

# Music's Textual Dilemma

## Mistrusting Musical Texts

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### ABSTRACT

*Music is sound: audible, unique, ephemeral. For music composed before the advent of electronic recording a century and a quarter ago, musical texts — the unique arrangements of musical symbols by which music is represented in visible form — are our principal evidence for how that music sounded when it was created. But the texts in which Western music of the past is preserved are not necessarily accurate representations of the music they record. Although the symbols that make up Western musical notation have remained relatively stable over the centuries, much that they represent has changed. Tunings and temperaments have varied — from repertoire to repertoire and from place to place. So have styles of singing and of playing instruments. So have the instruments themselves. Most important in the present context, the conventions for realizing texts have varied substantially; the idea that performers should follow their texts closely dates only from the mid eighteenth century. In these contradictions lies music's textual dilemma: music historians and performers must depend upon texts, but even supplemented by research in performance practice, texts do not necessarily provide the information necessary to support informed discussion.*

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*To the memory of David Greetham,  
whose erudition, enthusiasm, and enterprise  
helped change Textual Scholarship*

MUSIC IS SOUND: AUDIBLE, UNIQUE, EPHEMERAL. FOR MUSIC COMPOSED before the age of electronic recording, musical texts — the unique arrangements of musical symbols by which music is represented in visible form — are our principal evidence for how that music sounded when it was created. Electronic recording began to produce useful reproductions of musical performances shortly before 1900, so for our knowledge of all Western music created more than a century and a quarter ago, including the works of Josquin, Monteverdi, Vivaldi, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Rossini, and Wagner, we must of necessity depend upon texts.

Although the methodologies editors of music employ for dealing with musical texts are largely imported from the verbal disciplines, in fact musical texts function quite differently from literary, Biblical, or historical texts. A sonnet is experienced by audiences reading its text(s) directly off the page; a sonata is experienced by audiences listening to performers who read from texts that they may not necessarily follow and who, in any event, supplement their texts with musical matter that Western music notation does not specify, the matter that musicians think of as lying “between the notes”. Literary historians writing about a sonnet engage with two critical projects: they decide what arrangement(s) of symbols constitute the sonnet’s text(s), and they try to extract meaning from those text(s). Music historians studying a sonata engage with three projects: like literary historians, they decide upon the arrangements of symbols that constitute the sonata’s text(s), but they must also work out what sounds were produced by the performers who first transformed those texts into audible music; for it is, at least in theory, sounds (and not texts) with which music historians deal, and only after having worked out what those sounds might have been can one settle down to extract meaning from them. However, the original sounds that make up most of the music that music historians study are inaccessible, and over the centuries musical performance has varied in the degree to which it follows texts. The variance has depended on the individual performer, on the nature of the performer’s text, and, most importantly, on the conventions of the repertoire to which the work being performed belongs. In some repertoires, performers were expected to follow their texts quite closely (although it is an exceptional performance that follows a text exactly), while in other repertoires performers were granted — and were expected to exercise — considerable license in realizing their texts. Music historians are understandably reluctant to speculate about how performances in repertoires that encouraged “performerly initiative” might actually have sounded; instead, they tacitly agree to accept the surviving texts as representations of the works they record. And so the literature of historical musicology consists largely of discussions not about music, the performance of which involves spontaneity and innovation, but about texts, which restrain and prescribe. In these contradictions lies music’s textual dilemma: music historians may prefer to write about music, but the object of their writing must be texts.

Musical texts can be deceptive, especially if they are approached with the wrong assumptions. Today, the default assumption that we bring to reading musical texts — the principle that our first music teachers instilled

in us when we learned to read music — is that musical texts are prescriptive and that the text of a work tells us exactly the notes that performers should sing or play. A corollary of this principle is that a musical text need only be construed literally to serve as a basis for the study and performance of the music it represents. But the performance of music is regulated not only by texts but also by unwritten conventions called performing practices and performing traditions. Performing practices determine how music is performed in particular times and places; performing traditions attach to individual pieces and are created by successive generations of performers rendering those pieces. Performing practices determine (among other things) the quality of sound desirable in a voice or instrument, the density and placement of ornaments, and the degree to which performers are expected to adhere to or depart from their texts. Because elements of performing practice vary with time and place, following musical texts literally will not necessarily — in fact, will probably not — yield performances similar to those that the texts were intended to generate. If one listens to recordings made over the last hundred years, one cannot help but be struck by the rapidity and unpredictability with which performing practices have changed in just a few decades; could one imagine on the basis of their texts alone how a pop song, an opera aria, or a violin concerto could have sounded when performed a hundred years ago?

