

## The Aesthetic Value of Performing Music

And indeed we think it not manly to perform music,  
except when drunk or for fun. (Aristotle, Politics, 8, 1339b)

[Abstract: What is the intrinsic aesthetic value of performing say a Beethoven sonata that has already been performed and recorded many times before? The question is delineated by comparison to composing, on the one hand, and to listening, on the other. In answering it special emphasis is put on various aspects of internalizing a musical masterpiece that refine and elevate the performer's musical mind and personality to high standards she cannot attain otherwise. This has a bearing on the merits of an "intentionalistic" notion of performance vis-a-vis an "autonomous" one.]

Composing, performing and listening are three familiar musical practices, each having various forms and manifestations. Aesthetic value is usually ascribed to objects – whether artistic or natural. But "object" needs to be understood here in a very wide sense, including e.g. a theatrical production or a ballet. In dealing with music I assume that complete works are the primary bearers of such value, but we need not deny it from the practices of composing and performing, for they are imbued with those properties and aspects that make their products objects of aesthetic value. I shall not deal with the many problems raised by these sweeping assumptions. I shall rather focus on the question about the aesthetic value of performing music – confining myself to western classical written music. The question I am asking here concerns the aesthetic value of the practice or activity of performing a given work of classical music, not criteria for evaluating a performance nor the merits or qualities of a particular performance.

I shall talk mainly of solo performances; performances of chamber-music and orchestral performances pose here severe complications, especially the latter: Who is the performer – the conductor? the orchestra players? all of them together? Though many conductors regard themselves as performers, they just make movements and don't produce a single tone. Sure enough, they instruct and influence the players in many ways, but so do other persons (like teachers) and many other factors to which we don't ascribe the performance. And as to the players, none of the individual players performs "the work". There are also difficulties in ascribing a performance to all of them together; one

is that it is problematic to regard this collective as an intentional agent. Yet, I believe that with suitable qualifications much in the following applies to them as well.

I shall also ignore various problems concerned with public performance and with the relationships between the performer and his audience, which may complicate the discussion, and concentrate on private practicing and performing, in which it is simpler and neater.<sup>1</sup> Yet, I assume a serious notion of performing, with all the preparatory studying and practicing (as if for a concert), not "just playing".<sup>2</sup>

In dealing with this problem, it is advisable to think of two main poles of comparison – one with composing and improvising, and the other with listening and analyzing. That is, to put it roughly, one side of the question is what could be the aesthetic value of performing (say, a Beethoven sonata) rather than composing your own piece; the other is: if for some reasons one wants to devote her time and efforts to the Beethoven two-hundred years old sonata, why spend days and weeks practicing it rather than listen to a good disk. There are many aspects of the value of performing I shall ignore here, and direct my attention to what may be called "the intrinsic aesthetic value" of performing.

In classical music, for at least a hundred years or so we live in an age of performance. Sure enough many great works have been composed during that time, but by and large most of the music heard and played, and most of the music that appeals to the public of music lovers is music composed up to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and performed by (professional) performers who are not the composers of the works performed and in many cases not composers at all. Needless to say, studying a musical instrument and performing have been always part of the musical education and practice. But instrumental performance as a separate profession of musical activity, esteemed and assessed as such is a relatively late phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> In general, instrumental performers in old days played their own compositions or belonged to ensembles that performed them. This is still the case with many pop-musicians and jazz players (definitely not all), but I'll be concerned here mainly with classical music.

Performance is also valued, judged and appreciated as a musical achievement, very often not less than the work performed. In fact most music lovers and concert-goers relate mainly to the performance and to the performers. Recitals of famous performers are often sold out irrespective of the works they play and the same is true of records, disks and downloads from the internet. It also has its sociological and psychological aspects. Performers are generally esteemed artists; many are highly paid (sometimes sums that

composers could only dream of) and in many cases they are part of a "star industry", akin to movie-stars and sport-stars. Performers have their fans that can carry hot debates about who is "better" or "the best". Many reviews and full magazines are devoted to performances. Most music lovers and concert-goers have hardly anything to say (or even ask) about the work they have been listening to, but many of them feel they have a lot to say (paradoxical as it may be) about its performance. In all this performing seems to be an art-form in itself, having aesthetic value of its own and assessed as such.

