I’d like to begin with a maxim I learned many years ago in school – or maybe it was Sunday school. Perhaps you know it too:

He who knows not and thinks he knows is a fool: shun him.
He who knows and thinks he knows not is asleep: wake him.
He who knows not and knows he knows not is ignorant: teach him.
But he who knows and knows he knows is wise: follow him.

A couple of generations ago, the situation in the humanities – the branch of the academy concerned with the products and the production of culture, the branch in which I had been educated and in which I was beginning to teach – was grave. In a word, we were fools. We thought, or at least we acted as if we thought, that we knew far more than we could ever hope to know, and that pretense of certainty was acting as a barrier both to the actual growth of knowledge and to the exercise of creative thinking. Symptoms of this sort of foolishness were rife in all branches of academic music making and music thinking. In composition, the chief symptom was the notion, dominant through the end of the 1970s, that (to quote Charles Wuorinen, one of the most authoritative voices of the time) there was ‘one main way of doing things’, namely twelve-tone technique (Gagne and Caras 1982, p. 394). Wuorinen even declared that ‘the present generation of young composers must concern itself … with acting out the implications of the older generation’s work, [rather] than with innovation’ (Wuorinen, 1963, p. 54). In music theory, it was the happy thought, given voice in 1987 by David Beach in a plenary address to the Society for Music Theory at the Eastman School of Music, that the problems of musical analysis had at last been solved (or, to use his very words, that ‘we have our
tools’): that for tonal music there was Schenker, for atonal there was Forte and for serial there was Babbitt, and that all that remained to do was to apply their methods in perpetuity. (This, I hasten to add, was said optimistically, as the announcement of a golden age, even though it struck me at the time that there could scarcely be a more pessimistic view. In my mind’s eye I saw music theorists streaming into the music library with meat-grinders and coming out trailed by endless ropes of sausage.) In musicology, there was the attitude epitomized in an anecdote that Nicholas Mathew has recently put in circulation about ‘a senior colleague’ who ‘once told me that when he voiced his desire to become a Mozart scholar many years ago one of his mentors had puffed on his cigar and responded: “It’s all been done”’ (Mathew 2009, p. 134). The cigar is what gave it away to me, that the senior scholar was Neal Zaslaw, my fellow graduate student at Columbia University in the 1960s, and that the mentor was Paul Henry Lang, my beloved mentor as well. Neal did his dissertation on Jean-Marie Leclair, a Kleinmeister about whom there was evidently something still to be done; but he later found enough to do with Mozart that he was ultimately given the responsibility of revising the Köchel catalogue. Nicholas Mathew comments that ‘it so happened that [Lang] made this remark just as a younger generation of scholars, Wolfgang Plath and Alan Tyson among them, began to deploy new kinds of historical research to up-end the comfortable world of Mozart scholarship’, and thus he adumbrates one of the main points I will be making here this morning (Mathew 2009, p. 134).

Finally, in the realm of musical performance, those were the days when Malcolm Bilson could utter those words I’m sure he has often wished he could de-utter, to the effect that ‘perhaps it is wrong to put the instrument before the artist, but I have begun to feel that it must be done’ (Bilson 1980, p. 161), and when Christopher Hogwood could look forward to the day when, having digested ‘sufficient data’, we will be able to make ‘rules and regulations’ to govern performances of romantic music, thereby “reducing to a minimum” the number of issues “on which one must make personal choices”’ (Badal 1985, p. 89; Crutchfield 1985, p. 28).

What happy days those were, when questions had answers and could be checked off one by one. ‘My God’, exclaimed George Gallup, the statistician who developed The Gallup Poll, ‘when you stop to think of it, there are four billion Guinea pigs in this world, you see, each one of them with two goals, one, to live a long, and two, a happy, life. And those are both researchable. So here’s
Where Things Stand Now

a whole other world still to be conquered’ (Clymer 1984, p. 9). The golden age of positivism, some now call it, although no longer without irony. Because, when you stop to think of it, there is still disease and unhappiness in the world, and whereas data have surely helped us – and will go on helping us improve our physical health – happiness, like aesthetics, may belong to a world that data cannot conquer.

To think they can is utopian, and utopian thinking can easily lead – no, I’ll be brave, has always led – to authoritarian thinking. It was the authoritarian strain in the thinking exemplified by Wuorinen, Beach, Lang, Bilson and Hogwood to which many of us were reacting in the 1980s, and you didn’t have to be an intellectual radical – you didn’t have to cast your lot with post-structuralism or postmodernism – to join that fight. Old-fashioned liberals like me, and even enlightened positivists like Karl Popper, reacted viscerally against authoritarianism, and I derived my intellectual strength far more from the example of Popper, or Isaiah Berlin (another hard core liberal pluralist), than I did from Derrida or Foucault when I started to engage with the authoritarianism of the cold war academy.

Early music was the performance arena in which the battle was joined first, because early music was the arena in which the most faith was invested in data. That is because the academy, at least when it is on good behaviour, lives by identifying and attacking questions to which there are not yet answers, and most of the unanswered questions, as we then conceived of them, had to do with repertoires in which there was no continuous performance tradition on which we could rely in order to realize notation in actual sound. The field of inquiry that seeks to fill the gap between notation and sound is called performance practice – a term that already carries a whiff, or a stench, of normativity, or prescription, or ‘ought-ness’. When philosophers use the term normative, they refer to ideal standards, as opposed to typical standards, for which the much more ordinary term is normal. If you want to know how things are done, you are interested in the normal. If you want to know how things ought to be done, you are interested in the normative. Inquiries into the normal are descriptive. Inquiries into the normative are prescriptive. Studying performance can be descriptive, but studying performance practice is inevitably prescriptive, because it necessarily involves a priori generalization: since we cannot observe, say, eighteenth- or

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1 Joseph Kerman (1985) deserves great credit as an early whistle-blower on this game, even if his treatment of ‘positivism’ is misleading and unnuanced and mistakess the idea for its abuse.
nineteenth-century performances, we cannot describe them; but insofar as we can generalize from the sorts of data to which we have access (pictures, reports and reviews, treatises, surviving instruments and the like), we can generate a concept to which we can then try to make our performances conform, and that is prescription.