Today, most music historians and most performers specializing in the music of the past are aware of the quirks and inadequacies of musical texts. But it is only in the last fifty years or so that this awareness has extended beyond a few specialists; by the time this awareness was more widely shared, the premises of historical musicology — the rules by which the game of historical musicology is played — had been securely in place for almost two centuries, and dependence upon texts was one of the foundations upon which the discipline had been built.

The beginnings of historical musicology may be traced back to the decades just before and after 1800. In those years appeared the first general histories of music (written by Charles Burney, John Hawkins and Nikolaus Forkel), the first uniform editions of a composer's entire *œuvre* (Samuel Arnold's Handel edition and Forkel's Bach edition, neither of which was completed), the first substantial biographies of composers (John Mainwaring's biography of Handel and Forkel's biography of Bach), and the first bibliography of writings about music (Forkel's *Allgemeine Literatur der Musik*).<sup>1</sup>

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1. Respectively, BURNLEY 1776, HAWKINS 1776, FORKEL 1788, ARNOLD 1789, FORKEL 1801, MAINWARING 1760, FORKEL 1802, and FORKEL 1792.

Historical musicology proceeded from the assumption that musical texts could provide sufficient information to support informed discussion and proper performances of the works they represent. This is the assumption from which the music publisher Breitkopf & Härtel proceeded when, in the mid nineteenth century, it began bringing out the first editions in which the principles developed for editing Classical, Biblical, and Medieval texts were applied to music.<sup>2</sup> With their *wissenschaftliche* pedigree, such musical editions achieved an eminence that enabled them — and has enabled their successors to the present day — to be regarded as a reliable basis for study and serious performance.

The assumption that musical texts are dependable records of musical compositions has also formed the basis of influential approaches to the ontology of musical works. Thus, for example, the distinguished philosopher Nelson Goodman defined a musical work as a class of performances compliant with its score (by which Goodman meant the musical text established by its composer). Goodman argued that to be a work, a musical entity must have a unique text that serves as the guarantor of its identity by providing a document of record against which performances may be measured so that valid performances (those that follow the score) may be distinguished from invalid ones (those that do not).<sup>3</sup>

The idea that musical texts in themselves might not be all that is needed to understand music developed as a result of an increasing interest in music of the past. That interest began about three centuries ago, but until the late twentieth century, it lacked an important element of historical awareness: the belief that to be properly understood, music should be performed so as to replicate the performances that its first audiences heard. Instead, when music from earlier eras was revived, it was played ahistorically, in whatever style was current at the time of the revival. The French began reviving the *tragédies en musique* of Jean-Baptiste Lully in the depressing later years of Louis XIV's reign; they associated Lully's music with happier times. But to make them acceptable to French audiences notoriously sensitive to changing fashions, Lully's works were updated for revivals: at first, harmonies were thickened; later, numbers were re-orchestrated; by

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2. Breitkopf & Härtel's output includes collected editions of the works of Johann Sebastian Bach (*Werke*, begun in 1851), George Frideric Handel (*Werke*, begun in 1858), and Ludwig van Beethoven (*Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, begun in 1864).
  3. GOODMAN 1984, 127–92. Most subsequent discussions of the ontology of musical works do not share all of Goodman's views, but few do not contain some comment on them.

the end of the *Ancien Régime*, works were being substantially rewritten.<sup>4</sup> In 1829, when Mendelssohn made his famous contribution to the Bach Revival with his production of the *Saint Matthew Passion* at Berlin's Singakademie, he recast Bach's work to conform to early nineteenth-century tastes.<sup>5</sup> Twentieth-century orchestras performed Bach's Brandenburgs with large string sections, with continuo parts fully written-out and often played on pianos, and with modern winds and brass. Today, many orchestras still play the Brandenburgs in this way.

It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that there developed a concern with how music of the past had originally been performed, and it was only in the 1970s that conservatories and universities began to offer courses in the history of performance practice. Historians of performance practice studied instructional manuals, musical instruments, criticism, diaries, correspondence, musical texts, and anything else that might provide evidence of how Western music of earlier times had sounded to its original audiences. Like many historical projects, research in performance practice is speculative, but, unlike many forms of history, research in performance practice is expected to yield practical results in the form of specific audible sounds. Practitioners of historically informed performance (HIP for short) set aside modern instruments in favor of reconstructions based on centuries-old originals, they perform "orchestral" works with the smaller groups used in earlier eras, they reject modern editions in favor of facsimiles, and they have discovered that musical texts were not necessarily sets of instructions to be followed slavishly. Quite the reverse, their research suggests that in certain repertoires performers were expected to exercise considerable initiative in realizing texts; for such repertoires, HIP advocates had an epigrammatic warning: "If you've played it right, you've played it wrong".