Now, I do not intend to be judgmental concerning the above and have nothing against it. It is obviously a result of many factors, among them the "democratization" of music, art and culture in general, and of the wide spread and easy accessibility of music, as well as some features of the course "modern music" has taken (first in Germany) since say the second decade of the previous century. However, I do presume a judgmental, in fact an elitist position regarding the aesthetic value of musical works, and will refer in the sequel mainly to those masterpieces of especially high such value. I do not know how to define aesthetic value and will certainly not try it here.<sup>4</sup> I just assume that besides their other merits, the great masterpieces of classical music have aesthetic value as artistic, beautiful<sup>5</sup>, free creations of the human mind, revealing deep aspects of it. As remarked above, I shall rather assume this and not go into the problems it besets.

Assuming this, the question I wish to ask is about the intrinsic aesthetic value of performing or of producing a particular performance. By "aesthetic" here I mean also to exclude the economic, social, psycho-sociological and whatever other value-factors that may be connected with the "star culture". "Intrinsic" means to exclude entertainment and educational factors. Performing is often an enjoyable activity and sometimes great fun. But it is not as such that I refer to it as of "intrinsic aesthetic value". Sure, performing has also great educational value in cultivating musicality and sensitivity to various features of music. All musicians need to learn music and most of them do it by learning to play an instrument (or sing), thus in a way by performing. So in this respect also performing trivially has its value. But this again, though there is no question about its importance, is not what I mean by "intrinsic" value. It is as if one would explain the value of theatrical performance by pointing out that reading aloud is necessary in learning to read and write, and in appreciating features of rhetoric. This, even if true, is hardly relevant, and definitely insufficient for explaining the value of theatrical performance. In talking of the aesthetic intrinsic value of performance I also mean to exclude factors that may seem to be more pertinent like the appreciation of skill and talent shown in performance or the

psychological satisfaction in showing ability of the sort "I can also do it". I think these are not of intrinsic aesthetic value, but I will not get into the subtle arguments for and against it. Nothing in the view that they are detracts from what I say in the sequel.

It has also been claimed that since music is an auditory art, it is only through performing that music "comes to life", for otherwise it is dead marks on paper. In this spirit it has been argued that composing is also in a way dependent on performing, for when a composer writes his music he knows or imagines how it would sound in performance, and he composes with this as his goal. Following this line it might seem that performing is the prime bearer of aesthetic value in music. All these points need refinements and raise sever problems, but for our present concerns may be generally conceded; yet they still fall short of explicating the intrinsic aesthetic value of performing we are talking about. The last point for instance seems to be irrelevant to the question of the value of a particular performing of a work that has been performed and recorded many times. On the other hand it seems to face a problem about the distinction between a live performing and an electronic device "reading" music notes and producing audible output, thus "bringing the work to life" – a process to which I suppose we would be much more reluctant to ascribe aesthetic value. Many would also deny its being a performance at all. For instance, in *Musical Performance: A Philosophical Study*, Routledge, 1998, Stan Godlovitch explicates a model of performance, which he claims to be the standard or traditional one, according to which a performance is a skilled intentional action of an agent, who is in direct causal control over the produced outcome. He argues that music produced by electronic devices do not challenge this conception of performance, because it is not a performance; it is either a reproduction of a performance or a new art-form, a new non-performative way of making music.

To put the point I mean by "intrinsic value" bluntly, suppose someone faces a choice between being a mediocre composer or a good pianist;<sup>6</sup> what can we say, in terms of aesthetic value, in favor of the second option? Of course, the options do not conflict and she might better do both, but suppose she has to chose, and the aesthetic value of her practice is all important to her. She may then be troubled by questions like the following: Isn't performing "parasitic" on a work already composed, just being another "copy" or reproduction of it, one among many others, and thus devoid of any intrinsic aesthetic value of its own? Isn't it clear that instead of practicing some hours a day the works of others (long dead), breaking her head over what Mozart might have meant by this or that slur, or

what is the right tempo for this or that Beethoven's allegro, she should better compose, thus expressing her own musical ideas and her own "authentic" personality? Isn't it clear that this is a higher form of musical creativity, and of a much greater aesthetic value?

