

Voices and Instruments During the Classical Era

Performance Practices Related by Primary Sources

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Introduction

Performance practices can best be understood and appreciated by reading primary sources, which, during the Classical era, were in the form of instruction books (such as treatises, primers, or tutorial methods that were meant to educate); diaries that comment on performances of the time; prefaces to compositions by composers of the era; and dictionaries, letters, biographies, and essays. The benefit of primary sources, being contemporary to music as it was being composed and performed, is that information is direct and firsthand, and as such, the information has not been subjected to the vagaries that affect communication from one person to another over decades or generations. Absent are accounts from secondary sources (e.g., interpretations, re-interpretations, opinionated colorings, modifications to accommodate changes of fashion and taste, and dependencies on memory), which, however well-intentioned, alter original meaning or intent. Absent also are meanings that are different because of changes over time. For instance, the term *vivace* today is usually interpreted as “very fast,” and performers typically assume that music marked with this term should be faster—often considerably faster—than music marked with *allegro*. However, the term *vivace* meant “vivacious” to musicians of the Classical era, with implications for an actual tempo

comparable to or slightly slower than *allegro*. John Holden notes in his musical essay of 1770 (Part I, Chapter 5) that *vivace* is “near the same, but not quite so brisk a movement as *Allegro*,” and Daniel Gottlob Türk observes in his clavier treatise of 1789 (Chapter 1, Part 5) that “compositions which are marked Vivace are usually played too fast.”

Primary sources also reveal performance practices that have been lost or forgotten. As an example, meter signatures during the Classical era conveyed information about tempo and metric accentuation as well as equations of beats into measures. Regarding tempo, meter signatures with large numbers as denominators of the metric fraction, such as $3/8$, indicated a relatively fast tempo, while metric fractions with smaller numbers as denominators (e.g., $3/2$) indicated a relatively slow tempo. Johann Philipp Kirnberger explains this in Volume 2, Part 1, Chapter 4 of his composition treatise: “Those meters having larger values, such as *alla breve*,

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3/2, and 6/4, have a weightier and slower tempo than those having smaller values, such as 2/4, 3/4, and 6/8, and these in turn are less lively than 3/8 or 6/16 meter.”

Regarding metric accentuation, meter signatures conveyed patterns of strong and weak emphasis. Described by Türk: “Each meter has strong and weak beats, although according to their external value or duration, they are equal to each other.” Duple meters (all those with numerators of the metric fraction divisible by two, such as 2/2, 2/4, 4/4, 2/8, 4/8, 6/8, and 12/8) indicated that, beginning with the downbeat, notes on alternate beats were to be emphasized while notes on the other beats were to be de-emphasized. Triple meters (all those with numerators of the metric fraction divisible only by three, such as 3/2, 3/4, 3/8, and 9/8), indicated that notes on the downbeat were to receive an emphasis greater than that on the other beats.

The understanding of meter and its tempo and metric accentuation implications was so pervasive throughout the Classical era, it was discussed by more than twenty primary source authors of the time, including Quantz in his flute treatise (1752), C. P. E. Bach in his clavier treatise (1753), Marpurg in his clavier treatise (1755), L. Mozart in his violin treatise (1756), Agricola in his singing treatise (1757), Holden in his musical essay (1770), Sulzer in his general theory of music (1771–1774), Rousseau in his dictionary of music (1779), Koch in his composition treatise (1787), Türk in his clavier treatise (1789), Tromlitz in his flute treatise (1791), Altenberg in his trumpet and kettledrum treatise (1795), Spohr in his musical diary (1802), Czerny in his pianoforte treatise (1839), Nathan in his singing treatise (1836), Garcia in his singing treatise (1840–1847), and even Wagner in his conducting book (1869).

Primary sources define and explain relevant performance practices of a particular historical era. They convey to us the meanings of notation and how it should be understood, the customs and common procedures that govern and impact performance, the characteristics and

mannerisms that color interpretation, and the aesthetic ideals that the conventions can help manifest.

