RE-EXAMINING THE ISSUES OF “HISTORICALLY INFORMED PERFORMANCE VERSUS MODERN PERFORMANCE”:

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MODERN ORCHESTRA PLAYERS ON HISTORICALLY INFORMED APPROACH OF CONDUCTORS

The Fourth Performance Studies Network International Conference
16 July 2016

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1. BACKGROUND
Problem: comments or actions of performers on the modern side have hardly been quoted or described in preceding studies.

Solution: to highlight the modern side.

Significance: to prevent some facts of current performance practice from being excluded from performance history.
What do the modern orchestra players think about the conductor and his historical approach?

How do they react to them?

This study aims to understand orchestra player’s thought and action.
Method and Object

- Method: fieldwork
  - interviews on orchestra players
  - observations of rehearsals

- Why orchestra?
  - to understanding of the most various aspects of modern performers
Method and Object

- Object: professional modern orchestras in Tokyo
  1. Tokyo Symphony Orchestra
  2. NHK Symphony Orchestra

- Why these two orchestras?
  1. regular conductors
  2. guest conductors

Hubert Soudant  Norichika Iimori  Roger Norrington  Christopher Hogwood
2. RESULTS
2. RESULTS

2-1. variation among individuals
2-1. variation among individuals

① musical experience
   ➢ period instrument
     - some members have played
     - many members have never played
       because…
       1. technically impossible to master both instruments
       2. almost no job and demand
       3. no interest in period instruments
2-1. variation among individuals

① musical experience

➢ education

▪ use historical performance as a reference
▪ read literatures

→ some members do but others don’t do
→ their experience is not always “coherent”
2-1. variation among individuals

② kind of instrument

- receive conductor’s instructions
  → strings > others

- use period instrument in modern orchestra
  → timpani > brasses (especially horn and trumpet)
    > winds and strings (only bow)

- need to understand historically informed approach on the occasion of playing modern instrument
  → winds (except cl.) and strings > brasses and percussions
2-1. variation among individuals

③ stance of orchestra

➢ orchestra that makes capacity to respond to the approach into its selling point
  → members think that the approach has a profound effect

➢ orchestra that has a long tradition as modern orchestra and takes pride in high standard playing skill
  → members think that the approach have a small or no effect
2. **RESULTS**

2-2. common characteristics shared by modern orchestra members
2-2. common characteristics

① conductor’s historically informed approach hardly ever penetrates the entire orchestra fully because…

1. play not only under historically informed approach but also under modern approach
2. play the great variety of works
2-2. common characteristics

3. not all modern orchestra members are specialists of period style

4. historically informed approach is sometimes denied and ignored by orchestra members

⭐️ to avoid the case that they become overly committed to historically informed approach and consequently that makes a negative influence on other kinds of concert
2-2. common characteristics

② the phenomena that are commonly recognized as adaptation of “historical playing style” tend to be recognized as adaptation of “playing style which conductor demands, whether historical or modern” because…

1. historically informed approach is not “recreation of historical fact” but “interpretation of historical fact”
2-2. common characteristics

2. they adopt conductor’s approach because orchestra players have a rule that they basically have to adopt conductor’s approach

⭐ the most important thing is the result and as long as conductor’s approach brings good results, it doesn’t make any difference whether it is historical or modern
2. RESULTS

2-3. negative aspects specific to modern orchestra
2-3. negative aspects specific to modern orchestra

① “inconsistent” or “incomplete”

→ “Although modern orchestras can only go half way, why should we do that?”
→ “conductors don’t study seriously”
2-3. negative aspects specific to modern orchestra

② “disobeying the score” or “that is not Beethoven”

- conductors change familiar common practice during the member’s youth or modern orchestra’s own traditional interpretation of works drastically

→ the members reject any association with the situation that the rules or customs of the historically informed side gain predominance over the different rules or customs that their orchestra has preserved traditionally
2-3. negative aspects specific to modern orchestra

③ “it's other people's business”

・forced to adopt unwilling or unaccomplished playing style and make unsatisfied sound, they suffer from a sense of emptiness

Ex.) “I finished a concert without even breaking a sweat.”
2-3. negative aspects specific to modern orchestra

④ decline in the ability to play

Ex.) playing skill for Haydn or Mozart has increased, but playing skill for Dvořák or Tchaikovsky is decreased

Ex.) string players get less able to produce vibrato or their instruments get less able to sound
2-3. negative aspects specific to modern orchestra

⑤ trouble to staffs of orchestra

Ex.) Though librarians had to write the conductor’s indications into the part scores and spent two weeks doing the job, he cancelled them on a day before concert.

→ orchestra players share tired feelings of staffs, and their distrust of conductor becomes increased
2-3. negative aspects specific to modern orchestra

⭐ historically informed approach frequently require high-risk tasks that are unfamiliar and irregular for modern orchestras

→ if such approach turns for the worse, orchestra members feel that it does nothing more than increasing additional work

→ the possibility of success of concert is decreased and they suffer from some sort of psychological or physical stress
3. CONCLUSION
the significance of the study

• providing specific information about modern performer’s thought and actions
• based on detailed data and deals with negative aspects

→ the study serves as new historical materials about the issues of “HIP versus modern performance”
another consideration

What is the reason why preceding studies have never focused on modern side?

I think the reason is that…

• common knowledge and value based on certain recognition structure of researcher have not been relativized sufficiently

Because…

• researchers of preceding studies probably regarded HIP as very interesting and important activity

• once they thought like that, the perspective of modern performers was excluded from research object, because modern performers don’t always think so
another consideration

The most remarkable experience I had through my fieldwork is that…

• certain things that are naturally treated as “valuable” or “interesting” in musicological world are sometimes treated as “worthless” or “uninteresting” in modern orchestra world

• However, musicologists should try to understand and accept their way of thinking.

• Otherwise, research results of performance studies have continued to be limited to contents that suited for convenience or interest of researchers.
another consideration

⭐ Even statement or behavior that work to the detriment of musicology, we musicologists should not always dismiss them as “low sophisticated thought” or correct their “wrong behavior”, we sometimes need to record them as parts of diverse aspects of current performance practice.
the tasks ahead

• Considering the purpose of the study and some practical problems, the research object is limited to Japanese orchestras.

→ If anyone knows anything about modern orchestra’s response to conductor’s historical approach in other countries, please tell me!
Thank you very much for your kind attention to my presentation!