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## **The Past is a Foreign Country Transcript**

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## **The past is a foreign country**

Professor Christopher Hogwood

I think it best today that I introduce myself, explaining where I stand vis-à-vis musical literature, history, performance, reception and your part in the process.

Usually, if a journalist asks me how I spend my time, I will say that I am 50% a performer and 50% a musicologist. However, this is not strictly true and if one had more time to expand on that I suppose one should say that one is 100% both of those. There is no way you can switch off your academic musicological interest when performing, and no way of suspending all notions of performance when sitting in the dusty library. So, although I would aim to be a performing monkey for half the year and a dusty academic for the other half of the year, the two necessarily mingle, and my ideal I think is to keep them both and juggle them so that they are both in the air and available all the time.

In both these categories, there is a degree of interpretation and it is a question of what is being interpreted. You are taking historical evidence, ancient instruments and either old notations and scripts or more recently printed music. You are dealing with all the signs and symbols that give you a clue as to what the original composer intended, but they are never a complete recipe. It is a form of cookery, and you have to devote yourself to the details and the balance of fact and imagine. Whether in a live performance or in making sense of some of these scribbles on the page and making them sufficiently sensible to turn into music that you would enjoy, they all have to be interpreted. Some people will say that there is a school of authenticity involved in this. I am a little bit suspicious of this word. Lionel Trilling dealt with authenticity very nicely as a literary form, when it was applied to music, rather casually, way back in the last century. It was a sort of catch-all phrase, meaning that you somehow took a closer look at history than your colleagues had used to do in advance of performing the piece you were going to perform, but it is very hard to say that when nearly everybody, in fact, is playing historical music. If you calculate the number of people who play contemporary music, mainly or exclusively, against the number who perform music of the past, you can easily see that we live, artistically, in a complete museum of musical history. Therefore, 'authentic' is only how convincing you can be according to your own likes, and the newer emphasis that has been put on faithfulness to the composer's likes is very interesting and can developed so far – it does not cut out the individual. I am still in there, even when I am puzzling over what Brahms, Mozart or William Bird meant by that scribble on the page.

A question always put to people involved in the recreative arts is whether they are recreating or reproducing. What is this new wonderful serial, *Downton Abbey*? Somebody introduced me the other day as being the Julian Fellows of the music world which I suppose implies faking up all the historical details and then having lots of people writing in to say you have the details wrong. That is essentially what performing musicology deals in, and whilst we hope that we do not get too many details wrong, but we also hope there is plenty of new discovery to be made.

To begin the process when you face a piece of music, I think it is very useful not to come with an empty historical mind, but to come with some idea of how that piece came into being. It is pointless going into "The Marriage of Figaro" without knowing something about the social conditions that gave rise to the Beaumarchais play, which gave rise to the Mozart opera.

It is also important artistically to have some notion of where the piece you are listening to stands in the process that went on in the composer's mind. I think a few examples are quite useful to us. If you listen to Beethoven's F Major Symphony, Number Eight, it always begins very beautifully. It is useful to know, just from the way that starts, that until the very last moment, Beethoven had prefaced it with three loud chords - bang, bang, bang - relief for and from the loud music.

This is true when you hear Mendelssohn's Italian Symphony. I have recently been doing a lot of editing of Mendelssohn and following the process that he went through. He re-wrote enormously. He even told his sister that he suffered from a disease know as revision's crankite, a sickness for correcting anything that was put in front of him.

We started putting out, for the public and for recording purposes, Version A, Version B and Version C. There was a lot of dispute, straightaway, with people asking "Why do we have to have Version A and Version B when we have the final version?" It seems a good question, except that a lot of people, including Mendelssohn's own colleagues, family and friends, sometimes felt that his first version was the best and he spoilt it as he tinkered with it in consecutive versions. The same view holds, some people will say, for J. S. Bach, that the vision was quite fresh at first and then was overworked as it became more and more complex in re-writes.

A greater example, I think, is shown when you ask people, "Do you enjoy Mendelssohn's Italian Symphony?" "Yes," they say, "wonderful piece!" "Do you know it's not the version that he last left?" "Oh really...?" And then you play them the final version, which is not normally played, and everybody says, "Oh, that sounds like an early version – I really much prefer its predecessor!"

