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# Review Articles: Current Medieval Studies

## Performing Medieval Music

SAM BARRETT

Ross W. Duffin, *A Performer's Guide to Medieval Music*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press (*Early Music America*), 2000. xiii + 602 pp. ISBN 0 253 21533 1.

Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *The Modern Invention of Medieval Music: Scholarship, Ideology, Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. xii + 340 pp. ISBN 0 521 81870 2.

*Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, edited by Timothy J. McGee. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003. xii + 332 pp. ISBN 1 58044 044 4.

Leo Treitler, *With Voice and Pen: Coming to Know Medieval Song and How it was Made*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. xxx + 506 pp. ISBN 0 19 816644 3.

INTEREST in the performance of medieval music is nothing new. From the 1830s onwards, Dom Guéranger sought to restore plainchant, Roman liturgy and Benedictine monasticism at the abbey of Solesmes.<sup>1</sup> In seeking to restore pure Gregorian forms of plainchant, Guéranger turned to modern philology, inaugurating the study of medieval manuscripts that motivated subsequent scholarship at the abbey. By the closing decades of the nineteenth century two books that would be instrumental in spreading the scholarship and performing practice of Solesmes had been published: *Les mélodies grégoriennes d'après la tradition* (1880), a treatise on performing chant; and the *Liber gradualis* (1883), the first authoritative edition of plainchant based on palaeographical research.<sup>2</sup> A similar alignment of scholarship with performance of medieval music took place at the turn of the twentieth century when musicologists in German universities founded *collegia musica* to perform the music that they studied. Although performances were open to the public, they were mostly attended by academics, while performers were drawn from a mix of musicologists and dedicated amateurs. The first *collegium musicum* was established at the University of Leipzig by Hugo Riemann in 1908, and it was his protégé Wilibald Gurlitt

<sup>1</sup> On the restoration of plainchant at Solesmes, see principally Pierre Combe, *Histoire de la restauration du chant grégorien d'après des documents inédits: Solesmes et l'édition vaticane* (Solesmes, 1969). A short introduction is also provided in David Hiley, *Western Plainchant: A Handbook* (Oxford, 1993), 624–7. A reading of the revival in the light of Romantic and post-Romantic historicism is given in Katherine Bergeron, *Decadent Enchantments: The Revival of Gregorian Chant at Solesmes* (Berkeley, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> The author of both books was Dom Pothier, the leading figure in chant studies at Solesmes after Dom Guéranger's death in 1875.

who later introduced some of the first modern performances of medieval music in Germany.<sup>3</sup>

The foundation of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in 1933 represented the first attempt to treat performance as a specialism equivalent in status to the new discipline of musicology. The professionalism brought to performance and scholarship at Basle was imitated elsewhere only after World War II. In England, Thurston Dart was the first in a new breed of performing scholars, and the publication of his book *The Interpretation of Music* (London, 1954), which included a chapter on the performance of medieval music, heralded an attempt to treat the problems of performance practice in a systematic manner. The appearance of medieval music in mainstream culture was subsequently aided by the virtuosity and presentational skills of David Munrow, while the foundation of the journal *Early Music* in 1973 was intended to forge 'a link between the finest scholarship of our day and the amateur and professional listener and performer'.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1980s, debates about authenticity and historical performance began to assume a status that was relatively independent of performance itself. Joseph Kerman's criticism of the way in which positivistic scholars of early music shied away from interpretation, and Richard Taruskin's unmasking of the modernist credentials of the early music movement, led to the emergence of what might be termed 'performance practice criticism'.<sup>5</sup> A less contentious move to treat the performance of medieval music as a subject worthy of systematic reflection in itself was announced with the publication of the first volume of the New Grove handbook on performance practice in 1989, which was described as 'not simply another guide to the performance of the past... rather a book about the study of past performance'.<sup>6</sup> In an attempt to develop a scholarly framework for discussing questions that had been vigorously debated in disparate and often informal contexts, leading scholars were invited to write at length on broad topics. The overall effect was to develop a discourse at one remove from current controversies; as described in the introduction to the volume, instead of providing advice to performers in the form of a manual, the editors were motivated by a desire to define 'the boundaries of the discipline of performance practice'.<sup>7</sup>

In the past two decades this new dialogue between performance practice and performance practice criticism has arguably taken centre stage from the older exchange between historical musicology and historically informed performance. The four books under consideration here could be said to continue the move away from the philological roots of historical musicology, embracing a quasi-ethnographic interrogation of practitioners (Duffin), interdisciplinary study (McGee), a 'new historicist' consideration of the way in which modern reception has shaped historical understanding (Leech-Wilkinson) and, among much else, historiographical reflection on

<sup>3</sup> Gurlitt's *colloquium* performed early chant through to chansons by Dufay and Binchois, beginning with three concerts in Karlsruhe in 1922. On the spread of *collegia musica*, see Emil Platen and Iain Fenlon, 'Collegium musicum §6. The 20th-Century Revival', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2nd edn, London, 2001), vi, 119.

<sup>4</sup> John M. Thomson, *Early Music*, 1 (1973), 1.

<sup>5</sup> For Kerman's critique, see his *Musicology* (London, 1985), 182–217. Taruskin's contributions on the subject of authenticity are collected together in his *Text and Act* (Oxford, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Dust-jacket to *Performance Practice: Music Before 1600*, ed. Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie (London, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

the construction of ‘performance’ (Treitler). The presence of this common theme alongside newer historical methods could be taken as a symptom of the readiness of medieval musicology to embrace the working methods and critical perspectives of ‘performance studies’. Pressure to adopt these perspectives has come from the confluence of two strands in Anglo-American musicology: first, a growing realization of the relationship between notions of historical authenticity and the work concept;<sup>8</sup> second, a sustained criticism of the idea of the work concept that has turned to different philosophical traditions (most notably phenomenology and performative semantics) in an attempt to introduce new ways of thinking about music.<sup>9</sup> Attempts to reassess medieval music by embracing approaches that stand apart from the analytical and historical schools of thought implicated in the notion of *Werktreue* are very much in their infancy, but the recent appearance of a few studies inspired by new movements in musicology amounts to significant dissension within a field that has largely resisted the introduction of new critical perspectives.<sup>10</sup> In view of the disciplinary heritage at stake, a close examination of recent studies addressing the performance of medieval music is needed to see whether a radical challenge to customary ways of thinking about medieval music and its performance is indeed in the offing and, if so, with what justification.