The modern-day performer is fortunate in having published compilations of primary sources such as Oliver Strunk’s *Source Readings in Music History* (W. W. Norton) and Carol MacClintok’s *Readings in the History of Music in Performance* (Indiana University Press). These books are not organized by topic, however, and thus gleaning information about particular practices is challenging. Books such as *The Birth of the Orchestra—History of an Institution, 1650–1815* by John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw (Oxford University Press), *Orchestral Performance Practices in the Nineteenth Century—Size, Proportions, and Seating* by Daniel J. Koury (UMI Research Press), and *Singing in Style—A Guide to Vocal Performance* by Martha Elliott (Yale University Press) are limited to specific topics, but also limited in the presentation of primary sources; most of the information about performance conventions is presented by modern-day authors. In the article here and in a comprehensive Classical-era book that will be published by GIA in March of 2011, the performance practices are mostly related through primary sources. In their original form or in new English translations, the reader can thus access the information directly.

Voices & Instruments

The topic of voices and instruments encompasses types and numbers of singers and instruments and their logistical arrangements in performances, including aspects of performance practice that are generally not known today: keyboard instruments were a part of orchestras, whether scored or not; orchestral wind and brass parts were often doubled (or even tripled); and Classical-era choirs performing choral/orchestral works were placed in front of (or beside) orchestras.

The Baroque-era practice of using keyboard instruments as a part of virtually all vocal and instrumental ensembles continued throughout the Classical era. At least one keyboard instrument (or another chord-producing instrument such as a theorbo) was a part of every ensemble, whether the ensemble played sacred or secular music or performed in churches, concert halls, or theaters. This includes, for example, the use of harpsichords in churches. Note the following comment by C. P. E. Bach in the Introduction to Part II of his *clavier treatise* (1753):

The organ is indispensable in church music with its fugues, extended choruses, and sustained style. It provides splendor and keeps everything together. However, in all recitatives and arias in the [church music] style, especially those in which a simple accompaniment permits free variation on the part of the singer, a harpsichord must be used. The emptiness of a performance without this accompanying instrument is, unfortunately, made apparent to us far too often. The harpsichord is also used for arias and recitatives in chamber and theatrical music.

The pianoforte and clavichord provide the best accompaniments in performances that require the most elegant taste. Some singers, however, prefer the support of the clavichord or harpsichord to the pianoforte.

No piece can be well performed without some form of keyboard accompaniment.

Bach also spoke to the use of multiple continuo instruments in a letter to Johann Gottlieb Gleditsch (c. 1760):

18 church pieces by the ducal Capellmeister in Meiningen Herr Johann Ludewig [*sic*] Bach. Most are with 2 oboes, 2 violins, viola, 4 voice parts and continuo.... All 18 pieces consist of (1) a clean score in the hand of my late father; (2) all parts written out with doubled violins and three continuo parts, among which a transposed organ bass is always present, because of the chamber pitch.

As to the use of unscored keyboard instruments in orchestral ensembles, consider the

following observations from the musical memoirs of William Thomas Parke (1830):

Salomon gave twelve subscription-concerts in Hanover Square, which began on the 12th of March [1791]. These concerts had the powerful aid of the celebrated composer Haydn, who was engaged by Salomon to come to London and compose twelve new symphonies, one for each night, and to preside at the pianoforte during the performance of them....

His Royal Highness the Duke of York presented a grand concert of instrumental music, March 2nd [1795], at York House, Piccadilly, at which their Majesties and the Princesses were present. Salomon led the band, amongst whom was Haydn, who presided at the pianoforte.... The following week I attended a grand instrumental concert given by the Prince of Wales at Carlton House to their Majesties and the whole of the royal family. Haydn presided at the pianoforte, and Salomon led the band.

There were no specific pianoforte parts for Haydn or other keyboardists; players simply read from the full score or from cello or bass parts and, as was the practice during the Baroque era, realized chords appropriate to the harmonies and expressive content of the music. As to specific characterizations of the continuo realizations, Johann Joachim Quantz has the following to say in Section 6 ("Of the Keyboard Player in Particular"), Chapter 17 of his *flute treatise*:

The general rule of thorough-bass [playing the basso continuo part on a keyboard instrument] is that you always play in four parts; yet if you wish to accompany well, a better effect is often produced if you do not adhere strictly to this rule, and if you leave out some parts, or even double the bass an octave higher with the right hand. For just as a composer is neither able nor compelled to set a three-, four-, or five-part instrumental accompaniment to all melodies, for fear that they would become unintelligible or obscure, so not every melody permits an accompaniment of full chords on the keyboard. Therefore, an accompanist must

govern himself more by the individual situation than by the general rules of thorough-bass.

