
Early music

Harry Haskell

<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.46003>

Published in print: 20 January 2001

Published online: 2001

A term once applied to music of the Baroque and earlier periods, but now commonly used to denote any music for which a historically appropriate style of performance must be reconstructed on the basis of surviving scores, treatises, instruments and other contemporary evidence. The 'early music movement', involving a revival of interest in this repertory and in the instruments and performing styles associated with it, had a wide-ranging impact on musical life in the closing decades of the 20th century.

1. The rise of historicism, to 1890.

The roots of the modern early music revival lie in early 18th-century England, France and Prussia, where a complex of social and cultural conditions gave rise to the concept of a canonical repertory of 'ancient' music. In England, the religious upheavals of the Commonwealth and Restoration fostered a renewed appreciation of the sacred music tradition. Preservation efforts, led by musicians of the cathedrals and Chapel Royal, took on an increasingly moralistic character. The clergyman Arthur Bedford, for instance, in his *Great Abuse of Musick* (1711), prescribed a revival of Tudor church music as an antidote for the rampant secularism of the age, as reflected in the vogue for Italian opera. This indictment was scarcely new: as early as 1643 musicians in Nuremberg had presented a concert illustrating 'the practice and abuse of noble music' through examples ranging from Jewish temple songs to 17th-century motets. But the notion of a discrete body of early music distinct from – and putatively superior to – music of the present day set the tone of the early music movement for much of the next 250 years.

In 1731 the Academy of Ancient Music in London formally defined ancient music as that composed before the end of the 16th century, although Handel, Pergolesi, Pepusch and other moderns continued to appear on its programmes. By the latter part of the century works by Handel and Corelli dominated the repertory of the Concert of Ancient Music. The great Handel Commemoration of 1784 at Westminster Abbey and Samuel Arnold's pioneer Handel edition (1787–90) secured Handel's position as a mainstay of the revival. In France, Lully's operas and Lalande's motets survived in the active repertory past the mid-1700s, attesting to a widespread taste for 'la musique ancienne'. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries the rising spirit of historicism was represented by the amateur musicians Baron von Swieten and Raphael Georg Kiesewetter in Vienna, the choir director Alexandre Choron in Paris and the founders of the Handel and Haydn Society in Boston. Anton Friedrich Justus Thibaut, a legal scholar who conducted an amateur choir in Heidelberg in the early 1800s, described his attic as a 'temple' where 'Marcello furnishes the scriptural lessons for my edification, Handel delivers the sermon to me, with Palestrina I worship my God, and our religious language, the religion we practise, is music'.

Similarly lofty sentiments inspired the most celebrated manifestation of the 19th century's passion for musical archaeology: Mendelssohn's revival of the *St Matthew Passion* at the Berlin Sing-Akademie in 1829. A.B. Marx hailed the event as 'a religious high feast', but neither he nor Mendelssohn treated Bach's score as sacrosanct. Heavily cut, rearranged and romanticized, it was performed by a choir of 158 and a large orchestra, with Mendelssohn conducting from the piano. Like most of his contemporaries, Mendelssohn looked upon early music not as a body of historical artefacts to be painstakingly preserved in their original state but as a repository of living art that each generation could – indeed should – reinterpret in its own stylistic idiom. As a consequence of his *St Matthew Passion* revival, a network of Bach societies soon sprang up in Germany and elsewhere (see Bach Revival), leading in 1850 to the founding of the Bach-Gesellschaft, which set exacting standards for its complete Bach edition and opened the gates for a flood of scholarly and popular publications of pre-Classical music in the late 1800s.

The 19th-century Bach revival fed on Germans' growing sense of cultural identity and a reaction against the Rococo art forms associated with the old European order. Bach's sober pietism chimed with the search for a deeper spirituality in an increasingly bourgeois age. Religious reformists, such as the adherents of the Oxford Movement in England, deplored the decadent worldliness of modern church music and pressed for a return to plainsong in its unadulterated form, shorn of anachronistic harmonies and instrumental accompaniments. The centre of musical revivalism in the Roman Catholic Church was the Benedictine abbey of Solesmes in France, where, beginning in the 1840s, Dom Prosper Guéranger and his successors revolutionized the study and performance of Gregorian chant. In place of a stiffly metrical modern style of chanting, they advocated a flexible, speech-like interpretation that eventually gained widespread acceptance. Many of the amateur and professional choral groups that proliferated in Europe and the USA in the 1800s were dedicated to raising the standard of vocal performance and composition, typically by cultivating the 'pure' *a cappella* works of the Palestrina school and the music of Bach, Handel and other Baroque composers. Among the many 19th-century composers influenced by the revival was Brahms, who championed early music as a choir director in Austria and Germany.