The avowed aim of Ross Duffin’s *A Performer’s Guide to Medieval Music* is ‘to foster more performances of medieval music’, as silence on pertinent questions of performance practice would mean fewer performances and a loss of approaches that ‘would mirror the loss of the original performance traditions’ (p. ix). Such a pragmatic and ultimately conservative outlook reflects the status of the volume as a publication of *Early Music America*, a magazine devoted to promoting music from the medieval to Classical periods. Duffin’s compilation also reflects the magazine in form, consisting of short essays by scholars and performers arranged into thematic categories: Repertoire, Voices and Instruments, and Theory and Practice. Some 40 essays distributed unevenly between these categories provide prolegomena to possible performances, placing repertoires within briefly sketched historical contexts and serving as introductions to resources, whether in the form of editions or contacts for makers of early instruments.

The volume could therefore be described as a mixture of surveys of historical evidence and anecdotal advice drawn from first-hand experience; in other words, a continuation of the alliance between historical musicology and the historical performance movement. The first part of the volume contains some excellent introductions to repertory by such established scholars as Alejandro Planchart and Elizabeth Aubrey, who are able not only to guide the inexperienced through areas in which much remains unknown, but to complement elucidation of issues of performance

<sup>8</sup> For a relatively early discussion of this relationship, see José Bowen, ‘Mendelssohn, Berlioz, and Wagner as Conductors: The Origins of the Ideal of “Fidelity to the Composer”’, *Historical Performance*, 6 (1993), 77–88.

<sup>9</sup> For an easily accessible overview of recent thinking in this domain alongside a call to orientate musicology towards performance studies, see Nicholas Cook, ‘Between Process and Product: Music and/as Performance’, *Music Theory Online*, 7/2 (2001), at <[www.societymusictheory.org](http://www.societymusictheory.org)>, the main themes of which are revisited in Nicholas Cook, ‘Music as Performance’, *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton (New York and London, 2003), 204–14.

<sup>10</sup> Two recent studies of medieval music that owe an explicit debt to new critical trends are Bruce Holsinger, *Music, Body and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Stanford, 2001), and Emma Dillon, *Medieval Music-Making and the ‘Roman de Fauvel’* (Cambridge, 2002).

practice with explanations of stylistic norms. Not all contributors, however, are able to draw on such a wealth of learning, with the result that in places enthusiasm replaces erudition – essays lacking examples, translations and vivid presentation are not redeemed by any amount of exhortation to get out there and perform.

The two remaining parts of the volume appear equally traditional in style. The essays on theory turn on the skill of individual authors at reducing topics liable to exponential growth to formulations that can be held in mind while performing or preparing performances. The chapters on individual instruments are almost entirely organological, which is not surprising since untexted music for instrumental performance survives in only a handful of sources from the later Middle Ages. However, in leaving questions as to what was played on medieval instruments to the varied conclusions of the individual writers on repertory, the authors in this section abandon instrumentalists to fend for themselves: anyone seeking to know what to play on the medieval harp, for example, has to piece together an answer by heading to the index and following up references in the chapters on repertory. A general essay introducing problems without necessarily coming to conclusions might have served to accommodate a notoriously controversial topic.

Summarized in this way, the volume would seem to offer little that is conceptually innovative. Duffin, however, claims in the Preface that

There has never been a book about the Middle Ages quite like this one. There have been books about instruments, about genres, and about places; there have been books about performing Baroque music, Renaissance music, and about performing both medieval and Renaissance music, but never one in which the focus has been entirely on the performance of music from the medieval period. (p. ix)

Some might quibble that there are many books dedicated to chant performance, but that is to ignore the implication of Duffin's claim that there have been no books that open up medieval music to the early music movement. When this intent is understood, then features of the book that would otherwise be anomalous begin to make sense. The number of chapters dedicated to musical instruments, for example, says far more about the number of instrument-makers than the state of current knowledge about the role of instruments in medieval music, while the distribution of chapters on repertory reflects the bias of the early music movement towards music that suits modern performance conditions: plainchant, despite its historical pre-eminence, is assigned one chapter, which in taking its point of departure from publications intended for modern liturgical use does not mention the major medieval repertoires of tropes, sequences or rhymed Offices. Suspicion that the volume is not only aimed at a distinctive audience but shaped by that audience's concerns is confirmed in Judith Cohen's chapter on Sephardic song. As Cohen writes, 'The music of Judeo-Spanish ("Ladino") songs was not notated until the late nineteenth century, and the only reason to include it as an entry here is the popularity of the repertoire among performers of early music' ('Sephardic Song', 158–62, p. 158).

This focus on the performance of medieval music today is in its own way understandable. Where so little is known about the performance of most of the music in question, and where what is known points to performance practices rooted in oral traditions and rituals that lie beyond the experience of most people, an acknowledgement of the ahistoricity of current practice, with at the same time an attempt

to make those engaged in it aware of unbridgeable differences, makes a certain amount of sense. It does, though, raise a problem about the status of the resulting performances: in what sense can they be called historically authentic? This problem is met by a subtle shift in emphasis. Instead of providing definitive or in many cases even recommended solutions, notions of authenticity are repeatedly displaced onto the performer: readers are repeatedly exhorted to study and if possible sing from original notations, to make their own editions, to experiment with tuning systems, to consult theory treatises and to assess the plausibility of reconstructions of original instruments.