Well, not necessarily. First, there are many inaccuracies in the above formulations. For instance, performing is by no means copying or re-producing, though it is dependent and supervenient on a pre-created work; it is, as we shall later see, a sui-generic creative activity. Second, expressing oneself is not necessarily of the highest aesthetic value – much depends on the aesthetic quality of the products. Of course, I am not denying that originality and "expressing oneself" are or may be of aesthetic value. I am just denying that they are exclusively or dominantly so. Performing or even just listening to great music of somebody else (let him be a Bach, Haydn, Mozart or Beethoven) may be in itself of a much higher aesthetic value, simply because it is great music and so much better than one can produce by his own. Evidently we don't have a means by which to measure how "good" a composer must be in order for his work added to the fact that it is original and expressive of his own musical personality to be of value which could compete with performing a masterpiece from the past.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, this looks like a grotesque question and is definitely irrelevant here (if it is meaningful at all). We did not raise the above blunt question in order to answer it. We raised it just in order to dramatically sharpen some aspects of the value of performing. The first point that emerges then is that learning, knowing and being acquainted with a masterpiece are of aesthetic value even when this masterpiece is not one's own and even if performing it is not regarded as an act of "expressing oneself".

But is it really not expressing oneself? This brings us to what is perhaps the core of the issue. Performing a Bach fugue or a Beethoven sonata involves close study and thorough acquaintance with it. It is not only that these masterpieces are of great aesthetic value (by far greater than a piece our imaginary composer can produce); by this intensive study and acquaintance it also penetrates one's musical consciousness to such an extent that practicing (performing) it does express one's own self, for it shapes it and becomes part of it. It is in this way that the quality of the work performed becomes a crucial factor in the aesthetic value of the activity of performing it. It becomes part of the musical personality of the performer, who, in performing it expresses herself.<sup>8</sup> In music (as well as e.g. in philosophy) exploring and indulging in the intentions of the great masters may prove to be not only highly rewarding, but creative and often the best way of clarifying

and cultivating one's innermost and better thoughts and ideas. "Merely to share in the masterwork is a truer life than to waste away in non-fulfilment" (H. Schenker, Forword, *The Masterwork in Music, vol. I*, Cambridge, 1994). So sure, performing is supervenient on the work performed and in some sense parasitical on it, but in art, as in nature, there are good sides to being a parasite – depending on the host.<sup>9</sup>

Here we come to the second pole of comparison I mentioned at the outset. Perhaps most of us will concede that knowing a musical masterpiece and studying it thoroughly are of great aesthetic value, and may even be of greater value than producing a mediocre piece yourself. But why perform it? What is the extra-value of performing over, say listening to it? After all, we can assume that in most cases the performance you can listen to on a disc is better than what you can produce yourself, and that listening to it takes no time in comparison to the days and months that studying a work for performance takes. So why not be satisfied with the better, easier, quicker and cheaper way of getting to know the work? Why insist on performing it yourself, and what is the intrinsic value of this?<sup>10</sup>

One can perhaps retort here that listening in itself is relatively too passive, and that by only listening, however attentively, one can attain only a relatively superficial acquaintance with a work (say of moderate complexity). We can then sharpen our question and assume that the listening is accompanied by a close analytical study of the score. The charge of passivity seems thus to be relaxed. Why then not be satisfied with that, and what is the aesthetically extra-value of performing over such acquaintance by listening-cum-analyzing?