Early music, with its overtones of piety and refinement, became a favourite pastime among the European aristocracy and newly rich gentry. 'Historical concerts' – lengthy surveys of musical periods or genres, accompanied by didactic commentaries – given by such artists as Mendelssohn, Moscheles, Paur, Méreaux and Rubinstein, became popular. Fétis, whose historical concerts in Paris and Brussels in the 1830s and 40s helped stimulate popular interest in early music, rejected the Darwinian view that modern music was inherently superior to music of earlier eras. 'Art does not progress', he said, 'it transforms itself'. This argument fell on increasingly receptive ears in the latter part of the century, when such musicologists as Chrysander, Spitta and Jahn and such composers as Schumann, Liszt and Franck were investigating and drawing sustenance from the pre-Classical repertory. The French pianist Louis Diémer began giving harpsichord recitals in the 1860s and formed an early-instrument ensemble, the Société des Instruments Anciens, which toured widely in the 1890s. Instrument collectors such as Auguste Tolbecque in France, Paul de Wit in Germany, A.J. Hipkins in England and Moritz Steinert in the USA gave public concerts and lecture-demonstrations. By the last decade of the century modern harpsichords, viols, 'Bach trumpets' (designed to play Bach's high clarino parts but unrelated to any instrument he knew) and reproductions of other early instruments were readily available, and the revival was poised to enter a new phase.

2. The historical performance movement, 1890–1945.

A key figure in the modern early music revival was Arnold Dolmetsch family. A brilliant intuitive scholar, Dolmetsch was above all a practical musician, excelling both as a performer and as a maker of finely crafted instruments; his harpsichords, clavichords, lutes, viols and recorders reflected an unprecedented concern for historical fidelity in design, construction and materials. The informal 'house concerts' that he initiated in the fashionable Bloomsbury district of London in the 1890s won an enthusiastic following and praise from such critics as Shaw and John Runciman. From 1905 to 1911 Dolmetsch ran the department of early instruments at the Chickering piano factory in Boston, where he helped lay the groundwork for the revival in the USA. After returning to England he codified his research in *The Interpretation of the Music of the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (1915), a pioneering survey of early performing practice and source material. In concluding that 'we can no longer allow anyone to stand between us and the composer', he formulated a credo for the nascent historical performance movement. Although the musical establishment held Dolmetsch at arm's length during his lifetime, both performers and scholars gradually came to accept his conviction that no music could be fully appreciated without reference to the instruments on which it was originally played and the stylistic conventions of the period in which it was written.

While Dolmetsch concentrated on instrumental music, others were approaching early choral music in a similar spirit. Richard Runciman Terry, organist and choirmaster at Westminster Cathedral from 1901 to 1924, played a central role in the revival of medieval and Renaissance liturgical music; he was a prime mover, with Edmund Fellowes, behind the Tudor Church Music edition. Fellowes also worked with such groups as the English Singers and the Fleet Street Choir to revitalize the madrigal tradition. In Paris the Chanteurs de St Gervais, directed by Charles Bordes, won international acclaim for their performances of Renaissance and Baroque sacred music; Bordes' editions carried his influence to the USA, where Frank Damrosch used them in performances with the Musical Art Society in New York between 1894 and 1920. The Bach Choir of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, gave the American première of the B minor Mass in 1900, inaugurating a series of annual festivals that were a major stimulus to the Bach revival in the USA. Its performances, like those of the Bach Choir in England, were traditionally large-scale and romanticized; not until after World War I were chamber-sized performances of Baroque music popularized by groups such as the Bach Cantata Club in England and the choir of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig under Karl Straube.

