Preface

Musical performance is probably the most complex field of music. It comprises the study of a composition, understanding its expression in terms of rationales stemming from analysis, emotion, and gesture, and then its transformation into physical, i.e. acoustical and embodied reality. Performance communicates its contents and does so in the rhetorical shaping of abstract score data. It comprises a creative interpretation that turns formulaic facts into dramatic movements of human cognition.

Performance is complex, but not necessarily more difficult than its ingredients, such as compositional sophistication or music theory. Its critical quality is the balanced combination of those rationales, shaping strategies, and instrumental virtuosity. Combining these components in a creative way turns out to be a mix of knowledge and mastery, which is everything but straightforward and more resembles the cooking of a delicate recipe than a rational procedure.

Therefore, a comprehensive treatise of musical performance is a difficult business that cannot be achieved as a simple sum of its constituents, but must focus on the interplay of all named aspects of music. Moreover, including analytical tools and case studies turns this project into a demanding enterprise that deals with detailed construction modes and experimental setups of concrete performances—all the more since this book is the first one aiming at such comprehensive coverage of the topic. The extension of the matter reaches from musicological and philosophical aspects studied for example by Daniel Gottlob Türk or Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno [21], to empirical and scientific performance research that germinated with Johann Hohlfeld’s *Fantasiermaschine* and was brought to a first florescence with the support of modern computer technology by Johan Sundberg and collaborators at the Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan (KTH) Stockholm [132].

In view of this delicate situation, we are happy that this book could be written with the ideal background and testbed of a course delivered to music performance students, who inevitably want to approach the subject from their concrete situation when performing a musical composition and shaping musical expression under realistic conditions. It is especially this context that
makes clear that education of musical performers should not be restricted to the canonical practice that is oriented towards a solid knowledge of the repertoire and its technical mastery. A well-educated musician must know for what rationale his/her performance is shaped in one or another way, and which are the parameters that are responsible for the performance’s specific qualities.

For this reason it is definitely not sufficient to teach and learn performance according to the old-fashioned model of intuitive imitation of the teacher’s antetype. This one is an undeniably precious component, but it cannot play the role of a reliable and exclusive tool in the understanding of what performance is about. It is not reliable since it dramatically lacks the poetical precision asked for by Adorno’s and Walter Benjamin’s micrologic of performance. It lacks this precision since, although it has a highly developed consciousness of performance as a whole, it does not explicate its constitutive parts and their interaction.

And one also needs to include a greater variety of criteria, more precisely the reference to analytical, gestural or emotional insights, in order to understand and judge performance as a function of semantic layers of the musical text that underlies a given score. Without such alternatives to intuitive imitation, performance risks being degenerated to arbitrariness and disconnected from what has to be communicated to the audience. This is in no way an attempt to construe a unique ideal view of a musical work, that famous inexisten unicorn of performance. On the contrary, semantics includes an infinite variety of perspectives, and the opening of such richness must be enabled to overcome the plain and ultimately sterile individual taste.

This being said, the present book is all but a complete coverage of the broad knowledge and research that deals with performance, its stylistically differentiated practice, pedagogy, and history. Comprehensiveness simply alludes to a conceptual and methodological architecture that surrounds the essential aspects of performance. This is a significant difference to my book *The Topos of Music* [84], which—at the time it was written—was thought as a rather complete reference to mathematical music theory. Therefore the present book is a first sketch of what the overall field of performance could look like as a modern *scientific field*. We do insist on this specification: not the art of performance, but its science. I have often been asked whether this field would ultimately aim at the elimination of human performers in favor of computer programs that would generate musical performance on suitably driven musical instruments from computer-generated analyses of score data in MIDI or similar formats. The answer is no! and it is so much as scientific poetology would never want to replace the creative act of a poet. Performance theory is about analysis, understanding, and experimental simulation of performance as an intellectual endeavor, not as a genuine artistic activity. Which does not mean that performance theory could not inspire artists to explore new creative approaches.

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