Some aspects of the answer were already mentioned above: performing a work of music is not just copying or obeying instructions its intrinsic links to the work performed notwithstanding, it has highly creative aspects of its own, which are entirely lacking in listening (cum analyzing). A performer needs to form in his mind a clear image of the work, from its gross structure and meaning, to the minutest details and gestures; moreover she must find ways of internalizing these in her body and of projecting them in her performance. True, all these are essentially linked to the work performed, and this is crucial, for as we have noted it is the source and origin of the aesthetic value of the performance. And yet, they are highly creative activities.

This brings me to three other components of the answer I want to add here. The key idea is **internalization** – as we saw before, in practicing and performing a piece one may (and usually will) come to such intimate acquaintance, such thorough knowledge of

it that it is internalized – it becomes, so to speak, part of oneself (and therefore it is quite superficial to think that in performing say a Beethoven sonata one does not express oneself). When this internalization is realized, the piece does not only become part of oneself, but, musically speaking, **the better part**: it improves and elevates the performer's musicality to heights she would never be able to attain by herself. This internalization can differ in various ways. I shall refer to them under three main headings: scope, intensity and mode. The degrees in which these three are realized is, I surmise, where performing shows its worth and where the aesthetic intrinsic value of performing lies.<sup>11</sup>

In terms of **scope** – when dealing with such works as a Beethoven piano sonata, or a Mozart concerto or a Bach partita, the amount of information relevant to the aesthetic value of the work (including the notes, their rhythmic values, dynamic properties etc.) is enormous. I doubt whether, except for rare exceptions, this can be "internalized" by only listening (however attentive) and analysis. Moreover, it is not only these but an enormous wealth of interpretive features (phrasing, balance, tempo, all sorts of expressive gestures etc.) that must also be internalized in order to function in what may be regarded as a musical activity in which one expresses oneself. In performing– to the extent it is good and a result of appropriate practicing– they are internalized, for otherwise the performer wouldn't be able to bring them out.

In terms of **intensity** – It is not only that so many details and features are internalized, it is also the intensity of this internalization that differentiate performing from listening. In performance they must be memorized, absorbed and internalized to such an extent that they would be active in the performance and this, just as in other cases of active memory, requires a much greater intensity of internalization. Memorizing need not necessarily be part of the internalization I talk about, but it can and very often is. Memorizing can come with practicing a work and can also be aimed at and attained in itself. In the following I shall rather assume that memorizing, whether achieved in this or that way, is part of the internalization I am talking about. We must bear in mind in this context that the notion of performing we are assuming is a particularly strong intentional notion in which the performer is guided by what she takes to be the constitutive properties of what she believes to be the particular work she performs.<sup>12</sup> Being thus intentionally guided by features of the work is another facet of the intensity of internalization I am talking about.

In terms of **mode** – performing is usually a very complex physical activity that is dominated and controlled by cognitive and other mental operations and states. Though this synthetic combination of the mental and the physical may be involved in attentive listening as well, in performing it is so in a totally different way and to a far greater degree. This is connected to another point the special "feeling" and sensations a performer has in his body (mostly the hands, but also the mouth and lungs). These feelings are not only important factors in the "kinaesthetic memory" with which most performances are involved, but are an integral part of the overall musical experience, and if one could have a musical experience without them, it would be seriously lacking. The aesthetic value cannot be detached from these experiential facets.

One should remember in this connection that most of our musical concepts – the ones we use in experiencing and understanding music– are connected to physical movements of our body and its organs. We speak in music of tension and relaxation, of movement and pause, of gestures, of going up and down, of moving from one tonal area to another, of running and walking slowly, of singing, jumping, dancing, etc. All these are in some sense metaphors, which originate in the movements and feelings of our bodily organs. These may be crude and elementary as in marching, clapping hands or nodding one's head to the beats of a simple rhythm, or singing a simple tune. And they may be subtle and complex as the delicate features of bowing, vibrating and phrasing on the violin, or of controlling balance and phrasing in a complex chord progression on the piano. Hence, since understanding music is perceiving it under the appropriate concepts, these bodily concepts and the feelings associated with them are integral to musical understanding and musical experience in general. Although they are somehow activated also in listening to music, this is in a much weaker and more remote way than in performing.