The exhortations vary considerably in form. The more conservative writers encourage performers to imitate scholars: Charles Brewer, for example, recommends that in view of our ‘uncertain knowledge of a number of aspects concerning fourteenth-century musical style, it is important that each work be newly studied in relation to its notation, harmonic and contrapuntal style before any final performance decisions are made concerning harmonic alterations’ (‘French Ars Nova’, 115–21, p. 197). Although this is an attractive idea, whether it is realistic for those outside scholarly circles, without even the necessary access to facsimiles and theoretical treatises, is doubtful. The motivation behind the recommendation becomes explicit when Brewer discusses the orientation of *ars nova* motets: this is ‘music for entertainment...not music for virtuosos, but for dedicated amateurs and court musicians’ (p. 198). The opposition thus supposed between informed, dedicated, amateur singers moving within literate elites and presumably uninformed, undedicated professional singers of lower social standing is not demonstrated for the fourteenth century and can be read only as a justification for the perceived superiority of modern performances within scholarly circles.

An exhortation of a different order emerges from an interview with Barbara Thornton (co-founder of the ensemble Sequentia) held shortly before her death in 1998, in which she promoted performance as part of a heuristic process involved in understanding medieval music (‘Poetics as Technique’, pp. 264–92). Her emphasis on medieval music as an oral art entails a revisionist account of how medieval music should be theorized, taught and researched. Performance is regarded as a centrally important medium of cultural expression with its own ‘sciences’ (rhetoric, poetics, memorization) that are of more immediate relevance than the abstractions of music theory. Ways of knowing peculiar to traditions rooted in orality – the slow processes of interiorizing models and procedures – are also held to represent the best way to gain understanding of medieval song. A similar perspective can be traced in more diluted form in several other chapters by performers with connections to the Schola Cantorum at Basle. Crawford Young emphasizes that in order to ‘get close’ to later-medieval or early-Renaissance lute music it is necessary to imitate the practices of setting, arranging and realizing a cantus firmus and intabulation. Ralf Mattes and Margriet Tindemans underline personal experimentation with given models as the only means of learning how to improvise in an appropriate style, while Benjamin Bagby (the other founder of Sequentia) goes further in seeking out analogous living performing traditions, not as sources of direct imitation, but as ways of stimulating his ‘imaginal feel’ for playing the medieval harp. What this amounts to is a challenge to the textual orientation of most historical musicology, for, as in ethnomusicological enquiry, the prime witnesses become informants and the prime method of research becomes sustained participation.

Duffin's compilation therefore gathers together a number of perspectives on the performance of medieval music. At one extreme, there is a reporting on what can be recovered, with little inclination to go beyond the sources. At the other, there is a reporting back from present-day performance, which in many cases has little or no relation to surviving sources. Between these extremes of documentary authority and authority derived from experience is an emphasis on recreating practices. What holds all this together and makes it representative of its time is an emphasis on what might be termed 'personal authenticity'. In transferring concepts of authenticity onto the performer, the volume reflects the most recent thinking in the domain of historical performance as theorized by both Peter Kivy and Taruskin: according to Kivy, performances that have personal authenticity demonstrate style and originality in the manner of an arrangement;<sup>11</sup> for Taruskin, personal authenticity is a matter of understanding your place within a tradition.<sup>12</sup> Arguments that tend in one or other of these directions are certainly present in this volume, but the overall project manifests a simpler commercial and journalistic understanding of what contemporary personal authenticity entails, for what is considered of the utmost importance is that an individual be kept informed by the latest documentary reports and first-hand accounts. This information then serves as a base from which choices are made according to personal preference: each reader/performer can make selections from a range of different interpretations (most notably on the issue of instrumental performance, but also on matters of rhythm) in order to create their own 'medieval' performance. The emphasis is thus placed squarely on the performer's freedom of choice or what might otherwise be termed individualistic consumerism. This has the advantage of replacing outmoded and at times autocratic ideals of historical reconstruction or realization of a composer's intent with a way of thinking that gives recognition to the contributions of individual performers. What is lost, however, is a sense that judgments about performance might be arrived at through negotiation, whether in the scholarly domain through a weighing of evidence offered by the various hypotheses, or in the performance domain through admitting that styles are in practice created as much by groups as by individuals.

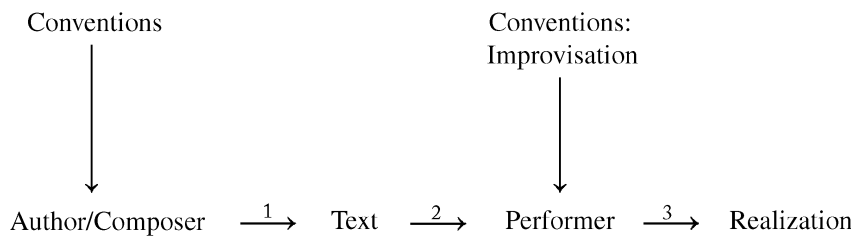
The volume edited by Timothy McGee, *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, consists of contributions drawn from an interdisciplinary conference dedicated to exploring improvisation in the arts before c.1700 held in May 1999 at the University of Toronto. The essays are grouped under the categories of music, dance, drama and art, and are preceded by a foreword by McGee and an introductory overview by Domenico Pietropaolo. The volume accordingly contains some intriguing material for those used to reading predominantly within their own disciplines. Italian song (McGee) and early-modern dance music (Keith Polk) are fairly standard topics for inclusion in a section on music; the extended description of a project to reconstruct an ancient Greek warship (Randall A. Rosenfeld), albeit as a comparative model for assessment of performance practice, is less expected. Dance is served by essays on Italian dances of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Barbara Sparti and Jennifer Nevile), as well as an overview of ornamentation in

<sup>11</sup> Peter Kivy, *Authenticities* (Ithaca, NY, 1995), 135.

<sup>12</sup> 'Authenticity . . . is knowing what you mean and whence comes that knowledge. And more than that even, authenticity is knowing what you are, and acting in accordance with that knowledge.' Taruskin, 'The Limits of Authenticity: A Contribution', *Text and Act*, 67–82 (p. 67).

sixteenth-century dance (G. Yvonne Kendall). Clifford Davidson provides a summary of the place of improvisation in medieval drama with a particular emphasis on England, the textual orientation of which is complemented by Linda Marie Zaerr’s consideration of oral transmission and presentation. Jane Freeman and David Klausner make up a second pair, considering the role of improvisation in sixteenth-century English drama. Finally, improvisation in sixteenth-century Italian visual art is examined by Leslie Korrick.

