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The term ‘authenticity’ has been used in several senses relating to music. The most common use refers to classes of performance that might synonymously be termed ‘historically informed’ or ‘historically aware’, or employing ‘period’ or ‘original’ instruments and techniques. A concern with historical performing practices is a by-product of 19th-century historicism and is evidenced, for instance, in the production of critical and Urtext editions, in Mendelssohn’s performances of earlier music, in the restoration of plainchant by the monks of Solesmes and in the colourful antiquarianism of Arnold Dolmetsch. However, ‘authentic’ performance was not to become a central element of Western performance until the 1970s, when it began to prove an extraordinarily successful direction for many performers and groups, encouraged by a buoyant recording industry. (*See also* Early music.)

‘Authentic’ performance may refer to one or any combination of the following approaches: use of instruments from the composer’s own era; use of performing techniques documented in the composer’s era; performance based on the implications of the original sources for a particular work; fidelity to the composer’s intentions for performance or to the type of performance a composer desired or achieved; an attempt to re-create the context of the original performance; and an attempt to re-create the musical experience of the original audience.

Many critics and scholars have questioned the ideals and aims of the historical performance movement and the term ‘authenticity’ itself has come in for particularly stern criticism, for example from Joseph Kerman and Richard Taruskin. To Taruskin, ‘authenticity’ suggests a form of cultural elitism which can imply that any other type of performance is ‘inauthentic’, as if a forgery or an act of almost purposeful deceit. He further notes that very little in historical performance is truly historical since so many aspects of performance have to be invented or co-opted from existing practices. Moreover, the style of performance and the selection of historical data are conditioned by modern taste and thus represent the hidden musical corollary of high modernism. In an interesting twist of terminology, Taruskin suggests that historical performance is in fact ‘authentic’ as a true symptom of modernist thought.

Few, however, would dispute that the movement for historical performance has brought with it many advantages. Initially centred on Baroque performing practice, the movement has expanded in all historical directions, even producing period performance of 20th-century music. While the use of the term ‘authenticity’ has dropped considerably since the early 1990s (‘historically informed’ or ‘period performance’ are more common), there is no doubt that it has contributed to the success of the movement. In an age that has experienced both the catastrophic destruction of cultural artefacts and a phenomenal expansion of technological production and reproduction, there is a definite craving for the ‘original’ and ‘authentic’ in many areas of Western society. The postwar era has also seen the spectacular growth of interest in ‘authentic’ restoration and period style in architecture. The cultural theorist Fredric Jameson may be correct in suggesting that the various standardizations of global capitalism and the concomitant expansions of the media and technology towards the end of the 20th century has resulted in a weakening of our historicity. This means that we are no longer so fully aware of our place within human history and are not so able to appreciate ourselves as historically

conditioned beings. Thus this period has seen, by way of compensation, a large number of historicist revivals, most notably religious fundamentalism. In these revivals, adherence to details that are assumed to be historically precise and unambiguous may serve to cover the radical difference between the present and the various pre-modern ages. If this analysis is correct, the concept of 'authentic' performance may be a symptom of a postmodern, rather than specifically modern, condition.

Given that the imperative to pursue 'authentic' performance is far greater in our age than ever before, it must respond to a cultural need that was never so crucial. This, in itself, should suggest that the term 'authentic' is dangerous, since it implies some standard of transhistorical truth, to be valid whatever the era. However much we may feel that a particular instrument conditions the playing style, we are still likely to make it sound how we, however subconsciously, want it to sound, even if this directly opposes existing practices. Indeed, a comparison of 'authentic' performers over three decades shows what radical differences might be afforded by increased experience and changes in interpretative fashion. Moreover, it is naive to assume that, were we to hit on exactly the same sounds as those of yesteryear, listeners today would be affected in precisely the same manner as those of the past. Differences in cultural perspective backwards in time are probably as great as, if not greater than, those between different cultures today.

The movement for historically informed performance is, however, one of the most significant developments in performance styles in the 20th century. It has opened up a wide range of possibilities for new ways of performing and hearing and, shorn of its claims to 'authenticity', represents an attitude to performance that, at its best, is both vital and invigorating.

The term 'authenticity' can also be applied, as in the popular art world, to works that are proved to be genuine, demonstrated by the work of a particular composer. However, even this, the simplest use of the term, is by no means unproblematic. Much music, especially before the Renaissance, was not written with the concept of a single, definitive composer in mind. Furthermore, composers, even in the 19th and 20th centuries, may not have had total control over every element of production. Both scribes and publishers might modify a composer's notation to conform to a particular house style and might edit the music at several levels, with or without the composer's consent. Indeed, musical works created within an environment of copyright laws and commercial process almost inevitably involve multiple wills, all conspiring to create a distinctive 'authentic' work.

The 'authenticity' of a work is often seen to be dependent on the 'authenticity' of its sources: if no manuscript or print directly connected with the composer is evident some editors have tended to exclude the work from the official output. Scholars have been reluctant to use style or quality as ways of authenticating a work; scientific textual study has often unseated the less certifiable assumptions of stylistic criticism. But the absence of evidence is not simply negative evidence for the authenticity of a work.

'Authenticity' is also a prominent term in German philosophy of the 20th century. Although Theodor W. Adorno was highly critical of Heidegger's concept of authenticity (as the state of those who take responsibility for their existential status), he uses a modified form of this concept in his philosophy of music. Authentic musical works are those that conform with Adorno's (negative) dialectical conception of musical truth, works that forge their own internal consistency while acknowledging the historical nature and social function of the material. Such works are necessarily conflicted 'failures', presenting

reference to the outside world within autonomous form (and, in the human condition after the Holocaust, this means that the sublimation of suffering completely exhausts the formal possibilities of music).

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See also

Early music, §2: The historical performance movement, 1890–1945