As the quest for the grail of Authenticity (a term first given currency by Dolmetsch) gained momentum in the years before the war, small period-instrument ensembles like the Casadesus family's Société des Instruments Anciens and the Deutsche Vereinigung für Alte Musik, co-founded by the viol player Christian Döbereiner, rose to prominence. Their programmes typically consisted of short salon pieces, largely by minor composers. An alumnus of the Casadesus ensemble organized the American Society of Ancient Instruments in Philadelphia in 1925. Dolmetsch made his USA début in 1903 with the American Symphony Orchestra, founded in New York by the violinist Sam Franko to perform Baroque and Classical works 'in the character of the time' with a reduced ensemble of modern instruments. German musicologists, meanwhile, revived the Baroque concept of the Collegium musicum, an informal gathering of amateur and professional musicians who performed chiefly for their own pleasure and instruction; the best-known such academic ensembles were Riemann's at the University of Leipzig,

established in 1908, and Gurlitt's at the University of Freiburg in the 1920s. Foremost among the instrumental soloists specializing in early music was Wanda Landowska, whose virtuosity on her modern Pleyel harpsichord captivated listeners on both sides of the Atlantic.

The early 1900s saw a sustained attempt to revive Baroque opera. Fétis included excerpts from Peri's *Euridice* and Monteverdi's *Orfeo* in the first of his historical concerts at the Paris Conservatoire in 1832, but the first full-scale stage revival seems to have been Handel's *Almira*, produced in 1878 as part of a festival of German opera in Hamburg. The procrustean cuts and alterations in the score drew sharp criticism from Chrysander, whose scholarly edition of the work had recently appeared. Vincent d'Indy likewise modernized the music of Rameau, Lully, Monteverdi and Destouches for the staged and concert performances presented in the first quarter of the century by the Schola Cantorum (the school for composers that d'Indy, Bordes and Alexandre Guilmant founded in Paris). For the 1904 revival of *Orfeo*, involving some 150 singers and instrumentalists, he omitted the first and last acts as undramatic and made substantial cuts in the remaining three, arguing that the opera was 'a work of art, not of archaeology'. Germany's 'Handel Renaissance' of the 1920s and 30s was similarly premised on a compromise between practicality and historical fidelity as then conceived. Productions ranged in style from Expressionistic to quasi-Baroque, and in scale from modest academic stagings to lavish outdoor spectacles with massed dancers and amplified music. The art historian Oskar Hagen took the lead in 1920 with the first modern production of *Rodelinda* at the University of Göttingen. His heavily abridged and rearranged editions were adopted by Werner Josten at Smith College in Massachusetts, where a series of Handel and Monteverdi productions took place in the late 1920s and early 30s. Other notable revivals in the interwar period were given by the Paris Opéra, the Cambridge University Musical Society and the Oxford University Opera Club, and the Juilliard School in New York.

The recording and radio industries were quick to recognize the potential for bringing early music to the masses. Chant recordings were commercially available from the turn of the century, and Landowska made her first piano rolls in 1903. By the 1920s the principal British and continental record companies were making substantial investments in early music, undertaking such major projects as Bach's B minor Mass, the Brandenburg Concertos, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and Handel's *Messiah*. Recorded historical anthologies, such as *L'Anthologie Sonore* and *The History of Music by Ear and Eye* (supervised by Curt Sachs and Percy Scholes respectively), provided additional outlets for early music. The state-owned radio networks made an equally significant contribution to the revival before World War II: from its inception in 1922 the BBC broadcast a wide range of pre-Classical music, and as early as 1930 Westdeutscher Rundfunk in Cologne formed its own period-instrument ensemble. In bringing groups such as the Munich Viol Quintet, the Chanterie de la Renaissance, Safford Cape's Pro Musica Antiqua of Brussels, the Boyd Neel Orchestra and Ars Rediviva to millions of listeners, radio and recordings hastened the transformation of the revival into a genuinely popular and international movement.

