

Closing the gap: Observations on cross-genre programs and the exchange of historical performance practices

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Introduction

"Corelli at the foot of Parnassus begs the Muses to receive him among their number"¹

In the past fifteen years I have worked on building relationships and creating concerts involving musicians trained in the historically informed performance practices of classical music (thirteenth through eighteenth centuries) with musicians specializing in vernacular musics from aural traditions in the Western hemisphere. The goal of this ongoing project is to bridge the musical and cultural crevasse that appeared in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the increased availability of printed music aimed at the highly skilled but unpaid musicians of the middle class. This seemingly innocuous event not only segregated the players of classical and vernacular musics, but created a cultural divide between musicians and audiences who previously enjoyed and embraced diverse repertoires of music.² In this essay I will discuss a brief history of the divide, the processes involved in rediscovering the common repertoire and performance practices, creating a concept for particular cross-genre programs, learning how to divulge the point of departure between modern musicians with completely different styles of training, reconciling the differences in how each group approaches a particular piece, and observing that, with a history of music in performance as our reference, the distance between particular styles of music may be reduced, if not eliminated.³

Overview

"Corelli charmed by the favorable reception given to him on Parnassus expresses his joy. He continues with those who accompany him"

Finding or recreating the common ground or roots music that was once part of both the classical and traditional repertoires at first seemed a formidable task, but after employing the centuries-old device of evaluating music—listening to it in live performance—I realized that

1 The text in parentheses throughout the article are English translations of the movements from François Couperin's (1668-1733) grand Italian trio sonata, *Le Parnasse, ou L'Apothéose de Corelli* (The Apotheosis of Corelli), 1724. The brief narrations describe Corelli's journey to Parnassus (paradise) and, indirectly, the unification of the French and Italian styles of music.

2 Stephen Rose, "The musical map of Europe c. 1700," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Music*, edited by Simon P. Keefe, 3-4. Cambridge History of Music (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

3 Of special note is the marked propensity of Early Music players to use rubato within the concept of a tactus counted on the breve (double whole note). The responsibility of the player is to get from one tactus to another in a set amount of time. This practice often allows for a liberal interpretation (or complete disregard) of the smaller note values and their respective relationships to other parts in the composition and to the big beat. This performance practice is largely unfamiliar to the traditional musicians who view the mutilation of the meter as an affront to the particular composition that has been played consistently the same way, more or less, since its inception, regardless of how many primary sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Early Music players place on the table.

from the classical perspective, the music itself had not changed, merely the way it was interpreted by the different groups of musicians.⁴ To state it in the vernacular, a groove is a groove, an ostinato is an ostinato, and the Romanesca has been in use for centuries.⁵ No shortage of players of both types of music exists in North America, but combining two different types of so-called historical performance practices, each with its own steamer trunk full of references, traditions, and attitudes, proved to be the most formidable component to navigating the musical landscape. Both sets of players are usually enthusiastic about the collaboration, although not all of the players are comfortable stepping outside of their respective comfort zones; it is necessary to adapt ones existing skills to use with new approaches to unfamiliar repertoire. For each project the learning curve is different for every player, but by using a “from the bottom up” approach as described by Francesco Gasparini in 1708, focusing on the bass line and harmonic progressions, a common-denominator is discovered.⁶ From that, a common, albeit limited, musical vocabulary is established and thus used to create new approaches to existing repertoires based on an eighteenth-century model of composition.⁷ The musical gap or cultural crevasse is not really a divide but rather just a part of music making that has been obscured by a mere two centuries of musical sectarianism. Thanks to a small but dedicated group of scholar-performers and the abundance of primary sources and secondary literature describing and identifying the simultaneous existence of the players and repertoires, this separation is now receiving recognition and resurrection.

Identifying, Defining, and Building the Projects

“Corelli drinks at the Fountain of Hippocrene. The troupe continues on.”