Ironically, although the study of performance practice had its origins in the late nineteenth century, it began to flourish at just the time that historical scholarship was becoming unfashionable and many historians were expressing doubt that one could ever be confident about historical "facts". Because the passage of time has altered or obliterated performing practices of the past, some cultural historians have suggested that historically informed performances may not after all be authentic. Richard Taruskin

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4. On updating Lully's dramatic works, see CYR & BROUDE 2019, 16–23.

5. For an edition of Mendelssohn's adaptation, see WINKLER 2014. Only the vocal score of this edition has been printed and offered for sale; the full score is available on rental.

has famously argued that the sounds produced by HIP are not historically accurate, and that they seem so only because they are different from those that we have been accustomed to hearing.<sup>6</sup> But whether or not the music produced by HIP musicians is authentic, HIP has made it clear that construing musical texts literally is unlikely to be an adequate basis for understanding that music.

Although many knowledgeable members of today's concert audiences are cognizant of the premises of historically performed performance, mainstream musical organizations usually perform older music ahistorically, i.e., in the modern styles with which their audiences are comfortable. This is a perfectly defensible choice, on both esthetic and financial grounds. Music historians, however, are concerned with how older music originally sounded. Because the original sounds of that music are no longer accessible, and because musical texts have by default become the common currency of music historians, the medium that enables the exchange of ideas, it is useful to remind ourselves of some of the ways in which musical texts may not represent fully or accurately the music they transmit.

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Let us begin our discussion with the most fundamental symbol of Western musical notation, the note, which for the past three quarters of a millennium has specified both pitch and duration. Today, the pitch known as "concert *a*",<sup>7</sup> the pitch that the oboe tries to sound when the orchestra tunes up before a concert, has a frequency of 440 Hz — i.e., 440 cycles (or vibrations) per second. That pitch is represented by the note head occupying the second space of a five-line staff governed by a treble clef:



But three centuries ago, when Bach was organist at Weimer, three different systems of tuning (*Cornet-ton*, *Cammerton*, and *tiefe Cammerton*) were in use simultaneously, and that same symbol (still designating a pitch called

6. TARUSKIN 1988.

7. For designating the registers of pitches, the following convention is used:



*a'*) could represent a frequency of approximately 470 Hz (a half tone higher than 440 Hz, equivalent to a modern *a'*-sharp), 410 Hz (a half tone lower than 440 Hz, equivalent to a modern *a'*-flat), or 390 Hz (a whole tone lower than 440 Hz, equivalent to a modern *g'*). A few decades earlier, at the court of Louis XIV, a similar situation had obtained: in the three French systems, the musical symbol for *a'* represented frequencies of 470 Hz (in *ton d'équie-rie*), 400 Hz (in *ton de chambre*) and 390 Hz (in *ton d'Opéra*).<sup>8</sup>

A 390 Hz *a'* is not simply a 440 Hz *a'* transposed down a whole tone: played on a harpsichord, the two sounds will differ not only in respect of pitch but also in respect of their other sonic qualities. Analogous differences occur with wind, brass, and string instruments. For many listeners, such differences do not matter. However, for many others, each note and each key has an individual character, and for such individuals a piece played a whole tone above the key for which it was conceived (which is how a piece notated for *tiefe Cammerton* will sound if played at today's tuning) is not the same piece as one played at the tuning in use when its text was inscribed.

The question of pitch is complicated by the problem of temperaments. Temperaments are systems of tuning that adjust pitches so that the same instrument can play in various keys without sounding too much out of tune in any of them. Temperaments do so by altering the relationships of pitches to each other. In theory, Western music is based on the premise that the pitches that make up our eight-note scales have frequencies bearing simple mathematical relationships to each other. Two pitches an octave apart are supposed to have frequencies in the ratio of 1 (the lower) to 2 (the higher); the frequencies that make up a perfect fifth are expected to be in the ratio of 2:3; a major third 4:5; a major second — that is, a whole tone — 8:9. Intervals produced by notes conforming exactly to these ratios are said to be “pure”. In practice, however, the system does not hold up: if one carries the calculations far enough, the expected ratios do not materialize. For example, the mathematics tell us that the ratio of two notes exactly seven octaves apart should be 1:128; but if we start with the same lower note and derive that note seven octaves above by cycling through thirteen fifths, the note thus produced will be slightly higher than the note generated simply by multiplying the frequency of the original note by 128. The discrepancy is 1.014:1, or 1.4 per cent, a small but a distinctly noticeable difference.

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8. For a convenient introduction to the history of pitch, see Haynes 2002: 95–123 for pitch in France, 133–58 for pitch in Germany, and 183–228 for German pitch with particular reference to the works of J. S. Bach.

