[2]MESSING ABOUT

Mike Diprose

….and it is to such players, undismayed by the fear of treading upon unfamiliar ground, and unbound by the tradition that says, 'It can't be done', that I dedicate this work. [1]

Rather than sniping from an Ivory Tower, Holier than Thou (EMR Oct 2010) was intended to provoke discussion - aiming to narrow the oft-encountered chasm in HIP between "Historically Informed" and "Performance". One or two from another playground chose to vent more than their Fs and As. One referred to it as EM fundamentalist claptrap.

The majority of those who expressed an opinion, particularly younger players eager to fill the gap in the market, reacted more positively. One wrote:

…..to value players that opened the doors for the new generation wanting to go a step further**. What we (straineers) should not do is to call it natural trumpet.**…..I am looking forward to the moment when people in general, and conductors in particular will appreciate the beauty of the natural trumpet the way it is. It shall take whatever it takes, the truth will always be the truth, and natural will always be natural. Quoting Arthur Schopenhauer, All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.

Barokensemble De Swaen was wound up in June in order to make time available for something new, applying what was learned from the 10-year project in which we combined natural brass, all-unwound gut strings in equal tension (with the odd thick-gut-core wound string on bass instruments); a large, hand-pumped chamber organ - or the real organ installed in one church - and inner-scraped double reeds attached to oboes with single staples, played with the historic "short" fingerings (more about which later). There is yet further to go but the interconnectedness of these elements naturally revealed many new beauties and a unique ensemble sound. We commissioned new pieces in order to cross-reference the wishes of living composers with the legacies of dead ones, keeping us fresh and open-minded - it's never "just a note". The large, loyal audience was included: We kept them informed and entertained; they kept us going and relished the "authentic" experience. Our "crazy" ideas were funded solely by voluntary donations from a captivated audience and so it was, if you will, an EM fund-a-mentalist clap trap.

Unsurprisingly, the De Swaen project showed that pre- and early-18th century music can be performed convincingly with uncompromised instruments - and audiences can enjoy it, especially when they know what's going on. To my knowledge, there are very few, if any, other ensembles and no commercial recordings (yet!) that feature this particular approach. Record producers, promoters and conductors could take note of this opportunity. Personally, I feel that it patronises audiences and demeans ourselves knowingly to compromise our instruments, which in turn, implies that either musicians now lack the ability or composers were unable to write adequately for the instruments at their disposal, but remember: if you try to paint a Vermeer with a spray gun, you may end up with something rather different. [2]

Jeremy Montagu:
With reproduction instruments, if you use a modern mouthpiece or drawn tubing rather than rolled and soldered tubing, you're not going to be able to bend the sound as it needs to be bent, therefore you start drilling holes in the thing, and therefore, you're playing a colander rather than a trumpet. You open a hole and the sound flies out the window.

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[1] "Messing" is German for brass.

[2] Walter M Smith, *Top Tones for the trumpeter - 30 modern etudes,* (1934), roughly 20 years before the invention of the first multi-nodal-vent-hole system for "historic" trumpets.

When you're playing an ensemble work, like the Bach B minor Mass, you can feel the trumpets standing on your drum if you're doing it properly. It makes a unified sound, and that sound is in the drum with the trumpets on it. When they were playing those things by Finke that looked like what Gottfried Reich was playing in the painting by Haussmann, you could literally feel it as they opened the fingerhole – Whoops! – all the sonic weight comes off the drum. You can still feel that even when they are using the modern ones that look like trumpets if you're not close enough to see the holes.[3]

It would be convenient for players of the modern trumpet if a similar mouthpiece could work on the natural trumpet but to date; all of the convincing clarinists that I have heard use one with a cup diameter between 19 and 21mm, similar to most originals. This is still relatively small given the length of the instrument, which, typically in D (nearly 8ft), is the same length as an alto trombone in third position, albeit playing an octave or so higher.

The large cup not only favours a strong, focussed principale (third octave) register but also allows space to "place" (bend) notes on an instrument of fixed length. Opening nodal vent holes instantaneously changes the acoustic length of the tubing in much the same way as valves do, making different demands on the mouthpiece and the player's technique. Using an appropriate, usually differently-sized mouthpiece for each instrument, and to practise changing between them can make things easier for the "muscle memory".

Andrew Clark is an admirable horn player but In Defence of Performers' compromises (EMR June 2011) seems to lament becoming a victim of his own versatility. The following paragraphs are not intended to offend Andrew personally but to question the environment that could lead to such preconceptions. Answers to his rhetorical questions can be found in original sources, such as this one from Petri, 1781:

If instruments really should show the bass line, it would be much better for my hypothesis if I take the origin of music from the brass instruments – horns and trumpets. ……. So if violins and pipes make horns and trumpets the source of the melody, we would tune the bass instruments from the horns, which are diatonic in their main tonality, and have only one possibility of a fifth, to give a home (rest) for the melody. That's why they have the big double forth (11th partial), as a major semitone (semitonium modi) to enter the dominant (quintam toni) (12th Partial).[4]

Original Baroque horns are of fixed length and can be warmed to pitch with air before playing; getting yet sharper is an indication of throat tension. The difference in sound between a cello with a spike and one without is very obvious on any stage with a resonant cavity beneath its boards. The difference between playing pre-19th century music on a violin with or without a chin rest[5] is a big

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[3] Hans Reiners, http://www.bows-viols.de/cms/index.php?id=129

[4] Jeremy Montagu: interview with E. Bradley Strauchen, HBS Newsletter, 2002.http://www.historicbrass.org/portals/0/documents/newsletter/HBSN_2002_NL15_9231.pdf (in EMR 138 p.15, I misattributed the word *strainer* instead of *colander* to Jeremy.)