Once a musical baseline was established, the performance goal was to reunite eighteenth-century traditions embraced by the following composers and musicians:

1. Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767), who sought out vernacular performance styles in eastern Europe;
2. Michel Pignolet de Montéclair (1667-1737), who indicated the ethnic and regional origins of particular low-style court dances;
3. Santiago de Murcia (1673-1739), who integrated West African music into his guitar compositions;

4 Western tonal or modal music is still actively taught in schools of music and music conservatories around the world. The hunt for a common ground between musical traditions commonly thought to be extinct was inspired by my wife, who observed that one particular group playing traditional music from Latin America sounded as if they were playing Baroque music from Latin America.

5 Robert Gjerdingen, *Music in the Galant Style*, (Oxford University Press, USA, 2007), 15.

6 Francesco Gasparini, *L'Armonico Pratico Al Cimbalo. A Facsimile of the 1708 Venice Edition. by Gasparini, Francisco*: (New York: Broude Brothers, 1967). For an English translation see Francesco Gasparini, *The Practical Harmonist at the Harpsichord*, trans. David L Burrows, Music Theory Translation Series 1 (New Haven: Yale School of Music, 1963).

7 Giorgio Sanguinetti, *The Art of Partimento: History, Theory, and Practice* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2012). Sanguinetti discusses the *partimento*, an instructional tool for learning to compose “with unprecedented swiftness” derived from the basso continuo that encouraged improvisation as the path to musical fluency.

4. Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762), who composed Italian diminutions on Scots tunes; Randolph Jefferson (1755-1815), who learned vernacular music from bonded people owned by his politician and violinist brother Thomas;
5. Composer-performers in the British Isles such as James Oswald (1711-1769, Scotland) and Turlough O'Carolan (1670-1738, Ireland) who worked in both vernacular and learned music circles with the modern traditional music practices and the respective players of each.

Specific cross-over repertoires and collections of instruments discussed here come from Central and Eastern Europe (Trans Carpathian, Hungarian, Romanian, Polish), the British Isles (Ireland, Scotland), and the Louisiana Territory (New Orleans, Acadian diaspora). The discourse will also include observations on a BalFolk French and European folk dance workshop and performance in which practitioners of both classical and vernacular music styles participated, shared musical styles and performance practices, and were reminded that there need not be a division between approaches, performers, and traditions.

Repertoire and Performance Practice Reconciliation

"Corelli's enthusiasm caused by the waters of Hippocrene"

For every collaborative program discussed in the case studies below, the same two well-established traditions of performance practices had to be addressed: pitch standard and temperament. Framing and presenting the idea of a pitch standard that is different from the one used for a significant part of a career may at first seem a formidable task. With particular instruments such as an accordion or a wind instrument without a *corps de rechange*, it is not an issue of pitch but one of transposition, but for the string instruments, including a cimbalom, the practice of cross-tuning or scordatura is neither foreign nor frightening.⁸ In my own experience it was easier for the early music players to go with the prevailing modern pitch standard (ca. a=440Hz) and equal temperament, because professional musicians and unpaid enthusiasts usually are equipped to play at two or three different pitches depending on the gig or repertoire.

Three Case Studies

The first project discussed here, Transcarpathian music (Central and Eastern Europe) brought two ensembles together. The vernacular ensemble, specializing in Balkan music, contained violin, cimbalom, piano accordion (120 bass button), and double bass. The accordionist also provided vocals and percussion on the ütőgardon. The classical (early music) ensemble, with a broad range of repertoire from the fourteenth through eighteenth centuries, consisted of a quintet playing transverse flute and recorder, violin, viola da gamba, and Baroque guitar, theorbo, and archlute. This program conveniently had repertoire for the combined

⁸ This term means that one or more additional middle sections are provided to allow the instrument, usually a flute or recorder, to play at different pitch standards. Modern replicas of historical instruments provide the *corps de rechange* in half-step increments, e.g., a=392Hz, 415Hz, 440Hz, and 465Hz. Another combination is for a=415Hz and 430Hz.

