

Kai Köpp, AEC conference Trossingen 2021, Keynote

Historically Informed Performance (HIP). Is it enough to just be “informed”?

Authenticity in 19th century performance – the inside perspective

Imagine, we had sound recordings by Monteverdi, Bach, or Mozart, together with detailed bar-by-bar instructions on how to professionally perform from their scores. Our interpretation of their music would be much less speculative, or to put it positively – much more authentic. Wouldn't that be wonderful?

Well, we do have this wonderful situation with music and composers of the 19th century: Through the internet a rapidly growing number of early recordings, of instructive editions and annotated performing material is accessible to anyone who is interested in romantic music. And audiences as well as performers are becoming increasingly aware of these resources, so that we have seen a newly proclaimed movement of “early-recordings-inspired performances”, both among HIP and mainstream musicians. In my presentation I argue that two approaches can be distinguished: One is comparing striking historical performing habits to modern playing standards, using pejorative descriptions like ‘uncontrolled flexibility of tempo and rhythm’, ‘disrespect for notation’. The other perspective of recreating 19th century performing styles may be called the ‘pick and choose’ approach and focuses on elements that may occasionally be integrated into modern standard performances, like arpeggiation, portamento, flexibility of tempo or rhythmic asynchrony etc.

Both approaches, the comparative and the ‘pick and choose’ approach, fall short of understanding romantic music from an inside perspective. However, a careful study of the above-mentioned sources will enable to performers to arrive at an interpretation that is both historically informed and full of spontaneity in the style of early recordings and related instructions. This may even amount to the return of the attractive and powerful concept of authenticity in historically informed performances.



Dr. Kai Köpp, professor of musicology and interpretation practice at the Bern University of the Arts, studied musicology, art history and law in Bonn and Freiburg and holds a habilitation degree from the University Mozarteum Salzburg. With an additional viola diploma from the Hochschule für Musik Freiburg and three years at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis (viola, viola d'amore) he was a member of leading German period ensembles with over 40 recordings. After teaching in Zurich and Trossingen, he continued working in Bern from 2008, where he established the research field “Applied Interpretation Research”. His numerous funded research projects (including a promotion professorship of the Swiss National

Science Foundation 2011-2016) focus on new types of sources of musical performance such as instructive editions, early sound documents, piano rolls and organological user interfaces.

His work as an interpretation coach is linked to his numerous publications on the history of music and interpretation, on methods of performance research and on Bach, Beethoven, and Wagner. Recent publications include a comprehensive volume on historical string making (with J. Achtman and J. Gebauer, 2019) and the compendium Musik aufführen (with T. Seedorf, 2020), commissioned by the Gesellschaft für Musikforschung. His well-known Handbuch Historische Orchesterpraxis. Barock – Klassik – Romantik has recently been translated into French (La pratique d'orchestre historique, 2020) and is shortlisted for the "Prix du Livre France Musique 2021".