Temperaments address this problem by substituting impure ratios for some of the pure ratios. Over the centuries, different temperaments have been devised, each with compromises intended to address the problems that were of most concern at the time. The preferred temperament today is “equal temperament”; it allows us to play satisfactorily if not perfectly in all of the many tonalities in common use at present.<sup>9</sup> Equal temperament does this by making fifths slightly narrower than the 2:3 of a pure perfect fifth and major thirds considerably wider than the 4:5 of a pure major third. We are so accustomed to these adjustments that many good musicians and experienced listeners may not notice them. But in order to realize the intentions of a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century composer, it is necessary to use the same temperament that the composer used when composing.

Equal temperament is favored today because today we use many keys, but as late as the seventeenth century, when the system of modes was giving way to the modern system of keys, the keys in use were few, and keys with more than two sharps or two flats were considered “remote” and were rarely employed. (A sharp is an inflection of a pitch that raises it by four ninths of a whole tone, and a flat is an inflection that lowers it by four ninths of a whole tone; the ability of a single key on the piano to serve for both *c*-sharp and *d*-flat, which in fact differ by a ninth of a whole tone, is a product of tempering.) Three centuries ago, temperaments were designed to favor the relatively few keys with two or fewer sharps or flats, since those were the keys most often used. Such temperaments meant that remote keys would produce certain intervals that were mathematically impure but that, for that very reason, might sound interesting. Composers have always liked to test boundaries, and some began to venture into those remote keys to take advantage of the not-quite-pure sounds they produced. When temperaments were devised to “domesticate” the nearer remote keys, adventurous composers moved farther out, to keys with more sharps or flats. But with each move to more sharps and flats there came new temperaments intended to bring those outer sharps and flats into the system. If we use equal temperament to play music composed to exploit the piquant sounds produced by certain keys in certain obsolete temperaments, we lose an important element of that music.<sup>10</sup>

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9. For a critique of equal temperament and a discussion of its place in the history of temperaments, see DUFFIN 2007.

10. Jean Nicolas Geoffroy, a French organist of the late seventeenth century, is a composer whose music is noted for the unusual effects produced by his use of remote keys. On Geoffroy's music, see TILTON 2006, Part 1, xxiii–xxxvi.



Duration, the other element a note specifies, consists of two factors. On the one hand, there is value, a measure of the length of time for which a note is held relative to the lengths of the times that notes of other values are held: a whole note is held twice as long as a half note, and a half note twice as long as a quarter note. However, music is played at different tempos, so how long a particular note of a particular value is held, measured in absolute terms, varies with the tempo at which the passage in which that note occurs is played. Only with the introduction of the metronome in the early nineteenth century was it possible to specify how long in absolute terms — in fractions of a minute — a note was held. The metronome enabled a composer to specify how many notes of a certain value were to occur per minute, e.g., 84 half notes per minute would be represented as:

$$\text{♩} = 84$$

When introduced, the metronome was an intriguing novelty, and composers began adding metronome indications at the beginnings of compositions or sections. But the precision implied by metronome markings is deceptive: as good performers play pieces, they vary the tempo for expressive purposes, and to keep strictly to the metronome's tick would be to produce a "mechanical" (and therefore unsatisfactory) performance.

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Even if we could be confident about the pitches and durations represented by the notes of a musical text, we still would not know how performances before the age of electronic recording actually sounded. This is because over time styles of singing and of playing instruments have changed, as have the instruments themselves. If we listen to recordings of pop singers spanning the past hundred years or so, we can trace the progress from the sort of heightened intoning of Al Jolson to the more relaxed crooning of Perry Como to the speech-like declamation in vogue today. In the twenty first century, we expect a fuller, more forceful sound from a violin than was favored three hundred years ago.

The sounds produced by instruments have changed not only because performing styles have changed but also because materials and methods used to construct instruments have altered. Transverse flutes are now made of metal; 250 years ago they were made of wood. The instrument we call the French horn, with its relatively wide bore and valves, is quite different from its ancestor, the natural horn, for which Mozart and Haydn wrote. The fortepiano for which Beethoven composed his piano sonatas is a much

lighter, softer, and more subtle instrument than the concert grands on which they are mostly played today. So when we listen to any performance that is not either on an “original” instrument or on a skillful reproduction, then no matter how faithfully the performer follows his text, we are not hearing what the composer intended.