[5] J. S. Petri, *Anleitung zur praktischen Musik* (*1782*), *p 17.* (Much of which is recycled from Praetorius through Mersenne, Matheson, Quantz, L. Mozart etc).
Sollten Instrumente wirklich den Bass vorstellen, so waere dis desto besser fuer meine Hypothese, wenn ich von den Messingsinstrumenten, oder Horns und Trompeten den ursprung der Musik herleite.....Wenn daher Geigen und Pfeiffen, und ihr Urquell die Horns und Trompete Melodie dazu machen, so waeren sie so gennante Bassinstrumente ja auch nach den Horns eingerichtet, welche im Haubttone diatonissch fortgehen, und nur den einzigen Einfall in die Quinte des Tons haben, um Ruhepunkte der Melodie zu machen. Denn dazu haben sie die doppelte Quarte, die grosse nämlich, als das semitonium modi *zum Einfalle in* quintam toni.

difference, since it is technically no more necessary than valves would be on a horn. In my experience, the majority of violinists and violists that have developed a chin-off technique with an all-unwound gut, equal tension set up have two open ears, are stylistically-aware and consequently "easy to work with".

Andrew referred to Handel's Water Music. Several temperaments can accommodate three keys (in this case, D, F & G) comfortably.[6] Temperament need not necessarily be "fixed", either: JS Bach could reportedly retune a harpsichord in less than a minute; there are other reports of harpsichords being tuned every six months, whether they needed it or no. The harpsichord's role in ensemble is more percussive than harmonic. Those who have performed on balconies with real church organs will have noticed a significant difference when returning to a stage with a small, portable chamber organ, mainly because of its artificially-central position, leading to a poorly-supported[7] assumption that unrestricted "voice" instruments should try to play in a temperament that compromises a desirable 31 notes per octave into a manageable 12 (or 14, with two split keys) [8]. When a chamber organ is placed outside the ensemble, emulating its normal distance in an organ loft (if not its height) and played with tonality-aware voicing, it allows space for the temperament to "breathe" with an undisturbed, purely-tuned ensemble. If composers wanted their music to sound like an organ, they would write it for solo organ.

Coincidentally, the B played with "short" fingering on a correctly-replicated historical oboe lies relatively low, and not without reason - it meets a slightly-raised 13th partial (or la) on a trumpet in D and a slightly-raised 11th partial of a horn in F (not to mention the 15th partial of a trumpet in C) and in G major, a nice, pure mi - the 10th partial of a horn in G.

I was puzzled by this passage:

…we risk becoming curators in a musical museum where **the prospect of progress is discouraged**. As musicians, we have a duty to the art form and the audience to give musical performances that sound the best they possibly can and have those audiences wanting to come back for more.

Since we seem unaffected by the Trade Descriptions Act, and some apparently consider the word "historic" to be a technical inconvenience, the logical conclusion of progress through compromise - to eliminate human error - would have the score programmed into a computer (in a nice wooden cabinet) and played through veneered speakers - both of which pre-date the introduction of three and four-hole systems on trumpets, double staples on oboes, outer-scraped reeds and thin-gut-or-synthetic-cored strings. Electricity is needed for the lights anyway, so everything would be just "perfect" and could be uniformly manipulated into any temperament. The musicians would only need to mime, avoiding the horrific possibility of mistkase. It would then be cheaper to hire better-looking actors, or even robots, leaving more money for conductors; until even they are replaced by more reliable, wood-effect metronomes.

Instead, we can progress by uniting musicological research and performance practice. The best musicians are those best-suited to meeting any perceived challenges of uncompromised instruments. You all know who you are, so get on with it yourselves and teach it! Let's hope that in the coming decades, our successors and inquisitive listeners will look back on conscious, avoidable compromise as old-fashioned.

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[6] According to Sigiswald Kuijken, the chin rest was first proposed by Spohr in 1832 www.earlymusicworld.com/id19.html
cf Elizabeth Wallfisch *Chins-off* version 2, King's Music, 2005.

[7] See: Claudio di Verroli: *Unequal temperaments: theory and practice* (2008-9) (e-book) http://temper.braybaroque.ie/

[8] Many sources cite pure intervals as ideal and I have not yet found one insisting that violinists tune *all* of their open strings to a keyboard, although Quantz suggests a slight narrowing of fifths as a possibility, complaining of a fashion for tuning *e* strings too high. The dogmatic use of open strings by default is another issue.