reflections on the recordings at hand. Her outlined goal is to demonstrate the multifaceted, subjective reactions to music, feasible due to the multiplexed intermingle of performance features. Contemplating on Kuijken's versions she notes: "The more freely flowing, improvisatory, melodic-harmonic goal...express heartfelt sadness that nevertheless has hope to heal. The way the performer conveys a sense of free musical fancy that seemingly obeys only the passions of his soul carries within the seeds of consolation and redemption - just like an uncontrolled, cathartic grieving-crying, saying out loud, has the potential of letting go, of accepting, of moving on". (p.246) Such sensuality of expression is far from being detached, for it is constantly adjoined by well-manifested performance elements regarded as contributing to the overall *affect*. Later in the chapter she depicts responses made by listeners of varied musical background to the different recordings, and reports notably of the "conflicting comments" made for Zehetmair's version, "ranging from "Lovely performance, beautiful phrases and line of the melody" to "Terrible performance. Wrong phrasing, not

musical; the performer doesn't understand the music at all"". (p.251) Here again, qualitative data serves as an input for further investigations of performances' idiosyncrasies, moving back and forth from listeners' impressions, to the actual performance features assumed as their source of influence. All in all, her language is lavish and revealing, at times lyrical and sensuous. Addressing in the following chapter the substantial value of 'energy' depicted in contemporary digital broadcasts she writes: "The close-ups of intensely focused faces, moving bodies, eye contacts, breathing, and the physical effort and concentration involved...all add to the impact of performance". (p.284)

Fabian is surely not the first to have indulged in emotional and figurative responses to music, for many studies have focused on investigating the connection between psychological and physiological expressions/ reactions to musical stimuli. However, engaging in such domains as part of an inquiry of performance practice is quite novel. Scholars and listeners' 'holistic-affective experience' is brought into the forefront, baring equal partnership with quantitative observations in order to more fully portray the elusive nature of musical performance.

CONCLUSIONS

In the book's concluding chapter Fabian refocuses on the theory guiding her method: in adopting the 'complex dynamical system' disquisition, put forth by Paul Cilliers, Gilles Deleuze or Bruno Latour (see Deleuze, 1994; Cilliers, 1998; Latour, 1999) , she attempts to bridge over the asymmetrical, multilayered and non-hierarchical networks that comprise what we call a 'music performance'. The non-linear nature of performance features is perceived as necessitating a research framework that obscures generalizations, highlights perceptual limitations and complies with diverse meanings. In short: a post-modern abolition of the hierarchic order, for which (to use Thomas McEvilley's incisive words) "The obsession with formal sequences made up of linked solutions, which formerly seemed to imply a progress toward a goal, now seems merely an obsession" (McEvilley, 1991, pp. 162-163).

Fabian's work is fresh and original. Employing both qualitative and quantitative methods of investigation for analyzing musical performance is surely nothing new, yet it is the identification of performance as a heterogeneous, non-linear and non-hierarchical system, the recognition (and legitimatization) of a multiplicity of interpretations, and above all the acknowledgment of performance as an ever-changing, impalpable phenomenon, which makes this volume so compelling. The meticulous and detailed study of recordings surely served to reinforce conclusions presented over the past few years. Among them the current blend of HIP and MSP stylistic approaches, the distinctiveness and individual peculiarities characteristic of players regardless of their assumed style categorization or biographical identity, and the huge palette of performance devices found among present-day performers coupled with a constant search for new, innovative attributes. Nevertheless, it is the added perspective, this novel method of inquiry based on merging constituents taken from the broadest dimensions of investigation while humbly acknowledging its limits, that calls for much notice. In short: A book worthwhile indeed.

NOTES

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[2] One could already trace the conception regarding 20th century homogeneity of performance style in Theodor Adorno's reproaches about the standardization inherent in the capitalist industrial system, relating to the impact of the recording industry on music consumption. Thurston Dart similarly pointed to recordings as advocating uniformity of style, while cautioning against the degeneration of the performer's status as an individual interpreter. Laurence Dreyfus warned against authoritative performances dictating homogeneity, and saw in the demand for technical perfection an impediment to expressivity. Among later studies focusing on sounded evidence, the idea of homogeneity and invariability of style was first advocated by Philip, and has continued to be present in writings for almost a decade since. See Adorno (2002); Dart (1954); Dreyfus (1983); Philip (1993); Chanan (1995); Day (2000); Katz (2003).

[3] In her study of diverse Beethoven string quartets performances, Nancy November reported the newer generations "urge toward innovation" made by means of variety of bow strokes and articulation devices. I reported similar tendencies in my observation of violin recordings made in most recent decades. See November (2011) and Ornoy (2016).

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