We might wonder if we could learn about the sounds that instruments produced several hundred years ago by listening to some of the several-hundred-year-old instruments housed today in museums and private collections. But most several-hundred-year-old instruments have been modified at some point in their existence. Not long after they were built, many seventeenth-century harpsichords were enlarged by adding additional keyboards and sets of strings (a process called *ravalement*). When the nineteenth century decided that it wanted a more powerful sound from string instruments, the fingerboards, necks, and bass bars of older violins were modified; such instruments are said to have been “de-baroqued”. Quite a few of the most valuable Cremonese instruments, the ones made by Stradivarius, the Amati, and the Guarneri, have been the objects of such attentions.

The sounds that made up the music of past eras depended not only on the instruments used to produce them but also on the ways in which those instruments were played. Until the middle of the last century — and still today in many if not most musical communities — it was assumed that the sounds that musical texts should generate were the sounds that are generated by performers following their texts literally and using the current forms of their instruments. Violinists performed Vivaldi’s violin sonatas on modern violins, using lots of vibrato and not adding any ornaments to those specified by the editions from which they were playing. HIP was a reaction against this form of presentism. To audiences brought up on ahistorical performances, HIP could be so different as to seem revelatory.

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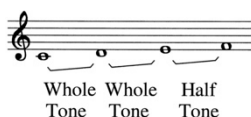
Finally — and most important for textual critics — there is the matter of how accurately over the centuries musical notation has reflected musical performance. The farther back in time we go, the less reliable does notation become as an indication of the relationship between the text of a musical entity and the notes that performers actually played or sang.

The earliest extant examples of post-Classical Western music notation date from the ninth century and take the form of “neumes”. Neumes are markings added to verbal texts: they are placed above the words to be sung, and they are similar in appearance, placement, and function to the dia-

critical markings devised late in the Classical Period to help with the pronunciation of Latin. In their earliest forms, neumes did not specify pitch; they indicated only the direction of a melody. A *virga* — a symbol similar to today's acute accent — placed above a syllable indicated that that syllable should be sung at a pitch higher than the pitch of the preceding note; exactly how much higher the symbol did not specify. A *punctum* — a dot — indicated a syllable to be sung at a pitch lower than that of the preceding note; exactly how much lower was not specified. Even when neumes were placed on different levels to reflect the general shape of a melody — a practice called “heighting” — or when a horizontal line representing a specific pitch was added to the mix, there was still considerable indeterminacy.

Students of chant have deployed various strategies to ascertain the precise pitches at which the neumes in surviving texts only hint. They have compared various neumated texts of the same chant with each other and with later texts in staff notation. They have considered how strategies employed by ethnomusicologists might be applied to neumated chant. And they have tracked how chants preserved in sources a millennium old have been sung down through the centuries. Chant is an important component of the heritage of Western music, and there is a substantial body of scholarly literature on the subject, but we must wonder to what extent we may be dealing with a case of an elaborate structure raised over a suspect foundation.

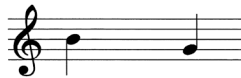
Staff notation, which was invented in the early eleventh century, might seem to offer a means of accurately recording music because it is able to specify pitch. A staff is a form of graph in which the horizontal axis represents the passage of time while the vertical axis represents pitch. Early staff notation does not specify absolute pitch, because there were no fixed pitches — i.e., no pitch equivalent to a modern concert *a'* at 440 Hz — but it could specify the relationships of certain pitches to each other. It was, for example, able to indicate that in a series of four notes the second note was a whole tone higher than the first, the third a whole tone higher than the second, and the fourth a half tone higher than the third:



We might assume that staff notation is a transparent system used to record music that had been there all along, just waiting to be written down. Not

so: music there certainly was, but it is unlikely that staff notation could record all of it accurately. The earliest staff notation recognizes only the notes that form the gamut, the array of twenty pitches, from G to *e''* recognized by medieval and Renaissance theorists (the number and identity of the pitches vary from age to age and writer to writer). These pitches, arranged from lowest to highest, occupy sequentially the lines and spaces of staves. Some adjacent pitches are a whole tone apart (e.g., *c'* and *d'*), while others are a half tone apart (e.g., *e'* and *f'*; see the musical example above). If the staff were a truly objective system, then the distances from line to adjacent space or from space to adjacent line would all represent the same interval. But because the intervals formed by adjacent notes of the gamut vary, in some cases the distance from a staff line to the adjacent space represents a whole tone and in some cases a half tone. Moreover, even though the interval of a half tone was recognized, it was recognized only between certain pitches, e.g., between *e'* and *f'*; until the sixteenth century, when accidental symbols began to be consistently applied to the notes they immediately preceded (which is the convention in use today), there was no straightforward way of representing a half tone falling between two adjacent pitches a whole tone apart. But the repertoire of unwritten chant seems to have included melodies that made use of half tones between two notes of the gamut separated by a whole tone (say an *e'*-flat between *d'* and *e'*).<sup>11</sup> Such melodies could be notated only by misrepresenting them (by recording a sung *e'*-flat as an *e'*) or by relying on singers to make un-notated adjustments in certain circumstances (say remembering that in a certain chant a certain note notated as an *e'* should be sung as an *e'*-flat). Early staff notation is a case in which notation, instead of recording music, has forced the music it records to accommodate itself to the notation's limitations.