A piece with full harmony accompanied by a large body of instruments also requires a full and strong keyboard accompaniment. On the other hand, a concerto executed by a few instruments requires some moderation in this respect, particularly in the concertante [solo] passages. You must then pay attention to whether these passages are accompanied by the bass alone or by additional instruments; whether the concertante part plays softly or loudly, and in the low or high register; whether it has a sustained and singing melody, leaps, or passage-work to execute; whether the passage-work is played quietly or with fire [etc.]....

In a trio the keyboard player must adjust himself to the instruments that he has to accompany, noting whether they are loud or soft, whether or not there is a violoncello with the keyboard, whether the composition is in a *galant* or elaborate style, whether the harpsichord is loud or soft, open or closed, and whether the listeners are close by or at a distance. The harpsichord is obtrusive and quite loud close by, but at a distance it is not as loud as other instruments. If the keyboard player has a violoncellist with him, and accompanies soft instruments, he may use moderation with the right hand, especially in a *galant* composition, and still more if one part rests and the other plays alone; with strong instruments, however, and with a piece that is harmonically full and elaborate, and also if both parts play at the same time, he may play with fuller chords.

The greatest discretion and restraint are required in a solo.... The accompanist is to be criticized if he uses the right hand too actively or if he plays melodically with it, arpeggiates, introduces other things in opposition to the principal part at the wrong time, or if he does not express the Piano and Forte at the same time as the soloist, but instead plays everything without expression, and with the same volume....

On a harpsichord with one keyboard, passages marked Piano may be produced by a moderate touch and by diminishing the number of parts; those marked Mezzo

Forte, by doubling the bass in octaves; those marked Forte, in the same manner and also by taking some *consonances* of the chord into the left hand; and those marked Fortissimo, by quick arpeggiations of the chords from below upwards, by the same doubling of the octaves and the consonances in the left hand, and by a more vehement and forceful touch. On a harpsichord with two keyboards, one has the additional advantage of being able to use the upper keyboard for the Pianissimo. However, on a *pianoforte* everything required may be accomplished with the greatest expedience, for this instrument, of all those that are designated by the word keyboard, has the greatest number of qualities necessary for a satisfactory accompaniment, and it depends for its effect only upon the player and his judgment. The same is true of a good clavichord with regard to playing, but not with regard to effect, since it lacks the Fortissimo.

The tone of each instrument may be produced in different ways, and the same is also true of the harpsichord, although it might appear that on this instrument everything depends not on the player, but on the instrument itself. Experience shows, however, that if two musicians play the same instrument, one produces a better tone than the other....

In the Adagio the accompanist must neither arpeggiate nor play melodically with the right hand, unless the soloist has sustained notes or rests. He must not allow the accompanying parts to become more prominent than the bass. In an Adagio in common time, he may strike each eighth note with the right hand. But in an Arioso in which the bass has a quicker movement, whether in eighth notes, sixteenth notes, or triplets of either classification of notes, it is not necessary to strike chords with the right hand for each note; it sounds better to allow one note to go by in equal notes and two in triplets, provided that the passing notes have no figures of their own above them....

In a recitative sung from memory it is much easier for the singer if the accompanist anticipates the singer's first notes at each pause, and, so to speak, puts them into his mouth for him by striking the chord with a quick arpeggiation, in such fashion that, where possible, the singer's first note lies in



Figure 1. Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* [flute treatise], section 6, chapter 17, figure 5

the upper part; immediately afterwards he should strike separately several of the following intervals that appear in the vocal part (see Fig. [1]).

Keyboard instruments were not the only ones used in performance even though they had no specific scorings and no printed parts from which to play. The serpent, which is a wind instrument with a soft and mellow tone quality, was frequently used in churches to accompany chant and to play the bass part of choral music. Charles Burney comments on this practice in his account of music in France and Italy (1773) and also in his account of music in Germany and the Netherlands (1775):

As I made no considerable stop till I reached this city [Lille], the capital of French Flanders, I here began my enquiries, and first tried to discover the manner of performing the Gregorian chant, which subsists throughout France in all cathedrals and collegiate churches. It is oftener performed without the organ than with; and though there are organs in every large church in this town, and throughout the kingdom, I find that they are only used, as in our parish churches, on Sundays, and at great festivals....

