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Research, Education, Performance

It's quite usual for conservatoires to link Education & Performance. But my concept also links both these to the cutting edge of academic Research. This could be compared, for instance, to Medical Science, where a teaching institution is simultaneously hosting research into new techniques, teaching the latest methods to advanced students, and testing the results in the real world of interaction with the public. Or to a Scientific laboratory, where advanced students study and also work alongside their professors in the lab, testing the practical outcome from new theoretical models.

In music, with the rise of (mainstream) Performance Studies and continuing investigation of Historical Performance Practice, I believe this is a powerful linkage, a promising path for future development in all three areas.

Evidence based

Evidence-based teaching is a buzz-phrase in conservatoires, but it isn't always encountered in practice. Especially not in coaching. Of course, it's very helpful for a teacher to share insights gleaned from their long experience with a particular repertoire, but we should carefully distinguish between Primary Sources (period evidence from treatises, scores, iconography etc) and Secondary Sources (modern scholarship, personal insights, CDs).

Most Primary Sources mentioned below are available free online, e.g. via IMSLP. My articles cited below include many links to key Primary & some Secondary Sources.

Text, Rhythm, Action!

Caccini *Le Nuove Musiche* (1601) defines Music as "Text and Rhythm, and Sound last of all. And not the other way around!". Many 17th-century sources, e.g. Bulwer *Chironomia* (1644), emphasise the importance of Action (aka Delivery): how the performer stands, moves, gestures, uses facial and other non-verbal communications to convey the Text and 'move the passions'.

These, therefore, are 17th-century priorities, which guide us in allotting rehearsal time and effort, as well as showing the order in which to work.

This phrase was also the title of my 5-year international research/training/performance project for the Australian Centre for the History of Emotions, which began with Monteverdi's *Orfeo* at DKDM (2011). It's also the title of my forthcoming book.

See <https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2015/10/30/text-rhythm-action-research-training-performance/>

No conductor

It is so well known that there was no conducting in the 17th century, that this hardly counts as a research finding. But since nearly all modern-day Early Music performances include conducting (whether front-and-centre, or from the keyboard), it is clear that almost no attempt has been made to find out how things work, if you do not have a conductor.

Our adherence to this vital historical principle places this project at the cutting edge of applied HIP research: almost no-one is trying this.

So how does it work? By Tactus, as Agazzari, Frescobaldi, Dowland and many other sources tell us. See <https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2013/09/08/rhythm-what-really-counts/>

Good & Bad

This is the principle underlying accentual poetry (i.e. most sung texts). Poetic metres and even the rhythms of prose are structured by accented/unaccented syllables, referred to in the period as Good/Bad. Composers and performers must unite Good notes with Good syllables, Bad notes with Bad syllables. Caccini calls them Long/Short.

This connection between Text and Music is fundamental to the concept of Early Music as Rhetorical (text-based, aiming to persuade the mind & move the passions).

This contrasts with the mainstream aesthetic of homogeneity. There are many such differences between baroque and mainstream, which can be summed up as “Baroque favours contrasts”.

<https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2013/09/22/the-good-the-bad-the-early-music-phrase/>

Tactus

The changing patterns of Good/Bad syllables in the Text are structured within the constant swing of Tactus. This is Musical Time, understood with a pre-Newtonian philosophy of Aristotelean Time defined as ‘a number of movement in respect of before and after’. It is linked to the philosophy of the Music of the Spheres & the harmonious nature of the human body. It is shown by the down-up movement of the hand, approximately one minim =- one second (so the complete down-up movement requires 2 seconds).

See my FB post about Zacconi (1592): the Quality of Tactus is revealed by the alternative names *tempo*, *misura*, *battuta*, *tatto*; it is *equale*, *saldo*, *stabile*, *e fermo* ... *chiaro*, *sicuro*, *senza paura*, & *senza veruna titubatione*. See Ruth Deford *Tactus* (2015) – there is a generous free preview on Google Books. See also Roger Mathew Grant *Beating Time & Measuring Music* (2014).

Last note short

This is a particular case of the Good/Bad concept. In poetic analysis, the last accent of the line is called the Principal Accent, it will almost always be followed by a final Bad syllable. This structures the articulation of cadences (which occur very frequently in this repertoire). Continuo players are trained to recognise cadences for their characteristic harmonies (typically 4 # over the dominant, # over the tonic). Singers and continuo should also recognise the built-in structure: Good/Long on the dominant joins to Bad/Short on the tonic.

