Theory and Practice in Late Nineteenth-century Violin Performance: An Examination of Style in Performance, 1850-1900


Abstract

With most of Western art music, it can be argued that music-making requires performers to interpret a composer's original, notated ideas. Often, an informed and perceptive reading of the score needs to be combined with the inspiration to convey the feelings and emotions intended by the composer. The difficulties inherent in such an undertaking are further heightened when the music was composed several generations ago. In this book, David Milsom argues that in order to convey late 19th-century musical style appropriately, the performer needs to have a grasp of the philosophical orientation of musical thinking at that time. In effect, one must "unlearn" the value systems of the present, in order to assimilate those of the late 19th century. To arrive at a better understanding of performance in this period, the book examines performing style in the German and Franco-Belgian schools of violin playing from c.1850 - c.1900. Milsom explores selected instrumental treatises written by noted players and theorists, together with a number of recorded performances given by celebrated artists in the early years of the 20th century, to review the similarities and differences between theory and practice. An accompanying CD illustrates this relationship.
Historically informed performance (also referred to as period performance, authentic performance, or HIP) is an approach to the performance of Western music and theater. Within this approach, the performance adheres to state-of-the-art knowledge of the aesthetic criteria of the period in which the music or theatre work was conceived. Whenever this knowledge conflicts with current aesthetic criteria, the option of re-training the listener/viewer, as opposed to adapting the work, is normally followed. 2003. Theory and Practice in Late Nineteenth-Century Violin Performance: An Examination of Style in Performance, 1850–1900. Aldershot: Ashgate. ISBN 0-7546-0756-9. 1850-1900 (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003); F. Martens, Violin Mastery: Interviews with Heifetz, Auer, Kreisler and Others (New York: BiblioBazaar, 2007); 3. B. Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 414. Page | 2. David Milsom argues in Theory and Practice in Late Nineteenth-Century Violin Performance (2003) that the implied contrast between the ‘Franco-Belgian’ and ‘German’ schools is questionable, quoting Wechsberg’s stance that ‘the scope and influence of a school can never really be defined’. 7 He also refers to David Boyden’s observations that even though the great.