In the French churches there is an instrument on each side of the choir, called the *serpent*, from its shape, I suppose, for it undulates like one. This gives the *tone* in chanting, and plays the base when they sing in parts. It is often ill-played, but if judiciously used, would have a good effect. It is, however, in general overblown, and too powerful

for the voices it accompanies; otherwise, it mixes with them better than the organ, as it can augment or diminish a sound with more delicacy, and is less likely to overpower or destroy by a bad temperament, that perfect one, of which the voice only is capable....

At the great church of St. Bavo [in Ghent], two *serpents* and a double base [*sic*] accompany the chant, when sung in parts, even when the organ is not played.

There are three organs in this church [Cathedral of our Lady in Antwerp], one very large, on the right hand side, at the west end of the choir, and a small one in a chapel on each side of the broad aisle.... The chanting here, as in other churches of this country, is accompanied by the double base and *serpent*....

At the Dominicans church [in Antwerp], there are two organs, which are esteemed the best in the town.... On Sunday, 19th at seven o'clock I attended the first mass. There were a few violins, two bassoons, and a double base placed with the voices in the organ loft, over the west door of the choir; but before these were employed, a considerable part of the service was chanted in *Canto Fermo*, with only a *serpent* and two bassoons in accompaniment....

At nine o'clock high mass began and continued upwards of two hours.... Before the service... the canons and boys marched in procession round the church, with each a lighted taper in his hand, chanting the psalms, in four parts, with the two bassoons and *serpent* above-mentioned.

The doubling of instruments is another feature of instrumentation that was not specified in manuscripts or printed scores. As Quantz explains in Chapter 17 (“Of the Duties of Those Who Accompany or Execute the Accompanying or Ripieno Parts Associated with a Concertante Part”) of his flute treatise, there should be one wind player per part in combination with a string complement of between fourteen and seventeen players (four to five first and four to five second violins, two violas, two cellos, and two to three basses). However, the winds should be doubled, with two players per part, in combination with a string complement of twenty-one players. There should also be an extra keyboard instrument.

He who wishes to perform a composition well must see to it that each instrument is presented in proper proportion—that there are not too many of one kind, or on the other hand, too few of another kind. I shall propose a ratio that, to my thinking, will satisfy all requirements in this regard. I assume that a *harpsichord* will be included in all ensembles, whether large or small. With *four violins* use *one viola, one violoncello, and one double bass* of medium size. With *six violins*, the same complement and *one bassoon*. *Eight violins* require *two violas, two violoncellos, an additional double bass* (larger, however, than the first), *two oboes, two flutes, and two bassoons*. With *ten violins*, the same complement, but with an *additional violoncello*. With *twelve violins* use *three violas, four violoncellos, two double basses, three bassoons, four oboes, four flutes*, and in a pit *another keyboard and one theorbo*. *Hunting horns* may be necessary in both small and large ensembles, depending on the nature of the composition and the inclination of the composer.

With this distribution in mind it will not be difficult to order even the largest ensembles in the correct ratios, if the increases from four to eight, from eight to twelve, etc., are properly noted. Since the success of a composition depends as much on an arrangement of the instruments in their proper proportions as on good execution, foresight in this matter is particularly important. Many compositions would be more effective

if the distribution of the parts were arranged properly, for how can a composition sound well if the principal parts are drowned out and suppressed by the bass or even the middle parts? The former should stand out above all the others, and the middle parts should be heard least of all.

Louis Spohr in his music diary of 1802 also speaks to the augmentation of wind players:

During Lent, when no public performances are permitted, the [St. Petersburg] Court Theater gave two major concerts a week.... The orchestra, at the first concert, consisted of thirty-six violins and twenty basses and doubled winds. In addition to this, and as reinforcement for the chorus, were forty hornists of the Imperial Band.... They served as an organ, and gave strength and security to the singing of the chorus, whose parts they doubled....

Very popular was a performance of Haydn’s *The Seasons*, given for the benefit of the Widow’s Fund.... The orchestra was the largest I had ever heard. It consisted of seventy violins and thirty basses and doubled winds.

In addition to commentary about the numbers of instruments in orchestral ensembles, authors of the Classical era also described the logistical arrangement of the instruments. The most common layout, as mentioned by John Berwald in his description of a performance of Haydn’s *The Creation* on March 19, 1799, had the first and second violins positioned across from each other, with the first violins to the left and the second violins to the right of the conductor or leader.