Western notation has a long history of conventions in which notation is not realized literally. A tradition current in Renaissance and Baroque music permitted a performer to fill in a leap of a third, creating a diatonic line. Thus, a passage notated




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11. The symbols # for sharp (*quadratum*) and ♭ for flat (*rotundum*) originated in the eleventh century, but until the sixteenth, their principal use was to specify the hexachords in which a note was supposed to stand.

could, at the option of a performer, be rendered:



In late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century France, notes notated as even quarters or even eighths could in certain situations be rendered as if they were dotted; the convention is referred to as *notes inégales*. Thus a measure written as



could be performed as:



*Musica ficta* is a term used to describe Medieval and Renaissance conventions for inflecting notes when the text does not call for inflection. Because the staff notation of the day recognized only certain pitches, when two or more voices were performing simultaneously, following the text literally would sometimes produce unacceptable dissonances. To avoid such dissonances, the performer of one of the voices creating the dissonance could inflect one of his notes. Thus, a passage notated



might have been performed



to avoid the diminished fifth formed by the second note of each voice.

Especially perplexing problems are posed by repertoires in which texts of entire pieces were not meant to be realized literally. An extreme but important example of such a repertoire is the solo music of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>12</sup> This was a repertoire dominated by virtuoso performers, masters of the harpsichord, organ, lute, violin, bass viol, and flute. Each performer composed much of the music that he or she performed. Many of the pieces were simple, general musical ideas that often originated in improvisations that were elaborated and refined in successive performances. This repertoire valued spontaneity in performance, and it was expected that each time a piece was played, it would be played in a different way: organists, harpsichordists, and lutists might vary the texture; flutists and string players might make adjustments to the melody; everybody added ornaments.<sup>13</sup> This repertoire operated to a considerable extent without benefit of text, and the ways in which pieces were created and circulated had much in common with oral traditions. Composers could carry their compositions in their heads, and performers sometimes learned new pieces by listening to performances of them.

Such music resisted textualization: because a performer was expected to vary a piece each time he played it, a musical text could not specify exactly what notes a performer should play. Instead, musical texts were of several sorts serving several purposes. There were manuscript texts which, like modern fake sheets, recorded only melody lines or melodies with continuo; performers were expected to provide *ex tempore* all the detail needed for acceptable performances.<sup>14</sup> There were somewhat more detailed texts intended to suggest to a composer's students how a piece might be performed and from which proper performances, with all the necessary detail added, could be improvised. And there were very detailed texts that were, effectively, transcriptions of specific performances, real or imagined. When the performer/composers of this music began to self-publish editions of

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12. On the uses of text in this repertoire, see BROUDE 2017.

13. Jean Le Gallois tells us admiringly that every time royal harpsichordist Jacques Champion de Chambonnières played one of his compositions, he played it differently. Le Gallois's comment is evidence not only that spontaneity in performance was an important element in this repertoire but also that listeners remembered past performances well enough to be cognizant of differences. LE GALLOIS 1680, 70.

14. Early eighteenth-century manuscript copies of pieces for bass viol by Antoine Forqueray offer texts of just this sort: simple, unadorned statements of essential musical ideas. As a performer, Forqueray was known for the complexity of his improvised elaborations. For those texts see CYR 2010, 3–7.

their compositions, they published detailed texts intended to serve as models of the styles in which their pieces were to be performed. Such texts were no doubt realized literally by some less accomplished amateurs, but literal realization was not their intended use because literal realization lacked the spontaneity considered essential to performance.

It was only in the eighteenth century (perhaps a bit earlier in some areas), when a large influx of amateurs changed the demographics of the European musical community, that a closer relationship between text and performance developed. Most amateurs did not wish to acquire the improvisational skills commanded by celebrated professionals: instead, they wanted music that they could perform satisfactorily and satisfyingly by following texts literally. During the course of the eighteenth century, composers and music printers responded to this new demand by creating and offering music that could be performed adequately simply by playing or singing the notes on the page. This development not only satisfied the Enlightenment love of the rational and the orderly but also encouraged the creation of works that, unlike those of the preceding era, were defined in considerable detail and that were stable. By the end of the century, music in which performances were expected to follow texts closely had become the norm.