A lot more can be said here, but these brief remarks should suffice to bring out some important aspects in which performing involves forms of internalizing, which may render performing a musical way of expressing oneself.

Summing up, in comparison to composing one's own piece or improvising, performing gets its intrinsic aesthetic value from that of the work performed (which, we assume, is a masterpiece). In comparison to listening and analyzing it gets its value from the intensive internalization of this work, which refines and cultivates the performer's musicality, and when manifested in performing expresses the better part of her musical personality. It is the combination of these two, which gives it its aesthetic value.

The above considerations bear on further problems of performance of a more inner character. In another place<sup>13</sup> I distinguished two notions of performance: the one I called "intentionalistic", where the performance is conceived as a performance **of** a particular (independently identified) work and is essentially linked to it and guided by it. The other, which I called "autonomous", is where a performance is conceived as musical event (or entity) in itself, without being essentially related to an independently identified work. Both conceptions are very common. In classical music we regularly speak of a performance and evaluate it in intentionalistic terms as being **of** a particular work— say Beethoven's *appassionata*. But even in classical music, and more so in jazz and pop music, we often conceive a performance— say, an astonishingly virtuosic version of a show piece— as an autonomous musical event or phenomenon with no regard to its "fidelity" to an independently given work.<sup>14</sup> The work in some such cases is so to speak just an opportunity, a jumping board for the performer to show his skills and talent.<sup>15</sup> Very often (but not always), when people hail the great beauty of music in the fact that there are so many good and enjoyable different performances of the same work, they conflate these two notions. They talk as if they conceive and assess the various performances on the intentionalistic conception as performance of a particular work, but in fact they hardly have an independent conception of the work, and treat and assess the performances on the autonomous conception as musical events in themselves. This is a conceptual distinction, and most actual performances, we may assume, thrive on elements of both<sup>16</sup>.

A big problem for the intentionalistic conception is to define exactly the "identified work"— how it is identified, and what such an identification includes. There are many musicological, textual and historical problems connected with this. We often lack a readable autograph or reliable first editions; sometimes the composer has left different versions of the work; we may sometimes not be certain of the exact meaning of a particular mark in the score, etc. However, in the above problem of the intentionalistic conception I am not talking about these musicological problems or of problems of the limitations of our knowledge; I am rather talking of a different problem concerning the identity of the work: suppose we overcome the above problems and have a reliable Urtext and know how to read it. What in it is constitutive of the work's identity? Is any little slur, any series of dots, any dynamic mark, any verbal title or instruction, any tempo indication etc. thus constitutive of its identity?

The issue has been widely discussed by philosophers and musicians. It is well documented that not only performers but many composers differ on it, and some would not insist on all such details being constitutive of the work, and leave many of them to the discretion of the performer. In philosophy, an important step was taken by N. Wolterstorff's distinction (using a modest modal apparatus) between a property being "essential within a kind" (a musical work is a normative kind for him) and a property being "normative within a kind" (See his *Works and Worlds of Art*, Oxford, 1980, 45-62). The former must be exemplified by any performance if it is to be **of** the work in question; the latter – only by correct ("properly-formed") performances of it. Though Wolterstorff's distinction was aimed mainly at explaining how a performance can be wrong and still be of a particular work, it is also relevant to the above distinction between the intentionalistic and the autonomous, for by Wolterstorff's distinction certain details indicated in the score may be regarded as not "essential within the work" but only "normative". One can then argue that whereas properties essential within a work are absolutely obligatory, this is not so of those only "normative". On an extreme "autonomous conception", a performance can be highly regarded even when sinning against essential properties within the work. On a more moderate one, it may sin against the normative ones. This however is very unlikely on the intentionalistic conception – here the normative is also regarded as obligatory.

On the other side, it is also clear that what is definitely considered constitutive of the work must be properly understood and interpreted in context. Musical writing and notation, like any writing, need to be understood. This often depends on parochial and conventional factors, whose proper interpretation depends on style and context. Evidently, a lot here depends on musicological and historical knowledge, which sometimes may be seriously lacking. Moreover, the composer's intentions may relate to instruments, acoustic and even psychological conditions he knew. It is often difficult, or perhaps even impossible to know them and how to transfer them to conditions of present-day performing (more on this later).