When we entered, we saw that the stage proper was set up in the form of an amphitheatre. Down below at the *fortepiano* sat *Kapellmeister* Weigl, surrounded by the vocal soloists, the chorus, a violoncello, and a double bass. On one level higher stood Haydn himself with his conductor’s baton. Still a level higher on one side were the first violins, led by Paul Wranitzky, and on the other side the second violins, led by his brother Anton Wranitzky. In the centre: violas and double

basses. In the wings, more double basses; on higher levels the wind instruments, and at the very top: trumpets, kettledrums, and trombones.

The arrangements of other instruments depended upon a wide range of factors, some of which are discussed by Quantz in Chapter 17 of his flute treatise:

The leader must know how to distribute, place, and arrange the instrumentalists in an ensemble. Much depends upon the satisfactory distribution and placement of the instruments, and upon their combination in the proper ratio. In the orchestra pit of an opera house, the first harpsichord may be placed in the middle, with the broad end facing the parterre and the tip to the stage, so that the singers are visible to the player. The violoncello may be placed on his right, and the double bass on his left. The leader may sit next to the first harpsichord, on the right and slightly forward and elevated. The violinists and violists may form a narrow oval ring, beginning with the leader and continuing so that the violists have their backs to the stage and extend to the tip of the harpsichord, in such fashion that all may see and hear the leader. If, however, the pit is spacious enough to seat four people abreast, the second violins may sit, in two pairs, one behind the other, in the middle between the first violins and the violists, and sitting with their backs to the stage; the closer together the instruments, the better the effect they produce. On the same side, at the end where the violinists stop, there still may be enough room for another violoncello and a double bass. The second harpsichord is placed on the left side of the first, parallel to the stage and with its tip turned toward the first, but so that room may still be found behind it for the bassoons, unless you wish to put them on the right side of the second harpsichord, behind the flutes. Another pair of violoncellos may be placed next to the second harpsichord. On this, the left side of the pit, the oboes and hunting horns may sit in a row with their backs to the listeners, like the violins on the right side; the flutes, however, are posted in a diagonal line next to the first harpsichord, so that they turn their eyes toward the harpsichord, and so that the lower

ends of their flutes are toward the parterre. In some venues, however, where there is an empty space between the pit and the listeners, the flutes are placed with their backs to the parterre, and the oboes are positioned in a diagonal line between them and the second harpsichord. The oboes produce an excellent effect, especially in tutti sections, serving as a filler, and their sound justly deserves a free outlet, one which the flutes also enjoy if no one stands close behind them and if the players turn a little to the side.... The theorbo may find a comfortable place behind the second harpsichordist and the violoncellists....

In a composition for a sizable ensemble, performed either in a hall or in some other large place where there is no stage, the tip of the harpsichord may be directed towards the listeners. So that none of the musicians turns his back to the listeners, the first violinists may stand in a row next to the harpsichord, with the leader on the right of the keyboard player, who has the two bass instruments playing on either side of him. The second violins may be located behind the first, and behind them the violas. Next to the violas, on the right, may be placed the oboes in the same row, and behind this row the hunting horns and the other basses. The flutes, if they have solo parts to play, are best placed at the tip of the harpsichord, in front of the first violins, or on the left side of the harpsichord. Because of the weakness of their tone, they would not be heard if they were to stand further back. Singers also may take the same place; if they were to stand behind the keyboard player and read from the score, they would not only impede the violoncellists and double-bass players, but would also obstruct their own breathing and stifle their own voices if poor sight forced them to bend over.

In a small chamber ensemble the harpsichord may be placed by the wall on the left of its player, but far enough removed from it so that all the accompanying instruments except the basses have room between him and the wall. If only four violins are present, they and the violists may all stand in one row behind the harpsichord. If, however, there are six or eight violinists, it would be better to place the second violins behind the first, and the violas behind the second violins, so

that the middle parts do not stand out above the principal part, for this produces a poor effect. The soloists, in these circumstances, can take their places in front of the harpsichord, in such a way that they have the accompanists in view to the side.

The arrangement of orchestral instruments with choirs in concert performances (as opposed to liturgical or theatrical presentations) was particularly interesting during the Classical era in that the choral ensembles were typically positioned in front of the orchestra. This disposition of performing forces was mentioned in the Berwald quotation above in reference to a performance of Haydn's *The Creation* in 1799 and can also be seen in a famous painting by Balthasar Wigand of a performance of Haydn's oratorio given at Old University in Vienna on March 27, 1808 (see Figure 2).