Of course as soon as I began to formulate these ideas, in a series of articles and essays that I later collected in a book called *Text and Act* (issued by Oxford University Press in 1995), I began to see that the line between the descriptive and the prescriptive was not easy to draw, and that our ideas about the performance of music for which there is a living tradition are often just as normative as our ideas about reviving lost repertoires. For tradition itself is normative, insofar as it passes on not only repertoires but also examples of good performance, which is to say it passes on a performance practice. In order to counteract the normative impulse to which I objected, I decided that I would try as a scholar to study performance, not performance practice, and this immediately created difficulties for my professional identity (all the more so since I was in the 1980s simultaneously pursuing a career, since abandoned, as a performer of early music). The Columbia music department, where I then taught, decided to issue a graduate brochure sometime in the early 1980s, shortly after I had written the earliest piece that eventually went into *Text and Act*, the one called ‘On Letting the Music Speak for Itself’, which was first given as a talk at a panel at the national meeting of the American Musicological Society in 1981. I was asked to list my research interests for the brochure, and alongside Russian music, the specialty in which I had done my dissertation, I listed ‘performance’. When the document was printed, I saw that the graduate adviser had changed ‘performance’ to ‘performance practice’ next to my name. I objected, telling him that I meant ‘performance’, not ‘performance practice’, to which he replied that ‘performance practice’ was what performance was called in the academy. I stifled the impulse to shout, ‘Yes! That’s just the trouble!’ but instead resolved to devote myself to demonstrating the difference as I then was in the process of conceiving it.

Fortunately I had the opportunity to do this quite soon thereafter, when on the strength of my early writings Nicholas Kenyon asked me for a contribution to *Early Music and Authenticity*, the anthology of essays he was putting together at the request of William Glock, the man he would one day succeed as controller of music for the BBC, and James Oestreich, the editor of *Opus*, a music magazine
to which I was a regular contributor, asked me for a review of some of the earliest recordings of Beethoven symphonies on what were then called ‘original instruments’. So I was able to do a full dress theoretical rehearsal of my early notions followed by an extensive practical application. It was in drafting these pieces in 1986 and 1987 that I developed my hypothesis that early music and its attendant performance practice were an aspect of modernism, ripe for a postmodernist dismantling.

But before I continue with this narration and the prospects to which it gives rise, I’d like to take a moment to defend the assertion I made a few minutes ago that there is no performance without performance practice, and that all performance traditions are normative. I had hoped to do this by showing you a video clip, but instead I will have to merely describe it to you. Some years ago, I watched on public television a documentary about one of the Van Cliburn competitions – which one I don’t recall, and maybe someone here can tell me, so that I can get my hands on it – that included a montage of a whole slew of contestants, all playing La campanella, the famous Liszt étude after Paganini, which was one of the mandatory contest pieces that year. The young players were from all over the world, representing every continent, I’m pretty sure, except Antarctica, and yet the fact that the montage could be successfully produced showed that they were all playing the piece at the same tempo, with the same touch and the same volume. In fact, without the visual component one could not have been able to tell that it was a composite rather than a single performance.

The purpose of the montage was to show how well they all played, of course, and they did play well. But in our present company, I could have presented the clip (and would have), needless to say, as an indictment of the uniformity that contests impose on their entrants, and we could have all enjoyed a nice ‘Two Minutes Hate’ together à la Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four, with – I don’t know – Vladimir Horowitz’s picture on the screen in place of Emmanuel Goldstein’s. When asked, we all deplore such uniformity. How un-romantic, we will say, and in particular, how un-Lisztian. Here’s what’s Lisztian: Wilhelm von Lenz, the piano-playing Russian privy counsellor with a German name who wrote a famous biography of Beethoven in French, once came to Liszt for a lesson bearing a few scores by Weber, which Liszt had not yet seen (Lenz 1983). Liszt seized the music, Lenz recalled, took it to the keyboard and ‘played through the different parts over and over again. He tried various reinforcements.
He played the second part of the minor movement in octaves’. Then he turned to the A flat major sonata and ‘played the first part over and over again in various ways. At the section (in the dominant) in E flat at the close of the first part he said, “It is marked legato there. Would it not be better to make it pianissimo and staccato? Leggermente is indicated there, too”. He experimented in every direction. So I had the experience of observing how one genius looks upon the work of another, and turns it to his own account’ (cited in Hamilton 2008, p. 201).

Liszt, it’s clear, would not have lasted a single round at the Cliburn Competition. The first thing that will get you eliminated there, or at any competition, is playing things ‘in various ways’, let alone ‘experimenting in every direction’. And I’m not just speaking hypothetically. You remember, don’t you, what happened to Ivo Pogorelich at the 1980 Fryderyk Chopin Competition in Warsaw? For performing in a way that did not conform to the implicit performance practice, he was eliminated before the finals, at which point Martha Argerich proclaimed him a genius, resigned from the jury in protest and insured his subsequent fame.

Not every nonconformist is a genius, of course. Many are charlatans; most, perhaps, are merely adolescents; and as they used to say, Quod licet Jovi, non licet bovi, which my friend Kenneth Hamilton (from whom I stole the anecdote about Liszt) translates as ‘What suits the Gods doesn’t suit clods’ (Hamilton 2008, p. 195). But what about those who are neither gods nor clods, but well-trained and imaginative pianists like Pogorelich (or even those Cliburn contestants, perhaps, when not performing before a jury)? Are we so afraid of charlatans that we can’t abide a genius? It might be further argued in defence of the double standard that we need to populate our institutions and our concert halls, and that means we need a steady supply of reliable performers rather than an occasional genius. But the early music movement was supposed to be an alternative to the mainstream market, and yet the uniformity that underpins our conservatory and competition culture is precisely the condition to which the early music movement of the early 1980s implicitly aspired – and sometimes explicitly, as when Christopher Hogwood called for the establishment of rules and regulations in order to minimize personal choice in the performance of romantic music, of all things. It turns out that we already have those rules and regulations, and that personal choice for that repertoire, at least in the realm of virtuoso piano music, has already been minimized. The Cliburn montage proved
that. Our normal is already normative. Our performances follow a performance practice. If we don’t like the resulting uniformity, or at least say we dislike it, why are we trying to find new ways of imposing it?