ensembles compiled in a collection of music from the seventeenth century called the Codex Caioni. Compiled 1634-1671, the book is named after Joannes Caioni, (1629/1630-1687), a Transylvanian Franciscan monk and Catholic priest, who was the last person to add to the codex. It contains music from both classical and vernacular traditions; and this particular assemblage of music alone should be enough to convince a modern listener that both types of music were enjoyed by the same community, regardless of social or economic standing. Chansons from the mid-sixteenth century, dances in the Western European tradition (*courante*, *balletto*), and instrumental music by composers such as Andreas Hammerschmidt (1611-1675; a local hero of sorts, born in Prague, spent most of his career in Germany), Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672), and Jacob Händl (Jacobus Gallus; 1550-1591), are found side by side with Transylvanian/Romanian regional dances and secular songs. These vernacular pieces are immediately identified as different from the Western repertoire not only by their names, e.g., “Mas Tancz Apor Istvan” and “Lepus intra sata quiescit,” but also by being written or transcribed in what is often considered, especially for the seventeenth century, irregular phrase lengths (for example, three bars repeated, followed by three additional bars, or by an entire dance noted in five bars in duple meter).

The program also included music from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: three Zingarese erroneously attributed to Haydn but more likely based on the playing of the Galanta Romani, and a set of Hongroises by Stanisław Ossowski (fl. late 18th century) and F. P. Rigler (c. 1748-1796). The Zingarese and Hongroise dances are found in a modern collection, *Hungarian Dances 1784-1810*, and the editor notes that the original versions of the pieces were written down in the early nineteenth century in order to preserve an oral tradition.⁹ In discussing this concept with the vernacular players, it seems that instead of preserving the oral tradition, the process of notating the dances and subsequently publishing them thus destroyed it. I view the collection as an opportunity to learn music from a source previously unknown to me. It should be noted that Rigler was much concerned with retaining the original vitality of transcribed folk tunes and complained that contemporary attempts at notating Hungarian dances “bleached away” their “true fast character.”¹⁰

In this program all of the musicians could read music, although the Balkan ensemble learned and performed most of their repertoire without using music. The note-reading proficiencies for some of the members reflected varying degrees of “rustiness.” The opposite was true for the early music group. This particular group did make a regular practice of improvising on ground bass patterns in concerts, and embraced the idea that with so-called “early music” the notes on the page represent only about 50% of the music; the remaining music must be provided by the performers in the form of musical rhetoric, improvisation, and an awareness that the character or function of a particular piece changes with each performance and place in the program. But learning new music just by listening is something that the latter group struggled with at first. A particularly enlightening experience in terms of early music performance practice was the way in which the Balkan ensemble interpreted the notes on the page. By engaging traditional rhythms and meters on the heavily regulated Western notation of the traditional dances, the pieces thus became their own, and helped the

⁹ Géza Papp, ed., *Hungarian Dances 1784-1810*, *Musicalia Danubiana* 7. Budapest: MTA Zenetudomány Intézet, 1986.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Preface.

early music ensemble expand their interpretation of the 50% concept. A reciprocating idea came from the early music players to the Balkan group, the practice of *notes inégales*, or giving almost all passages an underlying swing, in such a way as to be immeasurable in Western notation. Everything swings unless you see a specific symbol or written instruction to do otherwise. In my limited experience with cross-genre performers, even on commercial recordings, I have witnessed the metrical regularity used by the traditional players when faced with music from the classical repertoires, especially music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The eyes appear to take over for the ears and the smallest beat gets emphasized in every measure, unlike the documented idea of an overarching *tactus*, or big beat, often comprised of a breve, or double whole note, and rarely does the quarter note get the emphasis. But as the early music players learned to learn from hearing, the vernacular players were quick to adopt the ideas of swing and the use of a big beat to maintain the ensemble, and to implement them on the music of well-known composers from the eighteenth century.

The next case study concerns itself with music from the British Isles, wherein classical and traditional music from Ireland, Scotland, and England were performed by two separate groups and then as a combined ensemble. The vernacular group was a trio comprised of voice and guitar, violin and English concertina, and bouzouki and button accordion. The early music quartet played transverse flute, violin and viola da gamba, and several permutations of lute, arch lute, theorbo, and Baroque guitar as managed by two people. As with the first case study, the repertoire for the combined ensembles was composed, this time by an eighteenth-century musician, Turlough O'Carolan (1670-1738), who worked in the realms of both vernacular and classical music. O'Carolan's music not only has been learned by vernacular players for many years without looking at notes on a page, the eighteenth-century mania for newly printed music (ancient and contemporary) created a tradition of publishing almost every type of Western music from which a publishing house thought it could prosper. Thus it is not difficult to find a modern edition of O'Carolan's music. Knowing that it came from what is commonly called the Baroque era, it therefore gets the same treatment, rules for interpretation, rhetoric, and performance context by the early music ensemble as they would any other piece of music from the period.