There is discussion in the Secondary Literature of a basic principle of halving the duration of final notes, from the renaissance to 1800 and beyond. *I'm sorry, I don't have a reference for this.*

In practice, last note short is very effective in helping keep the Tactus stable, and in giving space for continuo-players to listen, singers to think about the next line, etc.

Long notes long, short notes short

This is often connected to the distinction between Good/Bad, and to maintaining Tactus. It's a practical counter-balance against the (lazy) tendency to iron out contrasts in notated values.

In this repertoire, contrast of note-values is an indicator of emotional intensity. Caccini *Le Nuove Musiche* gives many examples of how to exaggerate such contrasts for added effect.

Long notes

Typically, long notes have crescendo/vibrato at the end of the note. See <https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2014/06/16/inexplicable-dumb-shows-noise-languages-of-emotion-in-early-opera/>

Caccini *Le Nuove Musiche* places great emphasis on the importance of crescendo/diminuendo on a single (long) note, as the most effective way of moving the passions. <https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2015/01/25/play-it-again-sam-the-truth-about-caccinis-sprezzatura/>

Posture

Period posture is described as *contrapposto* in connection with painting and sculpture, *in prospettiva* in dance treatises, e.g. Negri *Nobilita* (1600). The score of *Ballo delle Ingrate* mentions Plutone's *nobil postura* in contrast to the lamenting gestures of the Ingrate. 17th-century singers were trained in dance and swordsmanship, and courtly etiquette required a relaxed, elegant posture.

See <https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2015/11/30/start-here-how-to-study-baroque-gesture-historical-action/>

Gesture

Although whole-body acting is crucially important on the baroque stage, period sources define acting as “imitating with gesture” (e.g. the anonymous *Il Corago* c1630). Dene Barnett *The Art of Gesture* (1987) was the pioneering book from which much modern scholarship and practice started – Barnett focusses on French 18th century acting, but the underlying principles were established much earlier.

Gesture is an outward and visible sign of the inward changes of the Four Humours. My catch-phrase for this in rehearsal is “put the emotions into your hand” – which also guards against the tendency to twitch the elbows or shoulders. Experiencing changing affetti “in the hand” also creates appropriate changes in tone-colour for theorbo- or harp-players, whose fingers are in direct contact with the strings.

See <https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2015/12/12/modus-agendi-or-how-to-act-preliminary-exercises-for-baroque-gesture/>

<https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2016/01/08/baroque-gesture-whats-the-point/>

Ut pictura

Many period sources compare music to a painting. Music “paints the words”, and the resulting sounds/images move the passions. We can use period art to study historical acting: postures, gestures, facial expressions etc.

Another important historical concept is *Enargeia*, the emotionally communicative power of detailed visual description. Just think of Venere’s aria describing the walls and ceilings of the Vienna court, as seen by the Ingrate as they emerge from Hell.

A practical challenge in performing Baroque Gesture is that the movements may look stiff, and/or disconnected/unnatural, if the performer simply puts the hand where the director instructed. We might get a beautiful hand-ballet, but it tends to be emotionally disconnected. The remedy is connect gestures to the text; to keep the text in your mind in the very moment of performance (Mindfulness); and (I suggest) to reverse-engineer *Enargeia* by creating mental images (Quintilian’s *visiones*) from the text you are declaiming. Once you have a strong mental image, with each item clearly located, you can simply point out to the audience what you are talking about.

<https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2016/06/25/ut-pictura-reverse-engineering-baroque-gesture/>

Walk & talk

In this style, we don’t walk and talk simultaneously. The instructions for walking during ritornelli are in the Preface to Gagliano’s *Dafne* (1608), summarised in Carter *Monteverdi’s Musical Theatre* (2002), highly recommended.

I contextualised Christine Jeanneret’s work with you on ‘character movements’ in Rhetorical terms. You can persuade/move your audience by Logos (text), Pathos (emotions) or Ethos (who you are, i.e. the character of the role you play)

Italian violin

In the absence of an early 17th-century source for violin technique, we have to apply principles gleaned from other period Italian sources. In his analysis of French bowing in 1698, Muffat *Florilegium* gives some hints about Italian practices (which were very different). Those hints are consistent with what we read in Geminiani (1751) [http://imslp.org/wiki/The_Art_of_Playing_on_the_Violin,_Op.9_\(Geminiani,_Francesco\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/The_Art_of_Playing_on_the_Violin,_Op.9_(Geminiani,_Francesco)) and Corri (c1810) [http://imslp.org/wiki/The_Singer's_Preceptor_\(Corri,_Domenico\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/The_Singer's_Preceptor_(Corri,_Domenico))

Our approach was to imitate viol-playing, stay on the string, move the bow slowly, get deep into the string, look for rich strong sound on good notes, observe Good/Bad contrast, alternate the bow, rehearse phrases with the opposite bowing.