The volume therefore displays a marked bias towards the early-modern art forms of Italy and England. There is also a broad agreement as to the nature of what is being investigated. For McGee, the ‘surviving text, whether it be literature, music, or choreography, is incomplete and requires unwritten additions by the performers in order to bring it to life in terms of the expectations of the early centuries’ (‘Foreword’, p. xi). Such a model, tacitly employed by the majority of writers, can be summarized as follows:



With something like this model in mind, most writers in this volume attempt to explain as much as possible about the third stage, drawing largely on secondary reports, treatises or other circumscriptions. The evidence is inevitably meagre and the question of practical application remains open: treatises necessarily tend towards systematization and literary descriptions can provide only snapshots of practice, leaving open questions about the range of possibilities and the decision-making processes that inform choices made in performance. The possibility that conventions of improvisation might inform the first stage is raised for compositions outside the mainstream, as discussed by McGee, or passages of rapid exchange in drama, as examined by Freeman. In these cases, the task of the modern investigator is widened to tracing improvisational traits, as understood from theory treatises and contemporary practices of improvisation, in the texts themselves. The most fluid genres, such as instrumental dance music or wholly improvised drama, are accounted for simply by beginning at the third stage.

Only a few contributors depart from this way of thinking. Korrick relates that improvisation, as understood in its modern sense of spontaneous creation, was not a routine part of Renaissance painterly practice and that in the few cases where improvisation is documented it was in the exceptional presence of an audience and consisted of reproducing images worked out beforehand. A more far-reaching challenge is outlined by Zaerr, who argues that not physical texts but oral events are at issue. The dynamics particular to these oral events can be appreciated on the one hand by studying ‘variants’ in textual transmission as clues to the way in which differing contexts condition what is performed and on the other by reflection on contemporary



performances. Rosenfeld stands furthest apart from the field by criticizing the possibility of gaining knowledge of performance practices through experiment. The villains in this piece are Christopher Page and Lorenz Welker, who are portrayed as introducing insights from performance when 'there is virtually no literature on the exact goals, methods, manner of stating results or criteria for proof of any experiment in performance practice' ('Performance Practice, Experimental Archaeology', 71–97, p. 72).

Rosenfeld's desire for stringency is refreshing, for, viewed in a narrow sense, experiments can establish only physical possibilities – the warship does not sink, the string does not break. Those who draw insights from modern performance might well reply that, although a systematic methodology has yet to be agreed, their claims do rest on a shared ground – that of common humanity. Such a claim, indeed, would seem to underpin Zaerr's conviction that audience pressures and performers' response remain fairly constant across time. It is nevertheless easy to share Rosenfeld's sense of frustration since it remains unclear whether claims drawn from the experience of modern performance have the status of knowledge that can be scrutinized. For this volume, the question can be usefully reduced to particulars: given that this is a publication supported by an academic institution, and given that its contributors are drawn from several different academic disciplines, the need for an explicitly defined framework for enquiry into the topic at hand is at a premium. To focus the matter further, since the chosen topic is one that embraces practical performance and the contributors were chosen on the grounds that as scholar-performers their comments would have 'an additional level of authority' ('Foreword', p. xi), then some theoretical framework for assessing the status of any insights drawn from performance is needed. The place where this might have been done is in an introduction, yet here a different perspective on the problem of assessing historical improvisation is taken.

At the opening of his introductory essay, Pietropaolo establishes two related principles from consideration of a late eighteenth-century report on earlier improvisation: that improvisation is subject to changing historical conceptions and evaluations, and that appropriate categories of analysis require a theory of improvisation that is historically situated. With this in mind, he advises that anyone wishing to write a history of improvisation would 'do well to reflect on the usefulness of writing it regressively' so as to develop 'distinct theoretical models for each stage of the development of the idea of improvisation' ('Improvisation in the Arts', 1–28, p. 4). When Pietropaolo himself turns to the late Middle Ages, he focuses on what he calls the 'professionalisation of the performer' as manifested in part through an increasing commodification of improvisation. The rise of improvisation as a professional specialism, with an attendant focus on individual virtuosity, initially occurred alongside continuing traditions of improvisation that were rooted in and responsive to the activities of local communities. The way that Pietropaolo theorizes this dichotomy is as an antagonism between notions of improvisation that can be traced back to Aristotle's *Poetics* and those belonging to the traditions of medieval rhetoric. According to the former, thought to have been influential among Renaissance elites, improvisation is viewed as a negative forerunner of the written artwork (thus unnotated, unstructured and ephemeral). According to the latter, attributed to continuing traditions among practitioners as well as teaching in the schools, improvisation was integral to the practice of developing stock themes and delivering them to specific audiences. A threefold model for the 'textuality of performance' in the early-modern era is drawn from the co-existence of these competing notions: (1) structured matter in the Aristotelian sense (possessing a

beginning, middle and end), (2) accidental ornamentation and (3) gestures involved in delivery.

Rather than seeking to provide an underlying rationale for the volume, Pietropaolo is therefore concerned to draw the individual essays into a wider framework, situating the threefold model employed by most of the contributors (text–improvisation/ornamentation–realization/delivery) in the context of both contemporary theories and evaluations of improvisation, on the one hand, and a broader socio-economic theory of cultural history, on the other. The first question that inevitably results is how well theory intersects with practice, for although early-modern theories of improvisation can be interpreted profitably through the lens of socio-economic theory, how much either can teach us about the practices of early-modern improvisation is open to doubt. The danger is that the concern to establish theoretical models, while providing a useful check on applying inappropriate categories, obscures the poverty of insight into particular cases and threatens to shape conclusions that might be drawn from them.