In addition, Burney describes and provides a floor plan layout of a similar arrangement of forces in his account of performances in Westminster Abbey in 1785 (see Figure 3). Note the reference to singers placed in front of orchestras "as at Oratorios," implying a standard practice.

The orchestra was built at the opposite extremity [of the Abbey], ascending regularly from the height of seven feet from the floor, to upwards of forty, from the base of the pillars; and extending from the centre to the top of the side aisle....

At the top of the Orchestra was placed the occasional organ, in a Gothic frame, mounting to, and mingling with, the saints and martyrs represented in the painted glass on the west window. On each side of the organ, close to the window, were placed the kettle-drums.... The choral bands were principally placed in view of Mr. Bates, on



Figure 2. Detail from *Aufführung der Schöpfung von Joseph Haydn im Festsaal der alten Universität am 27. März 1808* by Balthasar Wigand (1771–1846)

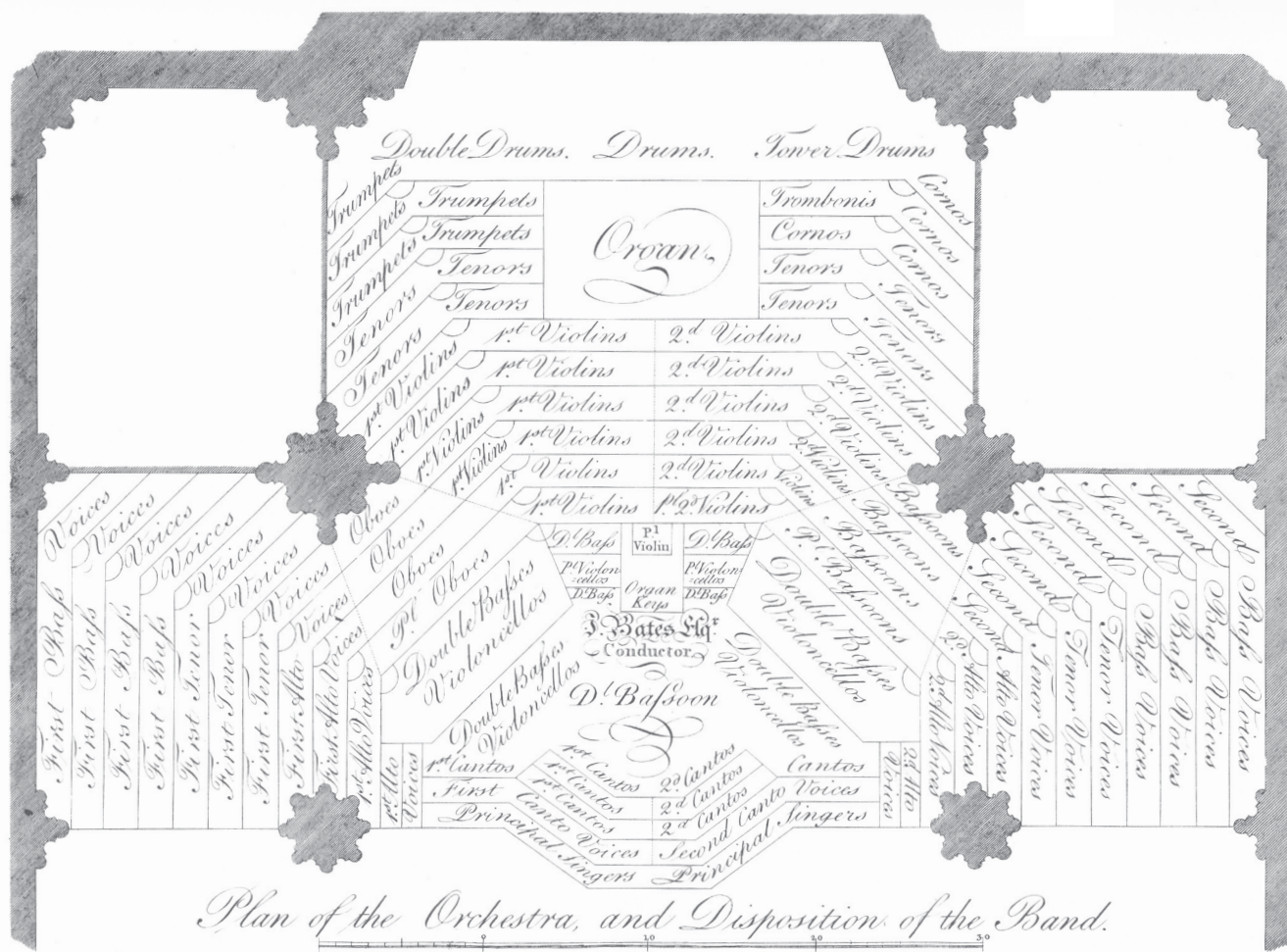


Figure 3. Burney, *Plan of the Orchestra and Disposition of the Band*

steps, seemingly ascending into the clouds, in each of the side aisles, as their termination was invisible to the audience. The principal singers were ranged in the front of the Orchestra, as at Oratorios, accompanied by the choirs of St. Paul, the Abbey, Windsor, and the Chapel-Royal.

The general ratio of orchestral players to choral singers during the Classical era was two to one, no doubt because of the forward placement of choristers. This is to say that there was generally twice the number of players to singers. Haydn conducted performances of his *The Creation* in March of 1800 with sixty instrumentalists and a choir of twenty-four, Salieri

conducted performances in March of 1808 with sixty instrumentalists and a choir of thirty-two, and the famous Tonkünstler-Societät performances of the oratorio, conducted by Haydn, had an orchestra of 120 and a choir of sixty. This orchestra, by the way, was comprised of tripled winds; there were three players on each of the flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and horn parts to balance eighteen players on each of the string parts.

Singers in the choruses of the time included boys, castratos, women, and men. Since women were generally (but not always) excluded from singing in church, liturgical service music was most frequently performed by the combination