Now, in light of all these a crucial problem that faces any performer is how much and to what extent details in the presumably reliable Urtext are obligatory. There are those who say: "perhaps this particular detail in the Urtext is in some philosophical sense obligatory, but it doesn't oblige me– I just play as I like (at the moment), as the music is appealing to me". And they may immediately add: "This is the beauty of music– that the

same piece appeals to different people (or to the same person on different occasions) in different ways, resulting in very different good and legitimate performances". Or "Each musical work, particularly the greater among them, leaves space for the spontaneity and creativity of the performer, and this is where various performances, equally good ones, differ", etc. Who hasn't heard and read such comments, and hasn't perhaps had such thoughts herself? When extreme, such an attitude sides closer to the autonomous conception of performance than to the intentionalistic one, in spite of its advocates insisting that the performance is of a particular identified work, and without them being clear on what exactly this means.

On the other end there are those austere orthodox intentionalists for whom the task of a performer is to realize the intentions of the composer and to get as close to them as she can.<sup>17</sup> This, by the way does not exclude the possibility that the composer has intended to leave various aspects to the discretion of the performer. If this was his intention, it should be respected, just as any other of his constitutive intentions. With all the difficulties in determining it, any detail the composer did intentionally indicate (in the imaginary definitive Urtext) is on this view obligatory in the sense that if the performance is conceived as an intentional performance of this particular work, it should be respected. The performer's job is to get as close as she can to the constitutive intentions of the composer, and to do her best to bring them forth and to realize them in the performance.<sup>18</sup> There are two main and quite simple reasons for this: 1) He is the composer – the work performed is his work; it is constituted and identified by his intentions while composing it. 2) In the kind of cases we are dealing with, the composers were such great musicians, that any performer should be just grateful for any musical instruction she can get from them, above all – those explicitly indicated in composing the work.

It is often quite difficult to determine this, and the difficulty is sometimes one of principle. Some theorists distinguish first order intentions like the use of a particular instrument, dynamics, register, or even a chord, from higher intentions, which the former serve, like a particular shade of tone or a particular effect, which allegedly may call for other (perhaps better) means.<sup>19</sup> Though it has been argued that the constitutive (or "determinative") intentions are the latter – the high order ones – I think this is untenable. In music one cannot thus separate the high-order intentions from the means to achieve them – the low-order ones. Particular instruments, chords, registers, etc. may not have today the effects they had when the work was composed, but this does not mean that we

may change them to achieve what we take to be these effects. Otherwise, almost anything could be justifiably changed, for, even putting aside drastic historical changes, hardly anything has the same effect after first or third hearing even for the same audience.

This applies not only to esoteric effects, but in fact to anything: a sweet or gloomy melody, a shocking or balanced harmony, a shaking or calm rhythm etc., which no one would allow thus to change. This has to do with my above qualms about an "audience-oriented" notion of performance (such as Godlovitch's and many others), for when the effects on an audience are seen as primary, it is difficult to block the argument for such changes. In general one should not construe "constitutive intentions" in a way that depends on listener's habits, experience and expectations, which obviously change in time and from listener to listener. For, to repeat, such changes may apply also to melodies, harmonies. rhythm dynamics etc. and may eventually result in a totally different work.

The issue has been much debated with regard to the problem of authenticity: how strict we should be e.g. in performing with "authentic" instruments, for which the works were written. I cannot indulge here into a discussion of these much debated issues. I shall just state my disappointingly compromising view that one has to find a reasonable position in between two extremes: on the one hand, austere rigidity here seems often both practically impossible and unjustified, while on the other, unrestricted liberalism can easily slip to absurdities. We cannot really match the instruments and acoustic conditions Bach, Mozart or Beethoven had in mind (supposing we know it, which is highly doubtful), and these very often changed quite significantly during the composer's life and from place to place. On the other hand one cannot allow striding on a slippery slope leading from a baroque flute to a metal modern trumpet, or of inserting extra foreign notes to enhance a dissonant effect. One has to find an in-between way with reasonable restrictions, which should take into account not only acoustic factors, but also traditional customs that were historically determined (the use of a modern piano instead of a forte-piano or even a clavichord or a harpsichord may be an extreme example).<sup>20</sup>