A second question that arises is how far performance should be considered in terms of ‘textuality’. Although Pietropaolo outlines medieval theories of improvisation rooted in rhetoric, by folding them into more fixed notions of art drawn from the Aristotelian tradition he quickly relegates them to ornamentation and gestures accompanying delivery of a text. How far the implied dichotomy between performance of a fixed text and supplementary improvisation holds both in theory and in practice is open to debate. The idea that performance takes a fixed entity as its starting point is certainly not new to the Renaissance, even though a concern to theorize artworks as fixed structures takes on a new urgency.<sup>13</sup> To speak of the ‘textuality’ of early-modern performance is thus useful in so far as printed texts provide concrete images of the fixed structures that are under discussion, but at the same time there is a need to ground the metaphor in some account of the changing historical status of texts in order to clarify how far Aristotelian categories overlapped with early-modern estimations of textual properties and how far these categories were applicable earlier. The degree to which oral traditions took their point of departure from texts can also be questioned. The association of medieval rhetoric with improvisation around the ‘performance text’, or even in exceptional cases the creation of a ‘complete and previously unscripted performance text’, seems unduly narrow (Pietropaolo, ‘Improvisation in the Arts’, p. 12). Given that the goal of rhetoric was persuasion, its end was irreducibly social: any texts that were produced, in so far as they can be abstracted, served as intermediaries in a process that was primarily experienced as an event rather than a text. Instead of speaking of the ‘textuality’ of performance, which implies a freezing of the processes of performance into a fixed product and a privileging of characteristics commonly associated with texts, it would be preferable to speak of the ‘actuality’ of performance in order to examine how social relations were played out through performance acts experienced as oral events.

The volume thus raises more questions than it answers. How are we to gain knowledge of historical improvisation? What is the relation of modern performance to historical practice? What was the relation of theory treatises, secondary reports and notated exemplars to practice? Perhaps most worrying is that improvisation is

<sup>13</sup> A classic consideration of the emergence of the idea of fixed musical structures during the Middle Ages is Fritz Reckow, “Processus” und “structura”: Über Gattungstradition und Formverständnis im Mittelalter”, *Musiktheorie*, 1 (1986), 5–29.

only ever defined as supplementary to the performance of a text. This opposition between textual performance and improvisation is one that has increasingly come under scrutiny, leading to claims that all performance is improvisatory in some respect. To state conclusions in an extreme form, all musical activity (whether listening, composing or playing) can be considered as improvisation in so far as it involves constant creation and re-creation of music.<sup>14</sup> If music is viewed in this way as a set of practices, then the whole modern concept of improvisation as something supplementary to textual reproduction is brought into question. Improvisation becomes rather a process of continual creativity that is more applicable to cultural and social events, which, as performances in which individuals constantly make and remake themselves, become the proper objects of analysis. Such revisionism might be rejected on the grounds that it has little relevance to a collection of essays on early-modern art, but given the roots of such new thinking in early modernity, the question of relevance cannot be so easily swept aside.<sup>15</sup> At the least, some engagement with the most recent thinking in this domain might be expected and would help the reader to locate the detail explored by the individual contributors in a cultural frame that is contemporary in both senses of the word.

A broadly 'new-historical' perspective is brought to bear in *The Modern Invention of Medieval Music*, in which Daniel Leech-Wilkinson takes as his topic the late-medieval polyphony of France and Italy and explores it through the prism of its modern reception. His central thesis is that our understanding of this repertory has been fundamentally shaped by modern performance and in particular by shifts in the forces used. At the centre of this narrative is the promotion by Gothic Voices of the 'a cappella hypothesis', which is understood to have introduced a paradigm shift of Kuhnian proportions. This shift provides the key to how medieval music was heard and analysed in the twentieth century: because of the distinctive timbres of the individual parts, performances with the instruments encouraged linear hearing, whereas the 'a cappella hypothesis' re-introduced harmonic assessment, such as the reductive (Schenkerian) analysis undertaken by Leech-Wilkinson himself. An uncovering of the power structures and rhetorical strategies at work in medieval musicology in general closes the volume.

Leech-Wilkinson's book has already excited strong reaction, in part because he ventures outside traditional modes of scholarship by resorting in places to a confessional mode of autobiography and in places to polemic.<sup>16</sup> The central claim that modern methods of performance serve to construct paradigms that govern the way in which medieval music has been understood is supported by the most detailed research and merits further consideration. Two pivotal moments are isolated: first, Hugo Riemann's promotion of instrumental accompaniment of late-medieval polyphony in his widely read *Handbuch der Musikgeschichte* of 1905; second, Christopher Page's championing of performances by voices only through Gothic Voices and the pages of *Early Music* in the early 1980s. Both shifts were articulated

<sup>14</sup> On musical performance as improvisation, see Nicholas Cook, 'Making Music Together, or Improvisation and its Others', *The Source: Challenging Jazz Criticism*, 1 (2004), 5–25. For the wider argument that all musical activity is improvisatory, see Bruce Ellis Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music* (Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> The oft-cited text at the centre of this movement is Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, 1980).

<sup>16</sup> A sharp analysis of the authorial voices present in Leech-Wilkinson's narrative is given in Jeremy Llewellyn's review in *Early Music*, 32 (2004), 135–8.

through popular channels by persuasive advocates: the fact that qualifications and reservations were expressed by a series of scholars in less prominent contexts is regarded by Leech-Wilkinson as less influential for widespread perceptions of medieval music and the practices of early music groups.

What is striking about this account of the reception of medieval music in the twentieth century is that it is based on a narrow notion of what constitutes performance; the reduction of discussion to the single issue of the forces used obscures the myriad decisions involved in any performance of medieval music. In his defence it might be said that Leech-Wilkinson is simply reporting on modernist conceptions of performance by assuming that performance consists simply of reproduction of a fixed product, the only open question being the forces used for that reproduction. Yet while such views were evidently held in his immediate circle, they were far from universal. The highly differentiated performances of medieval music given by groups trained at the Schola Cantorum at Basle from the 1970s onwards, in which decisions concerning not only forces but all aspects of performance practice emerged from sustained engagement with individual repertoires and pieces within these repertoires, are downplayed in Leech-Wilkinson's narrative. As a result, despite the attempt to release late-medieval polyphony from the ideologies it accreted by exposing the genealogy of its construction in modern performance, a distinctly modernist notion of performance as reproduction threatens to determine the outlook of the book.