So the idea of process going on through the music is already contentious and I think very useful in this day and age because we have the ability to compare and contrast on recordings, which means we have the ability to look at this process in practice. A changing picture, therefore, is much more interesting to the musician, the music lover, the amateur and the professional, than a static version.

When it comes to actually putting music down on the page, creating an edition, then you do have to balance these things up, and, as I say, you have to be honest about what the composer wrote, what he failed to write, what you think he should have done, what you think he meant, and also what his first and second thoughts were.

Sometimes, you get imaginative people who look at Handel concerto grosso and say "I think I can improve on that, you know - I'll do this instead and it will sound much nicer." It's a great brake on their overactive imagination to say, "Wait a minute - if you look at the manuscript, you'll see that Handel did think of that, and that was what he wrote first of all, and then he crossed it out, and he put this more elegant, simpler stated piece. He had the same thought as you and he vetoed it," and then they look a little chastened and come back to playing the text and not trying to improve upon it.

Performance of earlier music than music of our own day is very much a journey into the past, and that is why I stole the L.P. Hartley little statement about "The past is another country - they do things differently there". A lot of performers immediately turn round and say, "Yes, the past is another country, and we no longer have a passport or visa to visit it," or "We're exiled from this age - it's not suitable to us anymore." I think this is untrue, but I do think that you have not to make too many assumptions. Just because something works now and is expected now does not necessarily equal what your grandparents, your great-grandparents and people in the 19<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> centuries would have expected of that very same juncture.

So, I would like to go through in this lecture a few examples of what we might put together under this nasty heading called "reception history". I shall discuss how we look at the way music has been treated, received and judged prior to the present day, and what we can make of this evidence. Recordings are our greatest ally in this and now that the recording industry has lost its fascination for the latest and greatest technique and is instead looking back at its legacy of over 100 years of recording, we can begin to be our own researchers and this is something that should be much celebrated. Now, any one of you, for the price of a CD can go out and recreate, at home, a musical experience originating from way before you were born. We at last have the chance to have oral evidence of what went on, in addition to what we hear in live concerts nowadays. It gives one an increased regard, or at least an increased knowledge of what goes on in the background of historically informed performances.

We also have to be a little bit careful. It requires self-training to cope with some of the parameters of the earlier recordings and what you make of them. I will give a little example. I thought it would be worth, since a lot of what I will be doing over these lectures will be illustrated partly by live performance on this very stage but also by recorded excerpts, to know how the recordings began and what people first heard. Here is the earlier music recording, which I do not think you will make very much out of. I will tell you it is the Crystal Palace, and the work is by Handel.

[Recording plays]

It is part of Israel and Egypt. It was the first Edison recording that came over and the English agent for Edison took it along to the Crystal Palace in June 1888. The choir that is singing consists of more than 3,000 people, although they are much disguised behind the surface noise. Interestingly, the Victorians kept very clever records. The audience was 23,722 people. Here is a little sample to give you more clue; a modern recording of that same little snippet.

[Recording plays]

You can see that the Crystal Palace version, very obviously, was three times slower than that. Listen to it again and you may hear more in it.

[Recording plays]

I think the only evidence it gives us is that they sang very slowly in these big moments in the Crystal Palace! Everybody knows with a large choir, you can go fast. We have heard Hollywood Bowl performances with a thousand in a choir, and they can go as fast as a chorus of 25, but it tells you that monumental fact about Victorian interpretation.

Slightly later recordings can fill in gaps which for us are more perplexing in the process of resurrecting baroque music. One of the most difficult chasms to fill is that of the vocal soloists of the baroque, the famous singers who sang for Handel, Vivaldi and all the operatic performances of the baroque, in theatres all over the world, including performances way outside Europe. The star voices would be either female sopranos or male sopranos, castrati, and the works of all Handel's operas, and all his contemporaries, were built round the availability of specific terrific voices. People like Farinelli, who drew the highest salaries ever heard of in the music business, tended to gravitate to London, where people had more money to blow on this sort of thing, and delighted the operatic world with their warblings. We do not have a chance to know what quality of voice this really was, but recordings can come to our rescue a little bit, and this is where your training in what to listen for and what to ignore in the performance can be useful. The price of these earlier recordings is that they come very much preserved in the amber of their time; the wrapping paper around them is very much of its period.