These two attitudes (the intentional and the autonomous) pose a perennial problem for performers and in assessing performances. It is quite easy to sympathize with the latter view. It is moreover easy to see where, on this view, the intrinsic aesthetic value of performing lies, for it amounts, at least in part, to the value of musical imagination and creativity in general. Yet, I think that although many more rounds can be run in this debate, this view, with all its undeniable appeal and popularity, is far from compelling. Besides the problems it besets in identifying the work allegedly performed, one main

reason was spelled out above: an autonomous performance, detached from, or at least substantially deviating from the intentions of the composer, is likely to be music of lesser quality and value.

Another reason has to do with our previous considerations about the role of internalizing in founding the aesthetic value of performing; they also bear strongly in favor of the former, intentionalistic conception of performance. For, the gist of our argument was that performing, say, a Beethoven sonata is of intrinsic aesthetic value because: 1) The work performed is a masterpiece of high aesthetic value, and 2) performing it involves careful study of and close acquaintance with it, and 3) performing it involves internalizing its immense wealth of relevant features, in a particularly intensive way, which is not purely intellectual and theoretical, but has a bodily physical dimension, which makes it also physically experiential. These three together square naturally with the austere orthodox intentionalistic conception of performance, and pose severe problems to most forms of the autonomous one. For, adopting a too liberal attitude towards the score, and assuming that constitutive features of performing it are not determined by a proper understanding of it and are up to the performer jeopardize this triple argument for its intrinsic aesthetic value.

Gilead Bar-Elli, Jerusalem, 2015 (forthcoming in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*)

## Notes

---

- <sup>1</sup> In *Musical Performance: A Philosophical Study*, Routledge, 1998, Stan Godlovitch explicates a model of performance, which gives audience a primary role. I depart from Godlovitch's conception mainly in not regarding the audience as a constitutive element of performance, nor the performer/audience relationships as primary. I thus shunt here aside many issues that depend on audience comprehension and expectations, which obviously change from place to place and over time, and their effects on performance.
- <sup>2</sup> I shall not try to survey here the rapidly growing literature on performance. It has mostly focused on the relationships with analysis and on various psychological factors. For a useful general and brief survey of some of the latter see Eric Clarke, "Understanding the Psychology of Performance" in John Rink (ed.), *Musical Performance*, Cambridge, 2002, 59-72. For some philosophical issues see S. Davies *Musical Works and Performance*, Oxford, 2001 and the bibliography there.
- <sup>3</sup> It is different with singers, but I won't go into it here.
- <sup>4</sup> In the article "Value" in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*, ed. Gracyk & Kania, 2011, 155-164, Alan Goldman writes: "We can define the aesthetic value of music as the value of the way in which music sounds when experienced with understanding" (157). This is hardly illuminating to someone who doesn't know what this value is, and almost redundant to someone who does. Goldman then tries to explain why the expressive and formal qualities of music have such value on the basis of what goes on in appreciating a work with understanding. I shall not go into this here.
- <sup>5</sup> Remembering Brahms' quite typical saying: "A music-work need not be beautiful, but it must be perfect".
- <sup>6</sup> To put the issue in a sharper focus and to avoid irrelevant complexities, here and in the sequel when talking of performance I am talking of "good" artistic performance.
- <sup>7</sup> For many, Schnabel's or Furtwaengler's performances, for example, were of much greater aesthetic value than their compositions. I once heard Klemperer saying that he continuously composed – what he regarded as quite bad works – just because he believed that a conductor must compose.
- <sup>8</sup> For Elliot "The point of intersection of the timeless with time is an occupation for the saint", and he immediately adds that for most of us there is "music heard so

---

deeply / That it is not heard at all, but you are the music / While the music lasts” (T.S. Elliot, 1988 “Dry Salvages”, v, *Four Quartets* (Faber and Faber, London). I guess that for most of us, who are not a T.S. Elliot, this is more true of performing than of just hearing.