of boys, castratos, and men. Boys and castratos often participated together in singing the treble parts, and male altos (i.e., countertenors) and/or castratos sang the alto parts. The numbers of singers in choral ensembles varied greatly. Church choirs generally had from between eight to thirty-two singers, while festival ensembles numbered more than two hundred. Burney comments on the kinds and numbers of singers he observed in his account of music in France and Italy in 1770:

This morning [in Milan on July 18] I heard the whole service after the Ambrosian manner, was introduced to the Maestro di Capella, Signor Jean Andrè Fioroni, who invited me into the orchestra, shewed [*sic*] me the service they were to sing printed on wood in four parts, separate, cantus—altus—tenor—bassus—out of which after the tone was given by organist Signor Jean Corbeli they *all* sung, namely 1 boy, 3 castrati, 2 tenors and 2 basses, under the direction of the Maestro di Capella, without the organ....

Went this morning [September 30] to S. Peters [in Rome] to hear Mass where I staid [*sic*] 2 hours and had a delightful contemplative lounge—from hence to Signor Santarelli, with whom I spent 2 hours more very profitably. He had looked out several very curious things to show me, among which 2 MS [manuscript] volumes of extracts from curious authors and anecdotes.... There is no organ or other instrument ever used in the chapel. The singers are 32: 8 trebles—8 contr’altos—8 tenors and 8 bases. These are all in ordinary—there is likewise a number of *extras* ready to supply the places of those who are sick, absent, and infirm, or dead—so that the number of singers is on common days never less than 32 and on festivals nearly doubled. They are all in a kind of purple uniform....

After dinner [on October 17] to music at the Franciscan’s church [in Naples]—where the 3 conservatorios were to furnish music and musicians for a great festival of 8 successive days, morning and evening.... The band was very numerous, consisting of above 100

voices and instruments, in a long occasional gallery totally covered with gold and silver gilding....

Signor Fabio, the 1st fiddle of the opera of S. Carlo [in Naples], dined with us [on November 7] and brought his violin. [He is] a coarse player, tho’ a fat good natured man. He sung several buffo songs and accompanied himself very well on his fiddle and after dinner he had a 2nd who came to accompany him in one of Giardini’s solos etc.—I got from him the number of hands employed in the great opera orchestra: 18 1st and 18 2nd violins, 5 double bases and but 2 violoncellos, which I think has a bad effect, as the double base is played so coarsely throughout Italy as to produce no musical sound nothing but meer [*sic*] noise.