I would say it’s because the uniformity that the Van Cliburn video exposed is the uniformity of now, for which we must take the responsibility, while the uniformity Hogwood and many others have sought is the uniformity of then, which offers us an alibi (a.k.a. the Eichmann defence). Is that a better uniformity? Whether better or worse, can we even achieve it? Another leading voice in the old early music movement, Neal Zaslaw, showed how it might be attempted: ‘Since we have no time machine’, he wrote:

how can we know that we are getting things ‘right’? Leaving aside the problematic nature of the idea that there is (or ever was) such a thing as ‘right’, the answer is that we can never get it ‘right’, but we can arrive at ever closer approximations. This method of working is well known in mathematics and physics as an iterative solution, in which, in a problem for which no definitive answer is possible, a series of constantly refined approximations eventually yields a solution that is fully adequate to the task at hand. In the performance of early music, we too—by studying the implications of eighteenth-century performing conditions, aesthetic preferences, and the music itself, and seeing what impact each discovery in one of these may have for the others—can gradually reach a fully adequate approximation. This is not to suggest that there exists a Main Truth to be discovered, but that each age and each talented composer found temporary truths, some of which we may hope to rediscover. (Zaslaw 1989, p. 446)

But we cannot simply ‘leave aside … the idea that there is … such a thing as “right”’, as Neal Zaslaw proposes, because that, precisely, is the idea that motivates the whole iterative project – the conviction that the uniformity of then not only existed, but that it is to be preferred over the uniformity of now. Otherwise, why should we seek to revive it in today’s performances? Clearly, Zaslaw was making concessions to a bad conscience, and that bad conscience has spread wider since he wrote.2

What was its source? Could it have been the ‘postmodern’ or relativist notion that ideas of rightness are never wholly objective, and that subjectivity (read taste) is always a thing of now, not then? This notion was gaining ground

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2 It may be pertinent to note that in the chapter (‘Performance Practice’) from which the long citation was made, Zaslaw uses the euphemism ‘neo-classical’ throughout, in place of what was already the tainted word ‘authentic’, to denote ‘the approach to performance taken by “early music” specialists’ (Zaslaw 1989, p. 445). The term was suggested to him, he writes, by the Dutch violinist Jaap Schröder.
by the late 1980s not only in the realm of performance practice, but even in the realm of art restoration, on which the more dogmatic or reckless performance practitioners used to base their claims. Where Christopher Hogwood could allege in 1986, promoting his Beethoven symphony recordings, that ‘as in our appreciation of non-recreative art (painting, sculpture, literature), we can make our starting point what the work is, not what we would, with hindsight, design or expect it to be’, and that ‘by looking back to the pieces as they were before the retouching of Toscanini or the glutinous tones of Herr Steinway cast an anachronistic glow on the Beethoven image, we may still find them to be terrifyingly new, but at the same time accurately old’ (Hogwood 1986, p. 28), even Charles Hope, the director of the University of London’s Warburg Institute and a leading authority on the art of Renaissance Italy, admitted by 1993 that one cannot assume that ‘we could remove centuries of accumulated dirt to reveal the pristine work of art beneath’, because restoration is ‘seldom undertaken solely to counter physical threats to works of art, such as cracking or flaking; rather it aims to improve their appearance’, and, finally, ‘just what constitutes an improvement is of course conditioned by current taste’ (Hope 1993, p. 4).

The method by which I tested my hypothesis, that our notions of historical performance practice are similarly conditioned by current taste, was actually the height of positivistic empirical research. I went out and bought a special metronome – its brand name was Dr. Beat – that had a ‘tap-mode’ feature: by tapping along with a performance or recording one could get a numerical reading of its tempo. I then subjected the earliest period-instrument Beethoven CDs (two by Hogwood, one by Roger Norrington, three by The Hanover Band) to a meticulous tempo analysis, using my trusty ‘Dr. Beat’. As a control group – or rather, as two control groups – I measured tempos in a group of recordings by early twentieth-century conductors, including Arturo Toscanini, Willem Mengelberg and Bruno Walter (both protégés of Gustav Mahler) and Wilhelm Furtwängler and, finally, a group of what could be thought of as standard recent recordings as of then, including readings by Herbert von Karajan and Otto Klemperer (the latter, being very long-lived, somewhat ambiguously straddling two periods). I chose tempo as the primary proving ground simply because numbers are exact, and we have numbers that come straight from Beethoven that could serve as relatively objective evidence of the contemporary practice the early music performers purported to revive.
The results, which you can read about in *Text and Act*, were surprising and very embarrassing to those who made claims of authenticity. Even Roger Norrington, who made the sincerest and most successful effort to conform to Beethoven’s metronome markings rather than traditional tempos, held fast to his tempos in a fashion that could easily be shown, on the basis of contemporary treatises and descriptions, to be just as anachronistic as the actual tempos of the other performers. This was the aspect of my work that, so to speak, made the evening news and gave me, for a while (and maybe in some places, still), the reputation of a hostile debunker – or, in the words of Robert Quinney, an organist at Westminster Abbey, ‘the big bad wolf of HIP [Historically Informed Performance]’ (Quinney 2008, p. 303). But while I can’t deny a bit of perverse pride in being so flatteringly denounced, I was not interested merely in debunking claims of fidelity. Historical fidelity – what they called ‘authenticity’ – was never, in my view, the most compelling aspect of early music performers or their performances. What was compelling was what I preferred to call their authenticity, their success in providing ‘for better or worse a true mirror of late-twentieth-century taste’, something I regarded (borrowing a bit of adorable hyperbole from George Bernard Shaw) as ‘roughly forty thousand times as vital and important as being the assumed voice of history’, even if it no longer carried the privileged authority that early music performers sought (Taruskin 1995, p. 166). I actually thought my writing would enhance the prestige of early music performers. Rather than an enemy of the movement, I thought of myself as its best (or, at least, its truest) friend.