Although the remaining portions of the book are less directly concerned with the construction of medieval performance, the attacks that Leech-Wilkinson makes on historical musicology are part of his attempt to put both performance and listening at centre stage and cannot be ignored. The main object of his critique is historicism:

The ideological walls surrounding the study of medieval music, protecting it from non-historicist work, are buttressed above all by this belief that there is a special value in seeing the past as the past saw itself when it was the present. And that belief, because it is by nature exclusive, rejecting alternatives as necessarily wrong, is fundamentally authoritarian. (p. 253)

Leech-Wilkinson goes on to implicate historical scholarship in support for authoritarian regimes, claiming, for example, that it was 'the insistence that the search for historical truth was a greater good that allowed German academics between 1933 and 1945 to pander to National Socialism in order to secure continuing funding' (p. 255). Such an extravagant claim rests on an ill-defined concept of historicism. The association of historicism with authoritarianism is familiar from Karl Popper's critique *The Poverty of Historicism* (London, 1957), in which philosophies that claimed to predict the course of human history on the basis of past behaviour were uncovered as totalitarian in intent. In its broader sense (called 'historism' by Popper), 'historicism' is 'a critical movement insisting on the prime importance of historical context to the interpretation of texts of all kinds'.<sup>17</sup> This basic tenet seems to be what Leech-Wilkinson has in mind when he dismisses historicism throughout his book, but to reduce historicism to the formula of 'seeing the past as the past saw itself' is to reduce a rich tradition of historiography to a doctrinaire mantra of authenticity. Indeed the formula amounts to a denial of the very beliefs that are fundamental to historicism, that is, suspicion about the

<sup>17</sup> Paul Hamilton, *Historicism* (London, 1996), 2.

stories that the past tells about itself, and suspicion about present partisanship in telling stories about the past.

Leech-Wilkinson's use of the term 'historicism' might be defended by claiming that his intended meaning is that commonly assumed in writing about the performance of early music, in which approaches laying claim to historical authenticity are frequently labelled 'historicist'. However, Leech-Wilkinson repeatedly transfers the term from the realm of performance to that of scholarship, stating, for example, that 'the aim of historical musicology as current[ly] understood – to recover and experience the past as it was – is not more worthy than the aim of any other kind of musical study' (p. 7). This conflation of the ideals of scholarship and performance lies at the heart of Leech-Wilkinson's narrative. On the one hand, it opens up the possibility of studying modern performance without accusations of anachronism by suggesting that personal interpretation lies, or should lie, at the heart of both performance and scholarship. On the other, it allows a critique of historical scholarship through application of terminology and debates about historical performance. Just as performers no longer lay claim to wholly authentic performances, so 'verifiable reconstruction of the past' is the least of the achievements of historical musicology:

Scholarship cannot be defined by what it does for the past, only by what it does for us. Work that challenges but rewards the intellect, for no other reason than the delight it brings, should, so long as it does not cause significant pain or incite others to cause pain, be accepted as scholarship regardless of its attitude to the distant past. (p. 254)

To claim that scholarship be judged acceptable only in so far as (1) it delights, and (2) it does not harm others, is to remove any appeal to truth. The argument rests on a dismissal of positivist scholarship as authoritarian, rejecting claims to verifiable historical reconstruction in favour of explicitly acknowledged, subjective interpretation. The opposition is, as Leech-Wilkinson recognizes, to some degree false, since historians frequently acknowledge their personal interpretations and their relation to present-day debates. Yet musicologists in general are considered more dogmatic than historians in their insistence on not going beyond their sources. The problem with this argument is that it not only misrepresents positivism, but fails to put alternative criteria of accountability in its place. Positivism does allow challenge to its claims, as the methodologies that establish verifiable knowledge also guarantee its falsification – the claim is thus, strictly speaking, only ever to truth that is provisional. In place of such scientific standards, Leech-Wilkinson proposes a criterion of 'delight', whose subjective basis he does not open to any challenge. Far from guarding against authoritarianism by removing claims to truth, Leech-Wilkinson seems to espouse ideologies that encourage an uncritical acceptance of subjective judgment.

The ethical implications of Leech-Wilkinson's aesthetic relativism will be troubling to many, as on the face of it he appears to denude scholarship of any higher value or purpose than entertainment. For the most part, however, he directs his claims to the domain of musicology, where abandoning an appeal to truth is unlikely to cause significant pain. Whether musicology can be thus divorced from scholarship in general, and indeed whether scholarship can be divorced from political and social life where the consequences of such an attitude would evidently be disastrous, is nevertheless highly debatable. To make only one pragmatic counterclaim, musicologists are also educators and are as such responsible for overseeing

the intellectual formation of their charges, most of whom apply the fruits of their learning in positions outside the field.

Where Leech-Wilkinson's argument ultimately takes a wrong turning is in its failure to distinguish between scholarship and performance. Most would agree that there are elements of scholarship that involve performance skills, and that almost all performances of Western art music overlap with scholarship to a degree (if only in taking their point of departure from printed editions). However, as Taruskin has been at pains to establish, despite certain common features, there are fundamental differences between scholarship and performance.<sup>18</sup> It is the primary purpose of performance to delight, whereas it is the ultimate aim of scholarship to instruct. It follows that truth-telling remains imperative in scholarship, whereas performance, as a human activity, is significant primarily as a form of social interaction. Such pragmatic distinctions serve as useful initial orientations, bringing to the fore the conventional wisdom at work in everyday language use, even if these categories are open to further refinement. Close attention to the meanings of terms used in scholarly discourse, an aspect of philology that Leech-Wilkinson passes over in silence, remains a prerequisite in the presentation of detailed arguments. It is precisely a failure to reflect upon and offer definitions of central terms such as 'historicism', 'positivism' and 'performance' that leads Leech-Wilkinson into ambiguity and overstatement.

A sophisticated awareness of the language we use to discuss medieval music represents the starting point for many of the essays contained in Leo Treitler's *With Voice and Pen*, which are drawn from over 30 years of reflection on early-medieval song in all its varieties. Each of the original essays has been revised and all except the last are preceded by introductions that set the pieces within the context of not only Treitler's own deepening understanding, but also wider developments in musicology and humanistic studies in general. The overall result is less a definitive and summary opus than an enactment of an ongoing commitment to, and an open invitation to engage in, critical reflection.