And from his account of music in Germany and the Netherlands of 1775, Burney observed:

On the day after my second arrival [in Brussels], there was a mass, in music, performed in the little, but neat and elegant, church of Mary Magdalen.... Two boys, in particular, sung a duet very agreeably: but there is generally a want of steadiness in such young musicians, which makes it to be wished that females were permitted in the church, to take the *soprano* part....

In attending high mass at the collegiate church of St. Gudula... I again heard the performance of a considerable band of voices and instruments; and I was glad to find among the former two or three women, who, though they did not sing well, yet their being employed, proved that female voices might have admission in the church, without giving offence or scandal to piety, or even bigotry.

Castratos were very much a part of the performance culture in the Classical era, especially in the eighteenth century. They appeared in significant numbers throughout Europe (Burney says that there were large numbers of them in cities throughout Italy and that the Conservatorio of S. Onofrio in Naples housed sixteen of them), and they performed frequently in opera houses, where they sang the leading soprano and alto roles—many composed

specifically for them. W. A. Mozart, for example, composed the roles of Idamantes in *Idomeneo* (1781) and Sextus in *La clemenza di Tito* (1791) for castratos. As mentioned above, they also participated with boys in cathedral and chapel choirs.

Burney's comments below about the housing of groups of castratos and about the castration of boys seem to suggest that, although the practice of castration was clearly against the law, it was still very much tolerated and accepted. Indeed, there were notable castratos throughout the nineteenth century: Domenico Mustafà (1829–1912) sang in the Sistine Chapel choir and was its director from 1860 until 1898, and Alessandro Moreschi (1858–1922) sang in the choir from 1883 until 1913.

Burney's account of music in France and Italy of 1770 contains the following comments about castratos:

Friday 20 [Milan]. This morning [I went] to hear a *missa* in *musica*, composed under the direction of Signor Monza, Maestro di Capella. His brother played the violoncello with much facility of execution, but not a very pleasing tone or taste. The first violin, Signor Lucchini, who leads at the *Burletta*: 2 or 3 castrati sung.... The 1st soprano was what we should call in England, a pretty good singer, with a pretty good voice; his taste neither original nor superior. The contr'alto, who was the second singer, was likewise *pretty* well. His voice pleasing and he never gave offence by the injudicious management of it....

It is forbidden to castrate boys in these schools [La Pietà, Santa Maria di Loretto, and S. Onofrio in Naples]—that they chiefly come from Leccia in Puglia, but are first tried here or elsewhere as to the likelihood of voice and then taken out by their parents for this barbarous purpose, but it is death by the laws to those who perform the operation and excommunication to all concerned in it, unless it be done, as is often pretended, on account of some disorders which may be supposed to require it and with the consent of the boy....

But as to these previous trials of the voice, it is my opinion that this cruel operation is but too frequently performed without trial or at least without sufficient proofs of a dawning and improvable voice—otherwise there could never be found such numbers of them in every great town throughout Italy without any voice at all—or at least without one sufficient to compensate for the loss. Indeed all the *musici* in the churches at present are made up of the refuse of the opera houses, and it is a very rare thing to meet with a tolerable voice upon the establishment of any church in Italy....

This morning [October 31] I went to [the] conservatorio of S. Onofrio [in Naples].... There are in this college 16 castrati, and these lye by themselves in a warmer apartment upstairs than the other boys for fear of colds, which might endanger or injure the voice.

Summary

The subject of voices and instruments as it involves the types and numbers of singers and instruments and their logistical placements in performances is only one element of performance practice that directly affects sound. Other elements—equally important—include timbre, volume (dynamic levels), types of vocal and instrumental production, vibrato, and pitch. The choice and arrangement of singers and instruments, however, are two of the most tangible of these elements and two of the most influential in producing an overall quality of sound. This is important in that a definitive quality of sound can assist in the accomplishment of many other performance practices, from tempo to ornamentation.

It is hoped that the presentation of primary source material will provide the modern-day performer, student, and scholar with a comprehension of notation and its meanings during a specific period of history and also an understanding of performance practices—a comprehension and an understanding that will help to

define the scope and limits, as well as the character and appropriate parameters of each convention. With the grouping together of numerous quotations addressed to diverse audiences (e.g., beginning and advanced singers, flutists, violinists, keyboardists, and composers), it is possible for today's musician to view the basic universality of practices—the consistency of practices from one performing medium to another and from one compositional genre to another—and to perceive how the various practices fit into an overall ethic of performance.

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