



Association Européenne des
Conservatoires, Académies de
Musique et Musikhochschulen

AEC Artistic Training Panel - Early Music Summit 2020

Statement Jean Christophe Frisch, Baroque Nomade and Sorbonne University

Artistic Training: What role does Early Music have within the University/Conservatoire sector? What guidelines should influence relevant artistic training for our students in Early Music?

After many decades of Early Music teaching in the Universities and Conservatoires, I wonder why there is still a difference with the « main stream » classical music. Why should it be more important to be informed if you perform Ockeghem and Monteverdi than Scriabin or Messiaen ? It doesn't make any sense.

Actually there is a difference, but I believe that it is not following the borders of the « early music department » of the teaching institution. The « main stream » way of teaching, legacy 19-20th centuries, is « Trust your teacher », he/she will teach you how to play, you just have to practice. The other way is « Go back to the sources », where you will find the information you need, and you can decide how you want to study and perform. Of course a teacher is never 100% of one of them, of course we need to be both of them. In this well known new quarrell of the Ancients and the Moderns, early music movement being in this case the Moderns, the main stream teachers tends to be closer to the first model.

Still it is not obvious. A few years ago, we had a conflict between some teachers at the Sorbonne and baroque instrument teachers from our partner conservatoire. Some of them told us their job was to prepare the students to be able to work in a professional baroque orchestra, managing necessary instruments and style from Bach to Beethoven. My position was : training music like sport, win the orchestra concourses is not enough, and it takes time to read the sources, leave the students time to do that. Students need to increase their knowledge, develop a critical mind. We all know that Early Music (mainly baroque and classical) has become main stream in the business of concerts. A dangerous direction would be to think that research on ancient music is all done, and that we just have to keep it as it is.

For us teachers, the question is to decide if we prepare our students to find a job in that business, being compliant to the standards of the ancien music business, or if we want help them to have a meaningful way of being a musician. When I was a student, the normal path was : enter the *Conservatoire National Supérieur*, become the student of a good teacher, practice your instrument many hours every day, get you diplomas, start a career, first as occasional musicians in orchestras, and then pass successfully the

competition to enter the same orchestra, in Paris if possible, and become teacher at the *Conservatoire*, coronation of your career. The good side is the perpetuation of a style through the transmission from master to pupil, similar to a traditional teaching in oral traditions.

But the landscape changed. All the pedestrian zones in Shanghai, São Paulo and Tel Aviv show the same international shops. Communication leads everything, and standardisation is everywhere, in classical/early music as well. If you are a young early music player, you need more experience on social medias than knowledge about what you play. Your image could have more effect on your carrer than how and what you play. If young artists want to create a new group, and promote it for the profesional network, they need to create an image, nice videos, an up-to-date website, and so on. Starting the trill from the upper note and why, is of no interest. Taking the risk of playing with really unequal temperaments is not relevant. It will never become viral on social medias. Business wants compliant music, and viral image of the artists. Just like the pedestrian zones. Just the opposite of what the Early Music was, some times ago.

Early music, more than main stream classical, has a tradition of questioning the common beliefs. It used to be our strength. Let's keep it, let's share it, more than ever in this post-truth time. We even believed that the technique, the pure mechanical finger technique, grows faster when we think about it, and try to understand how it works. We need that way of thinking, as an act of resistance.

I believe that our role, as teachers, wether early music or main stream doesn't matter, is to help our students to play and think, perform and discuss, as artists and citizens. I dont see it contradictory with the transmission of our experience and our technique. Musical and musicological knowledge is, like any other, questionable, and questioning is the beginning of knowing.

In the *Parque* station of the Lisbon metro you can read, carved on the wall, a sentence by a greek philosopher : « C'est par la musique qu'a commencé l'indiscipline ». I love it.