But that hope was forlorn, so thoroughly invested had early music performers become in what I saw as not only the false but the pernicious idea that their claim of historical verisimilitude conferred a privilege. There has been, of course, a lot of blowback. There are two whole books, in fact, by Peter Walls, a fine violinist from New Zealand, and by Bruce Haynes, a fine American oboist who lives in Canada, that consist of little more than blowback against my challenge to the movement’s self-asserted privilege (Walls 2003; Haynes 2007). Both authors disavow the claim of privilege, of course, asserting instead that their claims are merely those of common sense; but the mask keeps slipping. Haynes, in particular, still insists on his entitlement to what Joseph Kerman called the ‘uneearned good vibrations’ that used to attach to the word ‘authenticity’ (Kerman 1985, p. 192) by sticking to the acronym HIP, although he euphemizes to the extent of calling HIP ‘historically inspired’ rather than
‘historically informed’. He dismisses my objection to the old coercive rhetoric and my ‘invidious antonym’ test for detecting it (invidious in the sense that one cannot claim ‘inauthenticity’ or ‘historically uninformed performance’ or ‘inappropriateness’ as virtuous alternatives) with a shrug (‘I don’t see a problem here’), and then goes right back onto the old offensive: ‘what does need defending, and what is logically and aesthetically questionable, is the old traditional attitude, the chronocentrism … that insists on using a single performing style for the music of all periods and blithely ignores differences of style and instruments’ (Haynes 2007, p. 11). I will challenge that characterization with an example in a little while, but before I do, I can’t refrain from treating you to Haynes’s list of invidious antonyms to historically informed performance. (He says he got it from ‘a colleague’. Such things always come from ‘a colleague’, just as it’s always ‘a friend of mine’ for whom one is buying contraceptives):


I think you can see the problem here. That kind of smugness might already account for Neal Zaslaw’s bad conscience. There are still those who feel that we know all we need to know and that performance practice has been ‘solved’, at least for certain repertories, and those who contend, just like Charles Wuorinen, that further experimentation ought to stop. Those repertories always seem to be the ones that they themselves are working in. Christopher Page allowed himself the public assertion that, although I may have been right to propose that most early music performers were responding to a modern or modernist intellectual impulse, he was actually in touch with history (Page 1993, p. 468). Another

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3 Brad Lehmann is named as the author of the list.

4 His exact words: ‘Certain musical ideals are often associated with the early music revival, especially a “clean,” light sound without vibrato, purged of 19th-century romantic gestures. What makes the study of the English choral renaissance so fascinating is that these ideals have arisen there in ways that complicate (but in no way confute) the argument of Richard Taruskin and others who regard them as a projection of certain 20th-century musical ideas and tastes. The increasing prominence of a cappella repertory in the choral institutions and the punctilious singing it requires, the marked prominence of younger singers with clearer, straighter voices (principally men of pre-
performer–scholar, very recently, has offered the opinion that we should concentrate on areas where performance practice has been sufficiently ‘thought through’ so that attention can at last be diverted from how to perform and focused on what to perform – that is, turn from performing style as such to what Elisabeth Le Guin calls ‘repertory excavation’.

But why the either/or? At the very least, such self-congratulation is premature and testifies to an abiding human weakness – that of overturning one orthodoxy only to impose another. In 1986, at the end of my chapter in Kenyon’s book, I saw reasons for optimism in certain changes I was observing in early music performances. They seemed to be relaxing a bit from the Stravinskian severity that had irritated me into action, and were getting a bit more ingratiating, not to say ‘romantic’ – flexible in tempo, less given to exaggerations in dynamics, less self-consciously at variance with audience expectations. I compared that development to some new trends in classical composition, like neo-romanticism and minimalism, and rejoiced that early music was thus showing itself to be a continuing bellwether of changing taste, and to that extent still of a piece with our musical culture as a whole. In a literal sense, that was a sign of its integrity. (My examples in 1986 were then very recent recordings by the Vienna Concentus Musicus and the Leonhardt Consort of Bach’s Brandenburg concertos.) In a talk I gave five years later, called ‘Tradition and Authority’, I found reasons for optimism in what I described as the beginnings of ‘a hardy social practice … that obeys its own dictates, has its own momentum, is becoming more and more eclectic, contaminated, suggestible’, in short, that it was behaving like a living tradition, which is to say an oral tradition (Taruskin 1995, p. 194). ‘Is this just wishful thinking?’ I asked, and I assured myself and my audience that it might not be with a quotation from Alfred Brendel, who was also noticing around then that ‘[p]erformances have become less dogmatic and more personal’ (Brendel 1990, p. 223).

If that was progress, I fear there has been some regression since, of a kind that might have been predicted. The fast unyielding tempos of the 1980s have
long been exceeded both in speed and in rigidity by groups like *Il Giardino Armonico*, and their many imitators, whose performances I find always to be exciting and compelling on first hearing and unbearable by the third. I might describe them as blithely heedless of differences in style and expression. And I am not the only one.

Maybe that settling in, that loss of the sense of experimentation and adventure that it had in the eighties and early nineties is why performance practice as a movement has struck some academic observers as out of steam. Walls and Haynes both call properly aggrieved attention to a footnote in a book called *Rethinking Music*, a compendium of essays by an array of prominent British and American musicologists that came out in 1999 and purported to present a status report on current musicological thinking at the turn of the century. The book contains no article on performance practice. That is because, as the editors, Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist, confided, ‘it proved impossible to find an author who could feel that there was something useful that could be said beyond a summary of conclusions of arguments current in the 1980s’, and concluded that ‘historically informed performance’, as ‘an intellectual concept’, appeared to be ‘exhausted’ (Cook and Everist 1999, p. 12). Although I might have been expected to feel complimented or even triumphant at this development (and although Walls and Haynes assumed with some asperity that I did), I also deplore the apparent foreclosure, as I would any foreclosure of debate.