German instrument makers began the mass production of harpsichords, recorders, lutes and other early instruments in the early 1900s, and by the 1920s the recorder was the virtual trademark of the burgeoning Youth Movement. Gurlitt's reconstruction of the 'Praetorius organ' at the University of Freiburg in 1921 initiated a trend towards neo-Baroque organ design, a goal long championed by organists like Schweitzer, Guilmant and Straube. Nationalism played an increasingly important role in the revival during the interwar period. Britain succumbed to an outbreak of 'Elizabethan fever' brought on by the tercentenaries of Byrd (1923) and Gibbons (1925). In Germany the collectivist mentality of the Youth and Singing movements played into the hands of the Nazis, who appropriated

Bach, Schütz and Handel as icons of racial purity. The founding in 1933 of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in Switzerland brought a countervailing spirit of internationalism to the revival; in establishing the first school dedicated to the training of early musicians, the viol player August Wenzinger and the conductor-patron Paul Sacher sought to promote 'a lively interaction between scholarship and performance'. This innovatory programme, together with the diaspora of European performers and scholars in the 1930s and 40s, helped produce a major realignment of the early music movement after World War II.

3. Since 1945.

The postwar centres of the revival – England, the Low Countries, Austria and the USA – came to the fore for various reasons. In Austria the movement was led by the musicologist Josef Mertins and his pupils and colleagues at the Vienna Music Academy (among them Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Gustav Leonhardt, René Clemencic and Eduard Melkus). In the USA such distinguished émigrés as Schrade and Hindemith at Yale and Erwin Bodky at Harvard established European-style collegium musicum groups on university campuses. In Britain the BBC Third Programme, inaugurated in 1946, served as an adventurous showcase for performers and scholars such as Alfred Deller, Denis Stevens and Thurston Dart. Leonhardt emerged as one of the leading Dutch early musicians and the most influential harpsichordist since Landowska; he was closely associated with the postwar trend towards historical harpsichord design. Scattered pockets of activity sprang up in eastern Europe, Scandinavia and elsewhere. Japan, initially under the tutelage of the American occupation authorities, began to cultivate first a recorder movement and then a fully fledged early music revival.

The introduction of the long-playing record in the late 1940s and the ensuing proliferation of small, independent labels, many of them specializing in early music, fuelled the postwar 'Vivaldi craze' and helped make the New York Pro Musica's freely imaginative *Play of Daniel* (1958) a landmark of the revival. The 1960s were dominated by such charismatic performers as Harnoncourt, Noah Greenberg, Frans Brüggen and David Munrow (whose Early Music Consort of London set new standards of instrumental virtuosity); this was also a period of energetic experimentation, notably in the interpretation of medieval and Renaissance music. The Munich-based Studio der Frühen Musik, directed by the American Thomas Binkley, transformed the performance of medieval monophonic music by applying improvisatory techniques derived from Middle Eastern folk music. In England Musica Reservata cultivated a nasal, raucous singing style that departed radically from the mellifluous sound of the English cathedral choirs and such progeny as Pro Cantione Antiqua and the Clerkes of Oxenford. A resurgence of interest in early vocal music in the 1960s and 70s gave rise to such groups as the Monteverdi Choir, the Ensemble Clément Janequin, the Prague Madrigalists, Concerto Vocale, the Hilliard Ensemble and Gothic Voices, some of which shared, in the 1980s and 90s, a historically informed concern with such issues as pitch, *musica ficta*, text underlay, proportional rhythm and its relevance to tempo, the use of instruments and ornamentation.

In the operatic field, the trend towards greater historical awareness became firmly established after the war. Two notable productions of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* – Hindemith's in Vienna in 1954 and Wenzinger's in Hitzacker in 1955 – used historical instruments as well as sets and costumes based on Baroque designs. A new generation of conductors concerned with the findings of recent scholarship, among them Charles Farncombe, Anthony Lewis, Newell Jenkins and Harnoncourt, exercised a strong influence on the performance of early opera. Significant productions of the 1960s and 70s include