Any attempt to isolate Treitler's views on medieval performance from this volume risks simplification of his critical thought processes: as the title of the book suggests, the writing of history and historiography, and indeed performance and scholarship, are inextricably entwined. Nonetheless, instead of attempting to summarize a series of new interpretations brought to topics ranging from the pre-history of chant through to thirteenth-century polyphony, a task that will occupy those working in this field for many years to come, only the proposals related to the performance of medieval music will be considered here and then only in order to sketch how they relate to other work being pursued in the discipline. Treitler's own words may be taken as a useful introduction: he remarks with respect to the repertory of Notre Dame polyphony that

What is not self-evident is that composers produced unique, fully determined works, that musical notation uniquely represented these, that musical scores were from the first copied from other written sources, and that they served from the first as prescriptions for performance. (p. 86)

The danger of imposing textual models on medieval music is a recurring theme in Treitler's thought, and in proposing attentiveness to the oral traditions alongside

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Taruskin, 'Last Thoughts First', *Text and Act*, 24–30.

which writing was introduced, he challenges modern preconceptions about performance. When considered as the primary mode of realization in a musical tradition, 'performance' embraces generative contexts for music-making that we are used to keeping distinct, such as composition and improvisation. Further, in a tradition where music is not primarily copied but realized from oral archetypes, writing, as an alternative mode of realization, becomes a mode of 'performance'.

Approached in this way, the question of how to explore the performance of medieval music (or, at least, music of the early and high Middle Ages) is put on an entirely different footing. Understanding performance becomes equivalent to understanding the workings of the music, which is in turn bound up with understanding its transmission. Treitler's subsequent exploration of the implication of oral, rather than textual, archetypes leads to an appreciation of how transmission embraces multiple possible realizations that are not corruptions of a fixed original, but differing realizations of a musical matrix according to constraints of idiom and melodic grammar. As for the delicate question of how contemporaries understood performance traditions, notation is taken as a prime witness since 'the nature of the symbolic representation reflects something fundamental about the ontological state of the objects represented in the apprehension of its users' (p. 292). What Treitler sees as captured by early-medieval notations in particular is a conception of melody as movement of the voice. This conception can be grasped in concrete form through the two kinds of information encoded in early neumes. First, neumes coordinated melodic inflections with syllables of text, thereby providing an image of melody as a function of prosodic projection. Second, neumes captured directions of melodic movement within grouped inflections but not necessarily between them, thereby providing an image of melody as an unfolding process (rather than a fixed structure that can be surveyed as a whole). In sum, what neumatic notation reflects about the ontology of early-medieval music is that, far from consisting of a predetermined structure, its shapes were realized only in the dynamic, moment-to-moment processes of performance.

The sources of inspiration for this sophisticated model of medieval performance are many and varied. The way in which Treitler draws on a multitude of modern theories (e.g. Bartlett on memory, Parry and Lord on oral traditions, Jakobson on structural linguistics) might be criticized on grounds of historical applicability, but this would be to misunderstand the use to which these models are put. They serve as analogies, not homologies, and are employed within a philosophy of history inspired by Collingwood, in which the past is always viewed through the lens of present understanding (p. xi). Attempts to dismiss Treitler's thinking by isolating his methodologies also obscure his profound engagement with the thinking of such eminent musicological scholars as not only Helmut Huckle, but also in differing ways Jacques Handschin, Fritz Reckow, Wulf Arlt, Oliver Strunk, Edward Roesner and Charles Atkinson.

An alternative engagement with Treitler's work might focus on the intersection of his critical perspectives with the material. To take the much-debated question of the significance of the uniformity among the earliest chant notations, Treitler outlines three possible scenarios to account for the relation of oral performance to writing in the earliest sources:

- (1) The corpus of chant was fixed in oral tradition and then written down. The agreement among the written images reflects oral fixity.

- (2) Writers copied each other rather than their own performance practice. The uniform written appearance is thus only a function of writing down.
- (3) The first notators performed like singers calling forth rules, forms, formulae, etc. Fixity thus occurred at the level of generative systems or performance models, rather than individual chants: 'This would be to regard writing down as a kind of performance and to understand the notation as descriptive' (p. 239).

The simplest explanation is the first, and in order for any alternatives to be considered it must be undermined. Treitler does this through criticism of the circularity of its twofold proposition: first, knowledge of stability or fixity in the oral tradition is entirely based on the image provided by notation; second, the presumption that notation provides a snapshot of performance is not self-evident. This argument downplays the significance of surviving evidence, for one of the few surviving passages to make explicit statement about notational function suggests that it did serve to provide an image of normative performance. The chronicler and poet Ekkehard IV of St Gall (d. c.1057) describes how a Roman cantor (Romanus) was said to have travelled to St Gall, bringing a notated antiphoner from which an exemplar was made, in which 'up to this day, if anything in chant is contradicted, all error of such kind is corrected as if in a mirror'.<sup>19</sup> In other words, when disputes arose in the course of singing chant, the antiphoner was consulted as the mirror image of a correct performance.

Given the existence of such a passage, the burden of evidence seems to fall on disproving the presumption that notation provides a snapshot of normative performance. Treitler, however, is not interested in establishing such a case; rather, he challenges the idea that chant was fixed in oral tradition and then written down by appealing to intuitive assessment of the proposal and evaluation of its theoretical type (p. 231). Those familiar with his writing on more recent topics will recognize this emphasis on intuition and critical self-awareness from his earlier collection of essays, *Music and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, MA, 1989). The alternatives that Treitler proposes are certainly imaginable, but given that the first scenario is believed by many scholars, it too is evidently imaginable and could be defended on the grounds of simplicity, and for some instinctive appeal. Those more predisposed to compromise might even make the case that all three scenarios contain elements of truth; that is, that there was stability in the oral tradition at the time of writing; that there was a stereotyped representation of that stability that was not always one-to-one in its correspondence with practice; and that appreciation of a generative system within the oral tradition also led to points of difference in precise pitch content and verbal alignment.