Fortunately, however, that exhaustion was only apparent, for the same book also contained an essay by José Antonio Bowen, somewhat bumptiously titled ‘Finding the Music in Musicology’, which showed that it was after all possible to study performance very fruitfully without falling into the trap of normativity, which is to say that it was possible to study performance rather than performance practice. This truly did feel like a vindication to me, recalling my difficulty a couple of decades earlier in getting my senior colleagues to see the difference, let alone why it mattered.

What Bowen was proposing was in fact a generalization of the methods I had used in critiquing all those Beethoven recordings for *Opus* magazine, albeit with a far more sophisticated technology that Bowen was developing at the University of Southampton, where he had established a research center called CHARM (Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music), which, since Bowen’s departure (or rather, return to the United States) and his turn from musicology, alas, into university administration, has been taken over by Nicholas
Cook, his then colleague at Southampton, and moved with Cook to Royal Holloway College at the University of London. By taking far more numerous tempo measurements than I had taken, of a far wider sample of recordings than I had surveyed, Bowen arrived at and presented in that article a convincing account of the actual history of Beethoven performances over the course of the twentieth century. It was an attempt to find out what musicians have done, not what they ought to do. And the project had very wide ramifications that Bowen and, following him, Cook have only begun to explore with the help of their many students and doctoral advisees.

These ramifications go far beyond performance practice, although that issue – for all that, it may have seemed closed in 1999 – has proved lively indeed since the advent of empirical research into recorded performances (and here I should cite the work of Robert Philip [1992], David Breckbill [1992] and Will Crutchfield [1983–1984] as noble predecessors). The statistical method enables the study of the actual evolution of performance practice. One can observe that, outliers and mavericks notwithstanding, there has been a notable and measurable speeding up of the tempo of the first movement of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony over the century’s course, and a slowing down of the second. As Bowen enjoys pointing out (for example, in another archly titled article, ‘Can a Symphony Change?’), that means that musical works are not necessarily the stable entities that they appear to be, even in our staunchly literate and history-obsessed culture (Bowen 1998).

That conclusion is of great interest to philosophers, for whom music is one of the great ontological enigmas (as witness Roman Ingarden’s The Work of Music and the Problem of Its Identity [1986], with its marvellous question, ‘Where is Chopin’s B-Minor Sonata?’) At the same time, that process of change has been a process of social mediation, so it is of equal interest to sociologists. Research like Bowen’s and Cook’s gives encouragement to the interdisciplinary growth of musicology; and indeed, there are more musical philosophers and musical sociologists now than ever before, and many of them have been trained in musicology, not just in philosophy and sociology. As Robert Philip’s subtitle reminds us, the evolution of musical performance is also an evolution of taste, which brings cultural historians into the picture alongside sociologists.

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5 Bowen acknowledges Philip and Breckbill. Much earlier – indeed, perhaps the earliest such extensive survey – was Crutchfield (1983–1984).
As for musicians and performers, the information this kind of empirical study produces can provide endless food for thought, by indicating possibilities that normative studies suppress, and also by prodding us to empathize with strangeness – a necessary precondition to the shedding of (often unconscious) prejudices. These are liberating developments. Before I do a little prodding of this kind myself, as promised, I want to advertise the existence of a book that on its face may seem another attempt like Walls’s and Haynes’s to reinforce prejudice and maintain privilege, but which turns out, very happily, to be more nearly the opposite. In Playing with History, whose subtitle identifies it as a study of ‘The Historical Approach to Musical Performance’, John Butt, an organist and Bach scholar who now occupies the Gardiner Chair of Music at the University of Glasgow, also notes with regret Cook and Everist’s relegation of historical performance to the realm of the dodo and the dinosaur in Rethinking Music, but gives it a positive spin. Noting that, partly as a result of my situating HIP in the context of modernism rather than authentic antiquarianism, ‘many within musicology and music criticism in general have perceived that the debate over HIP is effectively closed, that there is nothing more to say, and, indeed that the movement as a whole is running out of steam (like modernism itself)’, Butt turns right around and says that, on the contrary:

Taruskin’s work—far from closing the debate—is really the work that has most made future debate possible and has entirely reformulated the issues concerned with the discussion of HIP. (Butt 2002, p. xi)

Now that really is a fine compliment, and I want to return it and urge you to read Butt’s book. In it you will find chapters dealing with the relationship between musical performance and many other aspects of music and contemporary culture. Butt consistently writes ‘historical performance’, but the vistas he opens up apply equally to all kinds of performance, and virtually all repertoires. He writes of the relationship between performance and works with a fine appreciation of ontological problems. (He speaks, for instance, of the ‘subversion of Platonism’ – that is, of challenges to the notion that works of music have the kind of absolute ontological identity one associates with the Platonic doctrine of forms.) He writes of the relationship between musical performance and composers, and here he reopens intelligently and fruitfully the old question of intention and the responsibilities it may or may not entail. He writes of the relationship between musical performance and musical notation –
the very stuff of performance practice – without falling into normative traps. And there are chapters as well that attempt to define the relationship between musical performance and the social and cultural issues that surround music and the other fine arts at present, or at least as of 2002. All in all, the book is quite a marvellous performance in its own right.

And yet for all that, there is still a blind spot in Butt’s musical world-view, one that I would still definitely associate with modernism. To broach it I want to regale you at last with some music. The first item I would like to listen to with you is one that figured very prominently in the chapter I wrote in 1986 for Nick Kenyon’s book, which is called ‘The Pastness of the Present and the Presence of the Past’ (Taruskin 1988). It was much commented on in terms of my description, but I would wager that few of the commentators could actually have heard it, and neither, in all likelihood, have you. It is a performance of the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto by Johann Sebastian Bach, as recorded at the Salzburg Festival in 1950, the Bach bicentennial year, by the Vienna Philharmonic with Wilhelm Furtwängler not only conducting, but also playing the keyboard solo on piano. Here is end of the first movement, beginning with the so-called cadenza (Online Ex. 1.1).

Online Example 1.1. J.S. Bach, Brandenburg Concerto no. 5, BWV 1050, first movement, keyboard cadenza to the end of the movement, performed by Wilhelm Furtwängler and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra.