Harnoncourt's Monteverdi cycle for the Zürich Opera, with free-wheeling stagings by Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, and Raymond Leppard's popular but controversial arrangements of Cavalli and Monteverdi operas, with many cuts and rich orchestral textures, commissioned by the Glyndebourne Festival. In contrast, most recent operatic scholarship has sought to re-create every aspect of Baroque opera production: singing, playing, staging, gesture, the disposition of the orchestra, costumes, sets, choreography and lighting. At the same time, a school of singers, inspired in part by the renewed interest in 19th-century bel canto repertory and ornamentation in the 1950s and 60s, developed techniques apt to singing in an appropriate historical style with period instruments. A rigorously historical approach, however, is unsuited to the resources or the size of most modern opera houses, and much of the most innovative work has been done by festivals, academic institutions and smaller companies. Many revivals have been associated with 18th-century theatres that survive in their original form or in reconstruction, such as those at Drottningholm (near Stockholm), Schwetzingen (near Mannheim) and Versailles. As the revival pushed forward into the Classical and Romantic eras, directors such as Arnold Östman, Roger Norrington, John Eliot Gardiner and Gabriele Ferro began to apply historical principles to the mainstream operatic repertory as well.

By the early 1970s the repercussions of the early music 'boom' could be felt outside early music circles. The revival's centre of gravity shifted perceptibly to the Baroque and later periods, as early musicians and their patrons in the electronic media awakened to the benefits of giving a fresh twist to familiar repertory. Record companies came to play a bigger role in supporting the leading early music ensembles and promoting the new generation of star performers, such as Christopher Hogwood, Reinhard Goebel, William Christie, Jordi Savall and the Kuijken brothers. Significantly, the most prominent early music ensembles of the 1970s and 80s were not collegium-type groups or small consorts but full orchestras of period instruments (among them the Academy of Ancient Music, the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra, Les Arts Florissants and the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century). A milestone in the musical establishment's acceptance of the early music movement was reached in 1989, when the Glyndebourne Festival invited the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment to replace the LPO in the pit for a series of Mozart opera productions. By then performances of Mozart and Haydn on period instruments were commonplace, several 'authentic' recordings of the Beethoven symphonies and piano concertos were under way, and the boundaries of the movement were expanding into the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment engaged conductors from both within and outside the early music camp, just as modern-instrument orchestras and opera companies were turning their podiums over to Hogwood, Harnoncourt, Gardiner, Norrington and others. Several groups, notably the New Queen's Hall Orchestra, performed early modern music in period style, and reconstructions of vintage Broadway musicals with original scores and performing forces were mounted by the American conductor John McGlinn and others.

The expanding temporal and geographical boundaries of the early music movement are mirrored in the proliferation of specialist periodicals around the world. Among the most prominent are *Early Music* (UK), *Historical Performance* (USA), *Concerto* (Germany), the *Tijdschrift voor oude muziek* (the Netherlands) and *Consort* (Japan). Music publishing too has kept pace with the steady growing demand for critical and performing editions and facsimiles in the early music field. In addition to the 'monuments' and Denkmäler series, and collected works of individual composers, performers and scholars have access to authoritative Urtext-based editions of a vast range of music from the Middle Ages to the early 20th century.

The revival has had a wide-ranging impact on music education and concert life. Most music schools in Europe and the USA now offer courses in performing practice and tuition on historical instruments, and many have comprehensive early music programmes. These developments have raised standards of performance as well as helping to make traditionally trained musicians more aware of historical issues. As early musicians encroach on the core 19th-century repertory, however, there has been a mounting backlash against some of the more extreme claims made on behalf of 'historically informed' performance, and a growing body of opinion has come to view it as no more or less 'authentic' than other modes of interpretation. Moreover, as the early music field becomes increasingly professional in its approach to training, organization, marketing and fundraising, it has lost many of the trappings of a counterculture and become more and more integral to mainstream musical life.

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See also

Authenticity

Rifkin, Joshua

Concert (ii), §5(iii): After 1945: Early music

Acoustics, §I, 12: Room acoustics: The contemporary performance of early music

Amsterdam, §3: Concert life

Avignon

Besançon

Boston (i), §7(i): Other ensembles and performers: Smaller ensembles

Chamber music, §5(ii): After World War I: Ensembles, sound recording and concerts

Harp, §V, 10(ii): Europe and the Americas, Revivals., i) Early music.

Orchestra, §8: The modern orchestra

Neumeyer, Fritz

Performing practice