Notwithstanding the new respect being accorded musical texts, many performers — especially the most celebrated professionals — felt no obligation to follow texts faithfully. When Mozart performed as soloist in his own piano concerti, he delighted audiences — and no doubt frustrated the orchestra musicians — with *ex tempore* interpolations and modifications of the piano parts. Among the great nineteenth-century performers were Paganini and Liszt, well known for their free-wheeling interpretations. Because the best opera singers usually provided their own ornamentation, opera composers ordinarily did not bother to write out ornamentation for their parts unless expressly requested to do so.<sup>15</sup> True, nineteenth and twentieth-century composers often complained about performers who failed to play exactly what had been written for them, but the frequency with which such complaints occur must be seen not only as an indication

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15. On Mozart's improvisations during performances of his piano concerti, see KEEFE 2009, 185–242; on Paganini as an improviser, see BORER 2011, 191–216; on Liszt as an improviser, see EDEN 2011, 179–81; on improvised ornamentation in opera, see GOSSETT 2006, 290–331. The author thanks Professor Mary Cyr for directing his attention to the Keefe article.

of what composers wished but also as evidence of how indifferent performers might be to composers' wishes.

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The new correspondence of work to text to performance made possible a new way of thinking about music. Instead of thinking about unique and therefore differing performances, the musical community, encouraged by publishers and composers, began to think in terms of musical works, stable entities defined in detail by their creators, who recorded them in detailed texts that performers were expected to follow faithfully.<sup>16</sup> Musical works were artifacts that could be offered for sale in printed form and that, if properly used, could generate many similar performances. Although this new model described only the music being composed in the decades before and after 1800, it was applied retroactively to the music of earlier repertoires, even though in some of those repertoires the relationship of text to performance had been much less straightforward than that contemplated by the model. But this ahistorical approach was accepted by the musical community, partly because that community's historical awareness was not as well developed as it would later become and partly because acceptance facilitated the discussions of music that had become an essential element of musical life.

It must be understood that the belief that musical texts could provide a sufficient basis for the study and performance of musical works was the product of an exceptional moment in the history of Western music. By 1800, improvisational practices in which text and performance were only tenuously connected had been superseded by a reassuringly rational and ordered system in which performance followed text. The importance of performing practice in determining the correspondence of performance to text in historical repertoires had yet to be recognized. And so trust was placed in texts, even though performerly adherence to text has always been more a theoretical ideal than a real-life practice.

This trust justified reliance on the texts offered by the musicological editions that were beginning to roll off the presses of publishers. Using the texts of "standard" editions as a basis for research and discussion was

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16. There is a substantial literature on what is called the "work concept". The seminal work remains GOEHR 1992, but see also the collection of essays in TALBOT 2000. With Mary Cyr, the author is preparing a paper on the eighteenth-century acceptance of musical compositions as works.



an expedient and efficient way to conduct musical discourse. Until quite recently, original sources have been difficult to access, and having the texts of those sources available in reputable editions was a great convenience for researchers and performers. Moreover, being able to discuss a passage that could be quoted from or cited in a readily available musicological edition was an important advantage for music historians and their readers. Over time, there developed a mutually advantageous relationship between the specialist publishers that provided the editions and the historical musicologists and performers who used them. The publishers supplied editions upon which music historians and performers could rely for their research and performance, while the use of those editions by music historians and performers certified to the musical public at large the utility and dependability of those editions' texts. (This arrangement has not been unique to music: scholars in other disciplines have entered into similar bargains with their editions.)

For a long time, reliance upon musicological editions deflected attention from the inadequacies of the texts on which those editions were based. One might question the quality of an edition because it had been based on the wrong source, because it had too many questionable emendations or refusals to emend, or simply because it was filled with mechanical mistakes, but surely, it seemed, if managed by a competent editor, the underlying texts could provide adequate access to the works they represented. Thus, when the arrival of facsimiles in the 1960s and of the internet in the twenty first century rendered access to original sources increasingly convenient, music historians and performers could readily transfer their trust from the texts of musicological editions to the texts of facsimiles and internet images.