This, of course, is the kind of performance that HIP execrates for its ‘unthinking’ adherence to tradition, and (to recall Bruce Haynes’s rhetoric) for ‘blithely ignor[ing] differences of style and instruments’. But consider: did Furtwängler’s playing sound unthinking? Did it sound blithe? I have rarely heard a performance in which every note seemed as fully weighed, evaluated and considered, which is to say rarely have I heard a performance so convinced and devoted. As to its adherence to tradition, far from unthinking, it is devout, even sacramental, in a way that might make us squirm today; but if we squirm, it may be because it bespeaks a sort of commitment we can no longer muster, and we may sense that difference as a loss. Furtwängler’s attitude toward Bach is clearly premodern. As I put it in 1986, his is the performance of ‘a musician who still regarded Bach as Beethoven did – “not a brook but an ocean”, and the fountainhead of contemporary music’ (Taruskin 1995, p. 106). That view of Bach may be historically untenable; certainly no practising musicologist would endorse the notion of an unbroken tradition in German music extending from
Bach to the present day. But Furtwängler’s act of performance asserts and, one may even say, creates that tradition, as Brahms’s *Haydn Variations*, in which a theme Brahms thought to be by Haydn was subjected at the end to a patently Bachian passacaglia treatment, created the tradition in an act of composition.

Furtwängler’s performance is a cultural and historical document from which we can not only learn much, but also draw inspiration, even if we are fully conscious of its incongruity with the performing norms of Bach’s day, and even if we are not moved to emulate it. But here is something else to consider: do you seriously believe that Furtwängler was any less conscious than we are of the disparity between his performance and the norms of Bach’s day? Furtwängler was a learned man, and his performance deserves as much as any to be called a ‘historically informed performance’. Having contemplated the alternatives – and by the early 1950s, please bear in mind, there were many alternatives to contemplate, from Adolf Busch and his Chamber Players to the burgeoning chamber orchestras of postwar Europe as typified, perhaps, by Karl Munchinger’s Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, founded in 1945, or such Italian groups as *I Musici* and the *Virtuosi di Roma*, both founded in 1952, or even the young Gustav Leonhardt, who made his debut with a recital performance of Bach’s *Kunst der Fuge* on harpsichord, precisely in Vienna in 1950 – Furtwängler nevertheless chose to continue performing Bach’s music the way it had been done in Germany before the First World War.

Peter Walls, writing in 2002, challenges Furtwängler’s right to make that choice. He does so indirectly, by challenging, like Bruce Haynes, my ‘invidious-antonym’ test. My objection to words that have invidious antonyms, he writes, ‘presupposes that it is the free choice of every performer to adopt or reject an approach that takes account of what can be demonstrated of composers’ intentions’; and then he writes, with astonishing smugness:

This is true only if we accept that it is also up to performers whether or not to play the right notes. In the final analysis, it could be argued that to play Bach on the instruments appropriate for Brahms and without taking account of his expectations in relation to such matters as articulation and ornamentation is not acceptable. We should perhaps face up to the fact that performers who think they can do justice to the aesthetic presence of music while ignoring the score’s historical implications deserve to be regarded not as ‘differently abled’, but as ‘historically uninformed’. (Walls 2002, p. 32)
One condescends to the likes of Wilhelm Furtwängler at one’s peril – peril in the first place to one’s sense of proportion. To claim that using a piano to play Bach is the equivalent of playing the wrong notes (read playing incompetently) is fanatically intolerant, comparable to a rabbi arguing that eating pork is the moral equivalent of murder, or a priest arguing that eating pork during Lent is the moral equivalent of fornication. It goes beyond normativity to totalitarianism. To imply that Furtwängler’s choice marks him as historically uninformed (read ignorant) is itself ignorant. Furtwängler was fully aware of the newer ways of playing Bach that were coming into fashion in Germany as early as the 1920s, associated at first with what was then called the Orgelbewegung (the organ movement) or the Orgel-Erneuerungsbewegung (the organ-renewal movement) that sought in the first place to restore or reproduce the organs of Bach’s time and then insisted with Wallsian intolerance that Bach should only be played on such instruments. The attitude, not only of Furtwängler, but of the composers of the Second Viennese School (who all made appropriations or arrangements of Bach) and even of T.W. Adorno, toward that project was that it intolerably diminished Bach by reducing him to the stature of ‘a composer for organ festivals in well-preserved Baroque towns’ (cited in Berry 2008, p. 82). To equate what Walls calls ‘the score’s historical implications’ with matters of timbre and instrumentation was, in the opinion of most German music historians, another reductive solecism, which Hans Ferdinand Redlich, one of the leaders in the early baroque revival, memorably called musealer Klangmaterialismus – ‘museum (or curator’s) sound-materialism’. Furtwängler himself certainly gave as good as he got in debate, going very pointedly on the offensive against restorers of original instruments and ‘authentic’ performance practice. ‘To conclude’, he wrote:

from the fact that there are no expression marks in Bach, that one must sacrifice all individual interpretation is … the most wrongheaded thing that one can do. … And to believe that, because Bach did not prescribe it, there is no espressivo is already of

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6 Redlich coined the term in the programme notes that accompanied the performance of his unpublished edition of Monteverdi’s Orfeo in Zürich in 1936; in his monograph on Monteverdi, he defines it as denoting ‘the tendency of some modern arrangers of old music to restore it according to the letter rather than to the spirit, by using obsolete and historical instruments (Cornetti, Viols, Portative, Chalumeau, etc.) but without simultaneously endeavouring to solve the problems either of “Musica ficta”, Basso Continuo or of the many special types of ornamentation. The belief that the employment of ancient instruments alone ensures a historically faithful reading of old compositions shows an exaggerated appraisal of the purely material side of old music.’ (Redlich 1952, p. 196).
a level of naïveté such that it could only have come from an intellectual to whom art was foreign. (Furtwängler 1980, p. 50)

Furtwängler was reacting to performances he knew. There is no telling how he would have reacted to performances we know that came later. But there is no point in pretending that his performances were unthinking or historically uninformed. Rather, we might take the opportunity to interpret his performance as a historical document – one that might reveal to us something of an older historical view of Bach that transcended historical verisimilitude. Do I think him right and Walls wrong? Certainly not. Is Walls right and Furtwängler wrong? No way. Speaking as a historian, I cheerfully pronounce them both wrong – as are we, no matter what we say now. Just as John Maynard Keynes was pitilessly right to point out that in the long run we are all dead, so any historian is bound to acknowledge that in the long run we are all wrong about history. But an effort to understand Furtwängler’s motivation, which could easily last as long as this entire talk or this entire conference, would at least cast our own performance preferences in a new light, situating them in an articulated historical context that might simultaneously illuminate and relativize them, and might even show us the extent to which our own preferences have been embraced unthinkingly, as any conviction formed within any unarticulated historical context is likely to be.

