



Association Européenne des
Conservatoires, Académies de
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AEC Session on The Future of Early Music Departments - Early Music Summit 2020

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The Future of Early Music Departments. What is Early Music's relationship with elitism and excellence and what do we hope to achieve for future generations of students?

- Is it necessary to have a more precise definition of EM/HiP/HP within the education sector, or is EM/HiP/HP enough as a definition?

This is a time of reckoning for the world of historical musical practice. We are once again reevaluating our ideas and goals. What do we want to call ourselves and our art? What is our connection with the music we perform, and what kind of a relationship do we want to develop with our audience and performers of other traditions and disciplines? Perhaps the term “Early Music” is antiquated and no longer relevant in a time when it is pervasive to perform music of all eras in a historically informed manner. Besides, what counts as “early” nowadays? And what counts as “informed”? In short, I would suggest that we reconsider our focus which has been heavily on repertoire, and instead reframe it as a general approach to music - any music. In that sense, “historical performance” or “historically informed performance”, or even “culturally-immersed performance” would now be more appropriate terms than “Early Music”.

- Is it necessary to have separate EM depts., or should they be absorbed into more general schools? What has EM/HiP/HP brought to the Conservatoire paradigm? How would the cultural life within the Conservatoire be different had there been no EM/HiP/HP in the last 40-50 years? How has the Conservatoire paradigm influenced/shaped/affected the world of EM/HiP/HP?

The conservatoire paradigm aims to achieve excellence in performance through practice. The center of attention is on the instrument and the attainment of technical skills on that instrument to serve even the most virtuosic works. I think a main achievement of the Early Music Movement was to widen the perspective again beyond the borders of the instrument, and approach music in a more holistic manner. This is being achieved through analysis and the rediscovery of forgotten didactical methods of historical music pedagogy, through which the musician can offer a culture of performance and interpretation that go beyond the instrument and the written score - an approach, such as through improvisation, solmization, partimento, - spontaneous creation - creating a live and vibrant performance experience.

Historical performance has also brought a sense of accountability to something other than oneself and the teachings of one's teacher, allowing for a new kind of balance between personal style and source-based performing parameters. I think a movement such as the Early Music Movement was inevitable - the pendulum swayed for a while toward personality and virtuosity, and then back toward an understanding of music within a larger cultural construct. But in its turn, the Conservatoire paradigm also influenced the Early Music world. What started out as a communal movement with the participation of amateurs making music, and without the distance between the professional musician and audience that we often experience today, took on within a very brief timespan a sense of professionalism that became standard in historical performance. Now we expect to offer the same virtuosity and technical mastery as classically trained musicians, and in fact to inhabit the same concert settings. This is a major shift from the beginnings of the early music movement with its ideals of a functional and democratic approach. Now we all inhabit a cross-over culture of all-rounders who want to do everything, for better or for worse, and are technically capable of doing it, blurring the boundaries for us all.

- [What is the future of EM/HiP/HP department/faculty? Is it necessary to have separate department/faculty within institutions or should they be absorbed into the modern music department/faculty?](#)

Regarding the future of departments and institutes dedicated to Early Music, it seems to me that, while there has been a gradual absorption of historical performance ideals within the classical conservatory, we still need a plethora of institutional models. This is no longer just a field for specialists - everyone these days needs an awareness of historical practice. It is absolutely important to have integration within larger institutional structures, but just as necessary to have the possibilities of immersion in the culture that a stand-alone house offers. It's like learning a foreign language in its natural setting, through immersion in the environment where it is spoken, and thus being able to converse in it fluently, spontaneously and multi-dimensionally.

- [What is Early Music's relationship with elitism and excellence and what do we hope to achieve for future generations of students?](#)

The question of Early Music's relationship with elitism and excellence is an interesting one. We have become true professionals in concert performance - subjecting ourselves to the same markers of quality as classical musicians. But we also value intellectualism, through our close ties with the musicological world (close ties with musicology). In some ways this is a reversal from the origins of the movement. But it doesn't have to stay this way. Going back to the roots and rediscovering the ideals of the movement would be an interesting turn of events, especially if coupled with all of the fantastic developments of the ensuing decades. Elitism does not have to be a part of an excellent historical performance paradigm - we just need to redefine what "excellence" means for us.

These were just some thoughts to kick off a group discussion. I very much look forward to hearing other points of view!