

HIP

Historically-Informed Performance

Background

- The 19th century was devoted to contemporary music, and tended to view everything in its own self image.

Background

- Musical instruments underwent numerous developments during the 19th century.
- Orchestras enlarged and changed, especially in terms of the ratio of strings to wind / brass instruments.

Background

- Performing styles also changed, emphasizing such features as:
 - Constant legato
 - Nearly-constant vibrato in string instruments
 - Frequent tempo changes
 - A highly individualistic, “interpretational” approach.

Background

- This general performance style persevered well into the 20th century.
- It's perfect for 19th century music, but not so great for 18th century music.

Background

- Certain prejudices or misunderstandings of 19th century musicians also affected performances:
 - Tendency to think of Viennese Classicism as “precious” or “dainty”
 - Tendency to think of Baroque music—particularly Bach—as rigorous, granitic, and somehow Gothic in nature.
 - Tendency to assume that “progress” meant that 19th century performance practice was superior to 18th century practices.

The Beginnings

- Early in the 20th century some scholars began challenging current assumptions about performing earlier music.

Pioneers

- Wanda Landowska was the first major harpsichordist since the Baroque era.
- By modern standards she still seems pretty 19th century (her super-powered harpsichord would be unfamiliar to Bach) but still she was going in the right direction.
- She was an extraordinary musician and performer.

Pioneers

- Arnold Dolmetsch specialized in building copies of instruments found only in museums—harpsichords, clavichords, and the like.

The Early Attempts

- Most early attempts to recreate performances of earlier eras were severely hampered by a number of factors:
 - Inexperience with playing earlier versions of modern instruments.
 - Guesswork as to performing styles and techniques.
 - The “musicology” nature of the projects.
 - Typically mediocre performers who were refugees from the mainstream musical world.

The Early Attempts

- Froberger keyboard piece from the 1950s anthology *Masterpieces of Music Before 1750*
 - The clavichord is actually out of tune.
 - The performance lacks any sensitivity or nuance.
 - There is no attempt to take advantage of the clavichord's pronounced expressive qualities.

Bach Cantata Cycle

- A complete cycle of the cantatas, begun in the 1970s.
- Two conductors:
 - Gustav Leonhardt
 - Nicholas Harnoncourt
- Concentus Musicus
 - Orchestra formed to play early music
 - Used copies of Baroque-era instruments.

Bach Cantata Cycle

- Pros:
 - In many cases these were the first-ever recordings of these cantatas.
 - They brought at least some semblance of Bach's sound back into the world.
 - They awakened musicians and audiences to the expressive possibilities of using earlier instruments and recapturing the performance practices of the past.

Bach Cantata Cycle

- Cons:
 - Typically the instrumentalists weren't technically secure; there was a lot of bad intonation and sloppy playing.
 - The conductors themselves were relatively inexperienced; some of the interpretations were unsettling.
 - A certain snippy attitude manifested itself in deliberately ugly sounds, as a reaction against the cultivated lushness of 19th century sound.

Bach Cantata Cycle

- Boy Sopranos
 - The use of boy sopranos instead of women was controversial and musically unconvincing.
 - Boys in Bach's days went through puberty much later—at around 16 or 17—so they were considerably more mature and musically secure.
 - The recording was obliged to use 10–12 years boys, who weren't up to the demands of the music.

Cantata No. 105

- Fast tempo
- Heavily accented, almost martial
- Absolutely no loosening of the tempo towards cadences, or anything which might seem “romantic.”
- Boy soprano, who had intonation problems and couldn't negotiate the passagework.

Reaction

- Many musicians rejected these performances and others like them.
- Among older generation musicians, in particular, “historically-informed performance” was more or less synonymous with “bad music making.”

Growth

- During the 1980s, new groups began to be founded.
- There was an interest in Viennese Classical performance styles as well as Baroque.
- Interest in Renaissance and Medieval styles began to arise as well.

Growth

- The new groups were generally composed of first-rate musicians, under inspired directors and management.
- The stigma of “early music” began to fade away during the 1980s.
- Performance standards improved dramatically.

Cantata No. 105

- The old Leonhardt recording again...
- A new performance by the English Baroque Soloists, conducted by John Eliot Gardiner.
- Recorded during the Bach Cantata Pilgrimage of 2000.
- Performing (and recording) all of Bach's sacred cantatas during one year.

Nowadays

- “HIP” is easily one of the most interesting parts of the modern musical world.
- It has influenced non-HIP groups as well.
- Because it is now mainstream, the same values that apply to all other music making are in full evidence in HIP performances as well:
 - Expressiveness
 - Fine technique
 - Interpretational Skill
 - Personality.