Here is the sound of a castrato. This is the last castrato to sing in the Sistine Chapel. He was called Alessandro Moreschi. He was born in 1858. He made this recording - it is Gounod Ave Maria, so you all know the accompaniment. It is the Bach Prelude, and the voice over the top is definitely a voice of its time. This was recorded in 1913 when he was 55. He was also terrified of this modern mechanism. They had to really hold him down in the studio in front of this machine because he was sure something horrible would happen. So, when he begins, he is clearly breathless, and he cannot sustain a long phrase. If you can overlook the quality of the recording and, secondly, the stylistic mannerisms of the time, though do note them - a lot of swooping, a lot of very elastic tempo, the accompanist has to almost stop while he hangs onto a note and then go forward - all the flexibility that was expected in the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> Century is there. Behind all that though, there is an extraordinary voice, and anybody at the age of 55 who can pitch a top B that many sopranos would be very proud of at 25 and sustain it, has something going for him. The other thing that is very noticeable as well is the quality of the voice, and a very positive aspect is the sheer passion of the delivery. It is a religious piece, and we are not used to hearing religious music put over with quite so much passion. This was a man who served all the life of course in the Sistine Chapel as a servant of the church and the

Pope, and here he is, slightly terrified, giving you the only chance we have really of hearing a castrato voice behind these other layers of history.

[Recording plays]

I think you have to extract from that the quality of voice, some of the technique. Interestingly, noticing how little vibrato he uses, and then splice that in your mind back onto a slow Handel aria or something like that, subtracting the stylistic devices of the time. To us of course, it sounds a little bit extreme, but they are part and parcel of the history of music and the interpretation that composers expected.

If you make a jump now from the music of the baroque, requiring that voice, to those same interpretative devices used on music when it was contemporary with that style, here is a sample of the same sort of interpretative tricks – the elasticity, the very controlled vibrato, but most noticeably on that recording, and this next one, is this portamento, the sliding from one point and sliding upwards and down.

Nowadays, we are very much brought up on clean playing. We forget that Brahms and all the colleagues at that time in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, through to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, until the 1930s and 1940s, would have used that as an expressive device, the “dirty shift” as it were, so you can hear the interval.

Here is Elgar conducting a piece which has been terribly maligned by its connection with royal funerals and things - Nimrod, from Enigma. It was his second recording. This was 1926 which was only a few years later than the Moreschi recording. You hear all those tricks in play – a very elastic tempo; sung very slow; a lot of speeding up; a lot of sliding; and a wonderful disregard for his own score. When he suddenly says “retardando”, he goes very much faster. He treats every performance as new, and the orchestras that played for him said that they never knew what was going to happen when Elgar directed his music. It was always musical, but it was never like the previous day's performance.

[Recording plays]

That is a very good example of absolute expressiveness - very free expression, absolutely not sentiment. There is minimum sentimentality there. It is not a funeral piece, it is very nicely delivered, and you can compare that with the previous recording Elgar made – the technical tricks are exactly the same. That was the style he was after. We have his own evidence for it. It should be, therefore, part and parcel of the tricks that a modern orchestra and conductor should be able to deliver in order to give a stylistically correct version of that late Romantic music in the same way we make every endeavour to have Renaissance, Medieval and Baroque music delivered in the style considered correct for it at the time it was created.

What we also have on record as absolute evidence, sometimes, is the composer himself telling us about things. Here is a little snippet. We do not have Elgar speaking about his own works; we do not have Bach or Mozart telling us how to rehearse their music; but we do have Aaron Copland, who comes along to a New York studio to record the chamber version of Appalachian Spring. In the process, we discover quite a lot of things about what he wants, and what he thought was in his music that was not there, from what he asks the players to do. This is absolutely in addition to the information given by the printed notes that you purchase and play from.