Continuo

According to Agazzari (1607), continuo instruments “support and guide the whole ensemble”. That guiding is with sound, not with a conducting hand! So we worked on a way to give this support and guidance, based on Tactus. We also worked on imitating the “sound and emotions of the words” (Agazzari).

See Arnold *The Art of Accompaniment from a Thorough-Bass* (1931) available in cheap reprint, for early 17th-century sources, many of them quoted at length.

The register and character of continuo is *grave*. Low, slow, no ornaments, a certain heaviness/seriousness and stability. A quick calculation from the limits of period notation gives A (440, 460 whatever) as the top end of the realisation – theorbo automatically remains lower.

Early continuo sources view harmony two or three notes at a time (corresponding to the two or three syllables of most Italian words): we can do the same, as we search for rhythmic structures of Good/Bad notes. Cadences imply Good/Bad as well as characteristic harmonies.

Semibreves take two Tactus beats, and suit a Default Arpeggio (bass-fill-stop), see Kapsberger and Frescobaldi.

Minims are (more or less alternately) Good & Bad.

Crotchets or Quavers are light, harmonised at the level of minims, and otherwise treated as passing notes.

Tactus (in the continuo) guides the singer. (Dowland, Peri). Bass rhythms reflect the affetto (Peri). Faster moving basses tend to make the singing ‘dance’ (Peri)

<https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2013/10/08/sparrow-flavoured-soup-or-what-is-continuo/>

<https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2015/09/27/logical-captain-the-implications-of-peris-preface/>

<https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2015/10/23/frescobaldi-rules-ok/>

There is a series of practical continuo videos that starts here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCp19kfjGQo>

The LY principle

The sound of each word should correspond to its meaning (on the Good syllable). So *dolce* means sweet, you sing it sweet-LY; *cruda* means harsh, you sing it harsh-LY; *forte* means strong, you sing it strong-LY. And so on, for continuo players and singers alike. So we don't need to discuss loud and soft, we have many more, and much more subtle indications from every single word of the sung text.

I first wrote this up in 2007, in a chapter of *Bringing the First Latin-American Opera to Life* edited by Davidson & Trippett. The underlying period principle is rhetorical Decorum.

Monteverdi and *Il Corago* emphasise that tone-colour and emotion change from phrase to phrase, even from word to word. Cavalieri *Anima & Corpo* emphasises the importance of the juxtaposition of sharply contrasted emotions.

Proportions

See <https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2015/02/16/tempus-putationis-getting-back-to-monteverdis-time/>

and

<https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2014/11/09/sherlock-holmes-and-the-wedding-dance-tactus-proportions-in-monteverdis-lasciate-i-monti/>

Trancing

17th-century opera used techniques that we would now describe as 'hypnotic' to encourage audiences into an Altered State of Consciousness, in which they would suspend their disbelief and be more easily moved by the changing emotions of the drama. See <https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2014/12/11/the-theatre-of-dreams-la-musica-hypnotises-the-heroes/>

There is specific mention of eating 'magic mushrooms' as a means of experiencing hallucinations, in Venere's speech to the Ingrate about imagining yourself flying into the ceiling of the Vienna court.

Many musicologists would see this as a remote connection, but professional hypnotists find the techniques of Shakespeare and Monteverdi immediately recognisable.

Summaries

I've written introductory articles for singers (Journal of Association of Teachers of Singing) and continuo-players (British Harpsichord Society). These articles are in current/recent issues, so they are not available online, but I can provide private copies if you can't find them.

Text, Rhythm, Action! New priorities for baroque singing

On the Beat: directing from the continuo

Although in this summary, I've cited many of my own articles, those articles will lead you to Primary Sources, and I urge you to read and think about these topics for yourselves. With proper scientific scepticism, don't automatically accept what I (or anyone else) tell you, but read the period sources for yourself and check everything!

There is a list of useful sources here: <https://andrewlawrenceking.com/2015/10/30/text-rhythm-action-research-training-performance/>

Knowledge and Practice advance when someone dares to challenge the conventional view, helping us move beyond the status quo.