

About Scores and Interpretation: A Personal Opinion

When I first encountered the scores of John Bull, Orlando Gibbons and others of that period, I also first met the liberating notion of scores that had little or no indication for performance. The editors of these scores, quite wisely, decided that since they didn't know what had been done they wouldn't put in anything! This was in contrast to my first experiences with contemporary music where performers were confronted with scores that were filled with performance indications for each note, sometimes as many as 6 or 7. (in contrast to the new music of "weird signs and symbols" which was as liberating an experience as the old music) Finally, after having discovered the joys of creative music, by improvising and composing, I slowly came to realize how musical indications could hamper the possibilities of interpretation.

It was in improvisation that I began to understand the relation between what the musician hears and the effect it has on the imaginative or inner ear. Create a sound, listen to it profoundly, and it, the sound itself will stimulate the inner (imaginative) ear and this in itself will lead the musician to make the choice he needs or wants to make for the sounds that follow. The music we like the best is made by people who are able to listen most deeply to the sounds they make and who travel most carefully the ensuing path that is etched by this sound. This, their own unique reaction to an aural stimulus, becomes the basis for their own music. This what makes one persons music different from another's. This is why Bach's music is different from Tillman's, and Charlie Parker is different from Miles Davis, or Bela Bartok from Igor Stravinsky. This is what makes the music of an amateur also as important as that of someone infinitely more practiced. The question finally becomes how deeply you can listen, and to what extent you will let yourself be influenced by this aural stimulus to your body. *At first appearance, one would say that the best music would be made by those that let themselves be completely influenced by this aural stimulus. But the work of the artist is to let himself be influenced and then decide to what extent it should be felt in his work. This is not a romantic idea! The artist lives in the world like anyone else. But the artist is an individual. He can use his differences to do many things. (Beautify the world, perhaps) The differences between people are created by the life situations into which they are born. All of the information gathered by our senses is processed by our life situation. This life situation gives us the basis for creating our own individual personal interpretation of the universe.*

This is what I learned from improvisation. And I noticed that players of written music stopped their deep listening in an attempt to faithfully reproduce the indications in a score. Instead of listening to the sounds and trying to understand them and then deciding how to play them based on their feeling/following of what they heard, musicians have occupied themselves with trying to do what they think the score says. It seems to me that the recent renaissance in baroque music performance was made possible, in part, exactly because the music had so few indications of how to play. The musicians were able to play, listen and follow/decide. The musicians had the chance of hearing something differently. The scores were not loaded down with too many performance indications.

Of course the esthetic choices and necessities of 19th and 20th century music led composers to other decisions. The idea here is not to criticize history. The idea here is to say "In my music I would prefer the opposite. The less the dynamics appear in score, the more I like it".

I don't like to put performance indications in my scores but sometimes often times, I do. So why do I put them in? Have I simply given in to the musical practices of our time, to the powers of conservatories and other authorities of musical institutions.

Yes, in a way, but for a good reason. Some of my friends say that I shouldn't do this. First of all, because I don't believe in it and second of all because it will intimidate future musicians. But I believe more that submitting the music to this standardization process will open it up to players that wouldn't otherwise have had access to it. Some musicians today don't want to be bothered, some are afraid; others feel that this idea is nonsense, etc., so they won't even try if a score is not "correct". Rather than put myself in conflict with my fellow musicians, (a situation that has plagued the process of composed music for almost a century now) I decided to "correct" my scores.

It is, therefore, important to say, loudly and clearly. "Please don't be intimidated by the performance indications". Try to see them as perhaps a reference, as a way to start understanding the music. Remember that the little black dots on the paper are not the music. The music is what you hear coming out of your instrument. This, of course, is provoked by the little black dots but they are only the beginning. This may seem elementary, but the written music is only the door to the music, it's not even the doorway. You open the door but then you must pass through. The doorway and the ensuing path to the music is *You* and *Your Ear*. Try to hear into the sound and listen to what it tells you. Practice hard to play your instrument the way you want or think you want to hear it. Try to find teachers that will help you hear more acutely

and more profoundly and who can then give you tips about how to gain the physical skills you need to create the sound you need, the sound you want.

Really beautiful interpretations of written music are always a collective effort, a dialogue between players and composers. A very important part of the work of the composer is to inspire the musician to listen deeply. If the composer has done his job well, the performers way of hearing what the composer heard will be valid. I would like to say that, if you hear something other than what I have indicated, please, above all, change it. If you can make what I have made your own, then we have both succeeded.