[Recording plays]

Yes, that crescendo should go into everybody's score when they are doing Appalachian Spring, as he said. He did not know where it came from, but he likes it. It was not printed.

A little bit later, while he is busy correcting this over-expressive playing, these violinists who make nice shapes on long notes, as taught in the conservatoires are told “no, just straight, without effects.” He has a very nice phrase stopping them playing: “Too much masinee, too much masinee!”

I think “HIP” is quite a nice phrase. Andrew Porter invented it in the New Yorker. “HIP” performers stands for ‘Historically Informed Performers’. It is a nice halfway house between the old emphasis that the musician had to play everything on exactly the correct original instruments and had to try and resurrect a 300 year old soprano tone in order to let that do the job for you. It in fact is not done for you by the instrument. It is something in the head. You can be historically informed and still playing a not absolutely precisely appropriate instrument, but the performance can still have a deal of style.

This let many orchestras off the hook, because you can have a historically informed performance of baroque, classical or romantic music from an orchestra, basically equipped to play music post-Bartok providing everybody is aware, from the evidence of history, from recordings, from every printed source that is available, and from the activities of the people who specialise in period instruments, of what the framework is within which you can interpret and how not to overflow the boundaries of appropriateness, as laid down by what history we have. It may always be a changing target. It is something that requires education from early on. Part of the problem with public engagement with music nowadays is that we are very much wowed by the PR machinery and we have, in a way, lost the ability to make our own decisions on whether an interpretation, a performer or a piece of music is any good at all, moderately good, or absolutely marvellous. The solution, surely, begins with education, and the point at which the idea of musical appreciation and the academic path separated. They in fact should never really separate. As I said at the beginning, you should try and hold these two together, the performer and the academic, the informed listener as well as the informed performer, so that you can speak the same language. That is something that should begin early on in musical teaching, and it should not be subject to the PR campaigns elevating certain things above others. People should be free to make up their own minds.

One very easy category on which we tend to have jaundiced views is the business of arrangements. The minute I mention arrangements, everybody goes tut-tut because they think that if you are a historian, you do not deal in arrangements, you deal only in the original thing, but there are arrangements and arrangements. Mozart arranged Handel. That tells you a lot about Mozart, and tells you something about Handel too.

Here is a little sample of a composer deciding that his very nice music could do duty in another format. You know this piece very well, but probably not in a choral version.

[Recording plays]

The Barber Adagio, another piece that has been hijacked by state funerals, there makes a very nice choral piece, Agnus Dei and also fills a slot. One needs more and more church music of such quality nowadays, and that is an arrangement by the composer, condoned by the composer.

Very close to it is another type of arranging which would have brought you into the picture much more in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> Century than you get nowadays. Any new work that circulated mostly would have circulated in the form of arrangements for home consumption. Prior to the wonder of these recordings that we are enjoying so much now, you had to learn the new Mozart symphony, or any new Haydn, Brahms or Beethoven in the form of a piano duet, a string quartet adaptation or some format. I actually have a version of Beethoven 9<sup>th</sup>

Symphony for two flutes and guitar, so you can reduce some things to really surprising combinations! You had a hands-on experience. You probably did not get much of Beethoven 9 if you were a guitarist I suspect. You got to know the piece, formally, if you were playing piano duets - as everybody knows, you play the left-hand part. You got to know a lot about what the viola does in the middle of a classical symphony, in a way that you do not by just sitting in the concert hall. The value I think, and the importance of reviving an interest in these arrangements is very high. They were either by the composer himself or by friends, colleagues, or at least contemporaries.

Haydn's symphonies were arranged down from their big version, which only a few Londoners heard while Haydn was performing them here, to a chamber version. They were described by Sam [Wisle] as "these certain invaluable works." He gave a London public music lecture and said they were "...invaluable works originally constructed for a full band that had been very ingeniously contracted for the convenient accommodation of small musical parties. Amongst them, let me instance 12 delectable symphonies of Haydn, which have been reduced from the score with extraordinary ingenuity and accurate judgement by the late accomplished and energetic master of his art, John Peter [Salaman], nicely adapted for two violins, viola, cello, flute, and a supporting accompaniment on the piano forte."