<sup>9</sup> In The Book of Exodus (XXXII-XL) we are told of two "artistic works": the high priest Aaron made the golden calf, which was an "original work". Bezaleel Ben Uri executed a detailed plan with detailed instructions, to make the tabernacle of the congregation and its furniture and tools. The original work of Aaron was a sin, degraded and of no value, and Moses burnt it and "ground it to powder" (XXXII, 20), while Bezaleel's work, which was a "performance" or execution of given instructions and detailed plan, was exalted in the highest terms as being "as God commanded" (XL, 43). This of course was for religious, not aesthetic reasons, and yet it can serve in a way as an illustration for the claim in the text.

<sup>10</sup> For a survey of various pros and cons of performing-based and listening-based orientations to music education, see:

<http://www.brandonu.ca/music/files/2010/08/Whyx20Musicalx20Performance.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> I simplify a bit and ignore here various complications and qualifications. I have already mentioned that I talk only of good solo private performances. But even there some performers are e.g. such quick sight-readers that one can question their intensive internalizing of the work I am speaking about, particularly when memorizing is part of it. Indeed, in some such cases one can doubt the intrinsic aesthetic value of the practice.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed exposition of a similar view see N. Woltersorff *Works and Worlds of Art*, Oxford, 1980, 74-84. The point has been emphasized by many others, e.g. Godlovitch op.cit.

<sup>13</sup> Gilead Bar-Elli: "Evaluating a Performance – Ideal versus Great Performance", *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 38/2, 2004, pp. 1-13.

<sup>14</sup> This, of course, is not to deny that sometimes virtuosity, even of the show-off kind, is required by the work, and its performance has to be virtuosic to be faithful to its constitutive properties.

- 
- <sup>15</sup> Not only the general public, but people like Schubert, Liszt and Berlioz were enchanted by a virtuosic performance of Paganini, without regarding it as a performance or interpretation of a given work.
- <sup>16</sup> For some classical performers this is a matter of both practice and ideology. J. Dunsby quotes J. J. Nattiez saying (admirably) that for Glenn Gould "Bach scores are nothing other than 'an excuse to build up an infinite variety of pertinent performance systems' " (in *Musical Performance*, ed. J. Rink, Cambridge 2002, 228). Yet I think that his ideology notwithstanding, Gould's fresh, and sometimes stunning readings (not only of Bach) are always deep readings **of the scores** (and besides, what Gould could allow himself many others should better not...).
- <sup>17</sup> Many discussions of this issue fail to distinguish between the point of principle – that an intentionalistic performance should aim at realizing the constitutive intentions of the composer, for these are what identifies the work performed – and the epistemic limitations of our knowing and understanding these intentions. What is regarded as the essential liberty of performers, and their "equally good" interpretations, is often a result of these limitations.
- <sup>18</sup> "Constitutive intentions" should be taken with care considering a thorough analysis of the context. The acoustic strength of a forte or a piano need not be constitutive, while the strength relative to the surrounding may be. I have elaborated on the notion of constitutive intentions in Gilead Bar-Elli: "Ideal Performance", *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 2002, 223-242, where I have also argued that when given their due, on an intentionalistic notion of performance – directed at a particular given work – a case for assuming the notion of ideal performance is much more persuasive than usually supposed.
- <sup>19</sup> See S. Davies: *Musical Works and Performances*, Oxford, 2001, ch. 5, in particular pp. 216-222.
- <sup>20</sup> A harpsichord is often favorably compared to a modern piano in relation to solo baroque works. However, when an authentic harpsichord plays with wind instruments (baroque flute) or full orchestra it can often hardly be heard. The result is often absurd when the harpsichord has a leading role. Though this is probably the sound e.g. Bach was actually used to, I find it difficult to believe that this is the sound and balance he meant to be normative.