And there is one more aspect of Furtwängler’s performance that I would like to bring to your attention, and it is the one that is missing even from the far-reaching and encompassing purview of John Butt’s excellent book. Butt writes eloquently and extensively of the relationship between performances and works, between performances and composers, and between performances and notation, but never broaches the relationship between performances and audiences. That is a very typical modernist omission. When I play Furtwängler’s recording for classes and lecture audiences, I always watch them (as I have just been watching you). And what I almost always observe is an initial reaction to strangeness, expressed in embarrassment, occasionally in giggles, followed by an aura of intense concentration. A photograph or silent video of most audiences listening to this performance could easily be titled ‘listening’. Listening intently. That communicative aspect was clearly – or so it seems to me – one of Furtwängler’s paramount objectives. He was clearly – or so it seems to me – as intent on establishing a relationship with his hearers as he was on establishing a relationship to Bach, or to German history. His performance strove to establish a nexus – call it communion if you like – among all three. We may not particularly
like that message – I certainly don’t, much – but why have performances today become so much less detailed and communicative? Do we have less to communicate?

With that in mind, let me play you another recording of the same part of the same movement from the same concerto (Online Ex. 1.2). This time the performer is a friend of mine, a harpsichordist named Kenneth Cooper, and the performance falls squarely within the purview of what we would now call HIP: that is, historically informed or inspired in the ‘musealer Klangmaterial-istic’ sense.

**Online Example 1.2.** J.S Bach, Brandenburg Concerto no. 5, BWV 1050, first movement, keyboard cadenza to the end of the first movement, performed by Kenneth Cooper and the Berkshire Bach Ensemble.

Talk about a relationship with the audience! And yes, that part was definitely historical. It is perhaps the only aspect of this performance that we can call historical on solid documentary grounds. The performance is otherwise speculatively creative in a way that must sicken the likes of Peter Walls, because it is the work of a performer who plays on a historical instrument yet obviously believes that it is indeed up to performers whether or not to play the right notes – that is, the notes Bach wrote. But that spontaneity and unpredictability, coupled with virtuosity, was what elicited that spontaneous eruption of applause, something that I’ll bet none of us has ever actually witnessed at a performance of a Brandenburg concerto. For audience behaviour has also undergone significant metamorphosis over the centuries, and there is no reason to suppose that today’s typically passive audience behaviour is the sort of behaviour Bach would have expected or tried to elicit (outside of church, that is). On the contrary: before the advent of romanticism, and for quite a long time thereafter, audiences for what we now call classical music behaved far more like audiences behave today at pop concerts, or if not quite that uninhibitedly, at least the way they behave at jazz concerts. The quiet, contemplative demeanor of modern audiences took hold during the nineteenth century. There are whole books – by James Johnson (1995) and Matthew Riley (2004) – that trace the advent of modern listening (in France and Germany, respectively). The music on which audiences learned and practised that behaviour included, pre-eminently, the Beethoven symphonies.

Virtuoso keyboard literature was another story altogether. Here I draw again on the marvellous book by Kenneth Hamilton, who writes:
Nineteenth-century concert practice accepted, sometimes reluctantly, that the audience would give what amounted to a running commentary on the performance—if, that is, the performer was lucky enough to engage their attention at all. Particularly effective passages at any point in a work could be applauded or rewarded with bravos, even encored on some occasions. ‘I have always had applause after the cadenza’, [Hans von] Bülow told his students with some satisfaction in the late 1880s. He was not referring to the end of a work, but to the opening cadenza of Beethoven’s Emperor Concerto. Beethoven himself would have shared Bülow’s pleasure. Silence, he declared, ‘is not what we artists wish—we want applause’. Applause could well have drowned out a fair amount of the orchestral tutti of any concerted piece, as in fact it did once when Chopin performed his Variations on ‘Là ci darem’ for Piano and Orchestra. The audience showed its loud appreciation after each one. (Hamilton 2008, p. 86)

If we are interested in historical performance practice, then, how about reviving historical audience practice? It would only work if audiences could be persuaded to show their displeasure as audibly as their pleasure, and that would be a lot to ask in this day and age when audiences, having endured long bouts of enforced immobility, are in such need of exercise at the end of a concert that they often reward mediocre performances with what I have come to call perfunctory standing ovations, and it is a long time since I have witnessed a performance in a large hall that was so bad that it did not call forth at least one ‘bravo’. But I don’t think I am the only observer who would love to desacralize the concert ritual just a little bit, and restore a little spontaneity to the audience’s response. It might encourage more spontaneity in performances as well, for response begets response, does it not? True, the audience at New York’s Metropolitan Opera has been newsworthily boo-happy of late, and the loggionisti in Milan have always given vocal expression to their opinions of vocal expressions coming from the stage. But we still have a way to go toward spontaneity, restoring a real give-and-take between stage and house. It would require a change in performerly behaviour before there could be a corresponding change in audience behaviour, and critics, those puritanical enforcers, can be counted on to disapprove. Did I say puritanical? Make that snobbish, and the newspaper providentially provided me with an example the very day I drafted this paragraph. Reviewing a concert by Riccardo Muti, the snootiest of maestros, in Chicago, John von Rhein, the Chicago Tribune’s equally snooty regular reviewer, reported as follows:
Riccardo Muti has been speaking out a great deal lately on the need to educate youthful offenders about classical music as a means of bettering self-esteem, and becoming more productive citizens. But before he can realize that lofty goal, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s future music director has some adult offenders to educate closer to home.