Treitler's characteristic mode of argument therefore leads to highly developed notions of medieval musical performance whose intersection with surviving documentary material resists empirical testing. To take, for example, the trope and versus repertories that are central to Treitler's thinking, one of the immediate problems in coming to conclusions is that an overall sense of their shape is still lacking owing to the absence of comprehensive editions. Yet without a notion of a textual archetype, it is far from clear how tropes and versus that display the variety indicated in Treitler's discussions should be edited. The repertories cannot be wholly

<sup>19</sup> 'In quo usque hodie, in cantu si quid dissentitur, quasi in speculo error eiusmodi universus corrigitur.' Ekkehard IV, *Casus sancti Gallii*, ed. Hans Haefele (Darmstadt, 1980), 108.



understood until all the evidence is available for consideration, but this evidence cannot be presented without imposing ideas about its behaviour. Treitler's work is invaluable in exposing preconceptions and suggesting alternative ways of imagining early-medieval song; what remains is to find innovative editorial solutions that can capture the dynamics of its traditions while keeping open the possibility that our current interpretations are the product of the limited material available thus far.

The diversity of contents and methods that has been traced in recent writings about the performance of medieval music may be taken as a sign of strength. As the place of medieval music in the academy comes under increased scrutiny in view of both the expansion of musicology as a discipline and scepticism about privileges accorded to origins, so the need to demonstrate its continued relevance as an area of study increases. One way of doing this is to underline the extent to which a discipline commonly thought to be exclusively concerned with the minutiae of manuscript study is centrally engaged with questions about the ontology of performance that are making such waves in other areas of musicology. The attendant risk in making such claims is that medieval musicology could be simply assimilated in wider debates, and that in seeking to demonstrate relevance those working on medieval repertoires relegate their materials to the status of curious appendages. What is needed instead is resistance to tendencies to reduce reasoning about music to problems that transcend historical particularities, pointing to differences that highlight not only the unique properties of medieval music but also the historically contingent nature of many of our modern assumptions.

To place such an emphasis on understanding historical particularities leaves open the question of the status of modern performance. Can performance inform scholarly work, as suggested by McGee? Or, following Leech-Wilkinson, does performance have the potential to shape the horizons of historical understanding? Or, as implied by many contributors to Duffin's volume, should we treat insights arrived at through performance as relatively autonomous matters of stylistics to be handed down within an ongoing tradition of making medieval music? The difficulty with answering such questions in the abstract is that so much is dependent on circumstance: performance may inform or misinform scholarly work, it may shape historical understanding or be ignored, it may on occasion be regarded as the domain of pragmatic exploration and on others as a domain in which scholarly intervention is to be welcomed. In short, it is difficult to make sweeping statements about the relationship of performance to scholarship, which in turn means that any attempt to construct a systematic methodology to investigate that relationship is liable to exclude significant dimensions of current practice. The simplest conclusion would seem to be that insights that arise through performance should continue to be assessed case by case.

Such a pragmatic conclusion has much to recommend it, but requires further elaboration in the light of recent pressure to re-orientate musicology towards performance studies. Perhaps surprisingly, the approach discussed here that makes least reference to modern performance provides the most nuanced account of the relation that can already obtain between scholarship and performance. In the course of his essays, Treitler makes hardly any reference to modern performances, yet a CD, including performances by members of *Dialogus*, *Sequentia* and the *Ensemble Gilles Binchois*, is included with the volume. In a short note introducing the CD, Treitler sketches the reason for its inclusion: the performances serve to

illustrate the historical interpretations put forward in the book, which were in turn informed by the 'singing out' embodied in such performances ('Notes on the Compact Disc', pp. xxiii–xxiv). In claiming that performance can convey interpretations that complement and sometimes stimulate scholarly reflection, Treitler outlines a way of thinking that is implicit in the title of his book; namely, that voice and pen provide distinct, yet mutually enriching, ways of 'coming to know medieval song'.

Two related points may be taken from this formulation. First, understanding medieval music is not simply a matter of grasping fixed objects of knowledge, but of entering into a process of ongoing interpretation. Scholarship, like performance, may be regarded as a process, albeit one whose means and criteria of judgment are of a different order. If this is accepted, the central question is less what scholarship can learn from performance, or vice versa, than how interpretations are explored within the respective domains. An understanding of medieval music as a rhetorical art, for example, has implications for how it is both studied and performed, and insights within one domain may well prompt further reflection within the other without any need to package results and transfer them. Second, performances as interpretations are not neutral sources of insights, but individual readings that are as much the outcome of understandings developed in other areas as responses to particular problems that arise in performance. Treitler, for example, chooses specific performers to illustrate his interpretations since he does not find the Solesmes manner of performing chant sufficiently responsive to the 'vocal virtuosity, versatility and sensuousness implicit in the written record' ('Notes on the Compact Disc', p. xxiii). Rather than asking what performance in general brings to scholarship, enquiry can more usefully be focused on how satisfactory particular interpretations are when realized in the respective domains. As a result of so doing, a space is opened up not only for individual reflection, but for due account to be given to wider currents in the history of ideas that influence the immediate concerns of both scholarship and performance.

The key to what is being proposed here is that the realms of scholarship and performance are neither separated off nor collapsed into one another. Separation risks an over-zealous characterization of scholarship as an objective science and performance as a subjective art. Collapsing the two risks a characterization of either performance as scholarship (regarding performance merely as textual reproduction) or scholarship as performance (regarding scholarship merely as a pleasurable activity). By keeping the two in a critical relation, both their independence and their potential for stimulating creative response is safeguarded. Researching and performing medieval music need to be kept as parallel processes, with their own disciplines and ideally with their own institutional support. If that relation is abandoned, then the delicate balance between past and present, and between historical and aesthetic concerns, that has sustained interest in medieval music is in danger of becoming reduced to one polarity or the other. To ensure its continued value as a cultural pursuit, the full complexity of what it means to 'perform medieval music' needs to remain an open question to which, in our fallibility, we can seek only partial answers.