There are trade-offs in reading musical texts in facsimiles or internet images rather than in modern editions. Using a modern edition, one is working with a mediated text, but if the editor has been knowledgeable and conscientious, the problems presented by that text will have been identified and addressed; with facsimiles or digital images of an original source, one has the advantage of working with an unmediated text, but the problems presented by that text must be identified and addressed by the user.<sup>17</sup> In neither case can one be certain of how original performances of

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17. Mediation involves both editorial intervention and the changes resulting from transcription of earlier sources into modern notation. Such transcription usually involves loss of information, as when clefs that suggested by which instruments a passage was played are converted into the two or three clefs that most modern users can read. Transcription also resolves ambiguities, as when the double bars

the work that the text represents sounded. For example: If one is working with a copy of the 1700 edition of Corelli's violin sonatas self-published in Rome by the composer, one can be confident that one is working with the text in which the composer wanted his collection to circulate. However, one can not be confident that this text contains all the notes that Corelli expected would be played in performance. In fact, it is clear that Corelli expected that in performance quite a bit would be added to his score. We know this because in 1710, the Amsterdam printer Estienne Roger made an arrangement with Corelli that enabled Roger to publish an edition of Corelli's sonatas that included the ornaments for the adagios as the composer himself might have played them ("les agréments des Adagio de cet ouvrage, composez par M<sup>r</sup>. A. Corelli comme il les joue"); the presence of these ornaments was an important selling point for Roger, because Corelli's self-published edition had not included them. So Corelli's edition, which is as authoritative as an edition can be, is misleading in respect of how the music actually sounded when played.<sup>18</sup> Suppose for a moment that Corelli's edition were the only source in which his sonatas survive; we might have assumed that the text was elaborated in performance, but even with some knowledge of Corelli's personal style, would an editor have been able to devise with confidence a hypothetical reconstruction of how the pieces were actually played?

Knowledgeable performers dealing with older music are usually aware of the quirks and inadequacies of musical texts, but as their business is to produce actual sounds, they must choose between the two approaches that have long been used to deal with artifacts from ages past. On the one hand, they can try to recover or reconstruct some state of the artifact at some moment in the past — they can do the equivalent of cleaning a painting, restoring a cathedral, or producing an old-spelling edition of a play. Alternatively, they can accept the changes that time has wrought and leave the artifact to take its chances of engaging a modern audience in a modern interpretation. HIP musicians take the former course: they and their historically-minded audiences enter into unspoken agreements in which the musicians undertake to realize their texts in accordance with the best

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enclosing dots used in the seventeenth century to mark the ends of strains that might or might not be repeated are replaced with modern prescriptive repeat signs. And it can seriously misrepresent a musical conception, as when a piece that originally circulated in part-book or choir-book layout is presented in score, which distorts how the music was conceived and understood in its own day.

18. For Corelli's self-published edition, see CORELLI 1700; for Roger's edition with additional ornamentation, see CORELLI 1710.

and most current research while the audience members agree to accept such performances as authentic, and to suspend their awareness that what may be authentic today may well prove to be otherwise when new research is published tomorrow. Alternatively, performers can offer interpretations that ignore the premises of HIP and that are in modern styles. Casals and Landowska played Bach in this way; their performances reflected their distinctive and thoroughly modern musical personalities and usually were musically quite effective.<sup>19</sup>

A competent editor of a musical work can usually produce an edition that is satisfactory in the sense that its text is an arrangement of symbols close to — in some cases, exactly — what the earliest performers of the edited piece saw. But a musical text is useful only to the extent that we know how it was intended to be realized by those who inscribed or printed it, and we know that performances can differ from texts, in some repertoires very much so.

A music historian silently reading the text of a piece for his own instrument — say an organist reading an organ prelude — may imagine how he himself might realize that text, but when he is writing about that piece in an article or monograph, he cannot know what his readers reading the text of that piece will imagine. Perhaps some will imagine exactly the sounds that the symbols in the edition represent, and perhaps some will imagine how they would perform it themselves. Because the text is all that the music historian and his readers have in common, it must serve as the point of departure for discussion, even though its relationship to the actual sounds of a performance may be uncertain. And so, although music history is about music, the music about which music historians write is music imagined through the conservative construction of musical texts. Music historians know that to base their histories on conservative realizations of texts may be misleading, but they fear, with good reason, that to construct histories on the basis of hypothetical performances runs the risk of being more misleading still. No music historian has ever been criticized for following a text too closely. The discourse of music history moves forward as long as all concerned agree to accept musical texts as the bases for discussions. This is a pragmatic strategy: if texts do not correspond exactly to particular performances, each text may be approached as a norm that served as the basis for contemporary performances, and reading that text in the light of

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19. Paul Eggert (EGGERT 2009, *passim*. But esp. 19–60) discusses the choice between trying to restore or reconstruct artifacts from the past and letting such artifacts take their chances of engaging us in the states in which they have reached us.

current knowledge about performance practice, music historians and their readers may decide for themselves what a realization may have sounded like. This move enables music historians to acknowledge and move beyond music's textual dilemma. It is not an unreasonable course to pursue, as long as those pursuing it remain aware that they are thinking and writing about musical texts rather than the music — audible, unique, ephemeral — that those texts were intended to produce.

*The Broude Trust*

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