Last week the offender was a subscriber coughing over the opening bar of a Bruckner slow movement. On Thursday night a boorish minority of listeners insisted on trampling the quiet benediction Brahms built into the end of his ‘German Requiem’ with applause. (Rhein 2009)

Cough and you’re no better than a juvenile delinquent. John von Rhein is certainly not lacking in self-esteem. But are his the attitudes we wish to inculcate in our youth? Are they the attitudes that will attract new audiences to classical music?

And should we assume, by the way (lest we think our holy Bach should be forever exempt from shenanigans like the ones Ken Cooper elicited), that eighteenth-century concert audiences were any less demonstrative than the nineteenth-century ones Kenneth Hamilton describes? If anything, they were more so. Here’s how Mozart, proudly writing home to papa Leopold, described the reaction the symphony we now call his ‘Paris’ Symphony (no. 31, K299) elicited from the audience at the Concert Spirituel on the evening of 3 July 1778:

I had heard that final allegros, here, must begin in the same way as the first ones, all the instruments playing together, mostly in unison. I began mine with nothing but the 1st and 2nd violins playing softly for 8 bars—then there is a sudden forte. Consequently, the listeners (just as I had anticipated) all went ‘Sh!’ in the soft passage—then came the sudden forte—and no sooner did they hear the forte than they all clapped their hands. (Bauer and Deutsch 1962, pp. 388–389; Weiss (trans.) in Weiss and Taruskin 2007, p. 266)

We also know, from the work of many scholars today, notably Martha Feldman (1995), how inattentive eighteenth-century audiences could be, and, in particular, we know that opera audiences in public theaters behaved more rowdily than the unruliest movie crowds behave today. (I at least have never seen or heard anyone using a chamber-pot at the movies.) After a night at the opera in 1715, at a theater managed by Vivaldi, who also wrote the opera and appeared as a violin soloist in a virtuoso obbligato, a German traveller in Venice reported that ‘fearing lest we should be mistreated and spat upon as we were the last time, we took an inexpensive loge and proceeded to avenge ourselves upon those in the parterre according to local custom, just as had been done to us the last time,
even though I had thought it utterly impossible for me to do this’ (Preussner 1949, p. 67; Weiss (trans.) in Weiss and Taruskin 2007, p. 200). And how quiet do you suppose the audience was at the famous Ospedale concerts where Vivaldi’s all-girl orchestra held forth every Sunday afternoon? Please don’t think I am advocating the return of chamber-pots, spitballs or castrati, or that I mean to condone the sort of inattentive and inconsiderate behaviour my old friend James Oestreich, now at the New York Times, deplored in a music review providence supplied on the day I was writing this paragraph: ‘Someone directly ahead’, he wrote, ‘was sending brightly lighted e-mail messages when not flirting with his partner; three people to the right were passing around a cellular device and gawking; people directly behind were talking at will. Thank goodness for the aisle to the left’ (Oestreich 2009, col. 3). But audience behaviour prompted directly by the performance rather than by ingrained social ritual (or by boredom) has become vanishingly rare. I’d like to see its return.

We can take the measure of the change in listening practice and the origin of the attitude exemplified by the lofty Muti and the servile John von Rhein from the marking that comes at the end of the first movement of Mahler’s Second Symphony, the one with the quasi-religious subtitle, Auferstehung (‘Resurrection’). ‘Hier folgt eine Pause von mindestens 5 Minuten!’ Mahler commands: ‘Here follows a pause of at least five minutes’ duration’. What is the audience supposed to be doing for that time? Probably thinking over the questions that, according to one famous letter, Mahler intended the movement to pose: ‘Why have you lived? Why have you suffered?’ In any case, the audience is expected to sit obediently still, exactly as if they were in church. And five minutes, under such constraints, is a very long time.

Has the five minutes’ pause ever actually been enforced? The only performance I ever attended in which it was observed was a performance in which the five minutes were used to allow the chorus to enter and take their seats at stage rear. (The soloists entered separately, to applause, before the fourth movement.) That cannot have been Mahler’s intention, but no other conductor in my experience has had the chutzpah to force such a lengthy bout of contemplation on paying customers. Did Mahler himself subject the audience to the intimidating glare that his players so often recalled in interviews? Did his glare actually intimidate people he had no power to fire?

I could go on with these irreverent questions, but I don’t really mean to mock or belittle a work I love to listen to. Yet I am certainly not alone in
thinking that Mahler’s pretension could use an occasional ribbing, and he might actually have agreed – occasionally – at any rate – because, as you probably know, and like Berlioz with his *Symphonie fantastique*, he blew hot and cold about the symphony’s program, sometimes distributing it, at other times suppressing it. Perhaps he blew hot and cold about his artistic pretensions as well. My point is that the sacralization of art over the course of the nineteenth century eventually began to embarrass the artists themselves. Early music, *Klangmaterialismus*, and the rest were among the symptoms of the ironizing, miniaturizing, secularizing, de-romanticizing backlash that followed in the 1920s, which was not only the decade of neoclassicism but also that of the *Orgelbewegung*. It even affected ostensibly romantic artists like Rachmaninoff, who in 1931 wrote to his friend Nikolai Medtner about one of his latest works, the *Variations on a Theme by Corelli*, that he let the audience’s coughing regulate the length of his performances. ‘When the coughing increases’, he wrote [in a letter of 21 December 1931], ‘I leave out the next variation. If there is no coughing, I play them in order. At one small-town concert, I forget where, they coughed so, that I only played 10 variations out of 20. The record so far is 18 variations, in New York’ (Rachmaninoff 1980, pp. 321–322). Even the man Stravinsky derided as ‘a six-foot scowl’ believed in, and lived by, Jules Renard’s old precept that ‘art is no excuse for boring people’.

My bigger point is that our behaviour as performers and as listeners reflects our values as well as our knowledge, and contests over behaviour always come down, finally, to contests about values. I hope that over the course of this conference we will not only increase our knowledge, but also give our values and our behaviour some healthy scrutiny, because my biggest point is that it is on our behaviour, and the values thus embodied, that the future of our art depends.

Reference List


**Discography**