[Recording plays]

All from the days when playing music did not mean just setting your iPod to random, when you actually went and played it! The whole concept of private music, music played at home, not with a career in mind, but for fun, needs very much to be emphasised and encouraged now. It also means that you can bring back things that have been forgotten, like the piano duet, but also instruments - the lute, the clavichord - all of them private instruments that do not hold up very well in the Albert Hall but are perfect in your sitting room, and they give you an insight, even if it is an amateur insight, into music which you then go out and recognise and can, out of your own personal evidence, discuss and assess.

There are two final examples I would like to play, simply to give guidance in this year of Chopin. I do not know if you are also as disappointed as I am that we have had a year celebrating Chopin, with endless identikit interpretations of familiar pieces, without, as far as I know a single big discovery of anything valuable. There has been very little attempt made to transfer Chopin back to his own time and to his own instruments. For somebody who was so devoted to particular brands of piano, it is such a shame that we have to hear nearly everything played on the monster Steinway, and in a style which really says, you know, "Look at me - I can play the etudes! Look at me, I can massacre a little mazurka!"

How to find a different bearing? My suggestion is to go back to a pianist - we do not have Chopin on record, but one suggestion I would make, to plug the gap, is the work of a pianist who was a young protégé. He studied with Calsique, came from the Ukraine, and played around the major centres of Europe for a number of years. He studied for two years with Liszt, so here we have one of Liszt's last pupils. He then went away to study Philosophy, as he was not given to the bright lights, and afterwards came back to a playing career, but he was somebody who could turn a mazurka so exquisitely. All the tricks that you have heard from earlier 19<sup>th</sup> Century performance are present in this, but there is a finesse of [Roberto], how much can you stretch and push and pull on this, and also how can you modify the tone of a piano to really sing. This is Moriz Rosenthal playing a mazurka, Opus 50 Number 2.

[Recording plays]

If only a few more pianists would learn how to end pieces as simply as that! It is a marvellous example I think, and we can all play that mazurka. It is not at all difficult, but it is tricky to get it so affecting, so pure and, again, rather like the Elgar, without a moment of sentimentality. It is just expressive, and when it has said what it needs to say, it exits without any fuss. I think we are sometimes just dazzled by the sheer virtuosity that goes on around us now, with all the Lang Langs of the world - as the critic rudely said, "He carries an encore even in his own name!" So you could see judgement was already made. However, there does seem to be a competition now that all Russian pianists have to play louder and faster than all the Chinese, and vice versa. This general barnstorming, particularly on technical difficult things, means we manage to lose sight of the fact that the great technicians, people like Liszt, or the nearest we can now get to Liszt, pupils of Liszt, could deliver these barnstorming pieces with a smile. There was not a lot of sweat.

I will end with a recording of Moriz Rosenthal playing the first of the etudes, the C Major one, which Horowitz said was the most frightening of all the etudes. It has a nickname, the waterfall, and it was said that it was a waterfall because of all the tears that have been shed over it by people trying to master these very rapid arpeggios. Here is Rosenthal, who can sit back from them in such a way that they go absolutely at the metronome speed. There is not a note out of place, but he is actually enjoying it, smiling, and you'll notice, in one or two instances, he just withdraws from it, when he could be more and more barnstorming, and when all pianists with the technique to do it nowadays do storm away from beginning to end. He just suddenly drops back and says, "And look here, I can play this very difficult music also very quietly." At the grander moments, instead of milking them, there is only one moment of milking a transition in the whole piece, and he does it, again, a little amusingly, and the whole thing then goes on. It is a perfect example of how to show that you can smile at yourself and enjoy the virtuosity of the writing rather than just showing what a wonderful loud and fast pianist you are.

[Recording plays]

I hear a little bit of relief in those last few notes, when you actually arrive home. He has this very 19<sup>th</sup> Century trick that has not been used for a long time, of sitting on the last note of a showy piece for a long time. That is to subdue the people who are ready to stand up and shout "Bravo!" on the last note! He just holds and holds and holds and then you say, "Well, what a wonderful performance!"