To wax colloquial, the coolest part of each project occurred when the two ensembles started rehearsing the common repertoire. At this point the cultural crevasse of performance practice vanished, as if a superhero with super powers managed to transport everyone to the eighteenth century. To be sure, someone with training on a modern violin will have a different bow technique than someone who has studied and uses a bow made after an early eighteenth-century model. The modern bow is longer, heavier, and curves upward from the frog to the tip; the early bow is shorter, lighter, held differently, and has an arch from the frog to the tip. The designs and weights of the respective bows create techniques specific to the device.¹¹ They are not, however, inflexible and void of nuance. Skilled players can adapt and make their tools do what is necessary to play music. This crossing of string techniques occurred in each of the three projects described here, as well as with other projects not mentioned here. Part of the modern description of Baroque music is its irregularity, with rhapsodic characteristics even within an individual phrase or movement. To play with a controlling regularity and rigidity is uninspiring

11 A detailed discussion and descriptions of the two types of bows used here is beyond the scope of this essay.

and boring if the music was composed during a time when the opposite was expected by composers and audiences alike. Thus two string players with different modern training, a flute player using an eighteenth-century style flute, and fretted string instruments from historically different luthier perspectives found a common ground—the music and its traditions—and helped create an environment where both vernacular and classical deliveries successfully comingled. It is not possible to describe the sound created within the imagined time travel, but the audience, made up of aficionados of both styles of music, were not offended or appalled at the unification (or possible compromise) of styles. To them, and the players, it was just music that provided for them even more possibilities for enjoyment.

The final case study brought together another seemingly incompatible collection of music and musicians and the question: what musics do Louis XIV and the Acadian diaspora have in common? The focus of the program was vernacular music from the court of Louis XIV in the Louisiana Territory, particularly New Orleans. Again, an early music quartet of transverse flute and voice, viola da gamba and voice, and once more the collective of theorbo, archlute, and Baroque guitar were joined by a group that specialized in Cajun music. In this collaboration all of the musicians were able to read music, and with the Cajun players that particular skill included everything between the highly proficient to the “somewhat rusty.” This program, as with the others described above, also had some of its vernacular music provided by an eighteenth-century source. In this case it is a manuscript found in New Orleans entitled *Nouvelles Poésies spirituelles et morales*, copied in Paris in 1736. Now known as the Ursuline Manuscript because it was given to the Ursuline order of nuns in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1754, the collection contains music by composers active in the reign of Louis XIV.¹²

The pieces in the manuscript, however, are not the original versions written by those composers active in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France. They are sacred parodies of the originals, many of which started out as vernacular songs with reflective themes, usually about solitude, romance and related heartbreak, or the benefits and regrets of drinking. It was not difficult to find the original vernacular versions of these songs because of the aforementioned seventeenth- and eighteenth-century appetite for published music of all genres. The technical demands of the parodies selected for the program did not require one to be fluent or highly proficient at note reading. For the exchange of common repertoire, the Cajun music was given to the early music group as audio files, and they thus had to learn the music through a modern version of an aural tradition; in other words, by listening. As with the Balkan musicians above, the Cajun players reinterpreted the 50% of the music concept and essentially used only the original rhythms, words, and pitches. The phrases typically defined by a set length of bars in Western classical music were essentially still there, but the characteristics of the pieces changed completely. A mere chanson became a dance song, inspiring both players and audiences to want to dance; instead they were forced to remain in their seats because of modern concert hall protocols.¹³ The reverse interpretation happened with the music learned by ear for the early music players, in particular the use of *notes inégales* and eighteenth-century ornamentation. Parts of the rehearsal included a productive dialogue of “how did you do that,”

12 See Kim Pineda, “The New World Order: Ursulines, Music from the Court of Louis XIV, and Educational Outreach in Eighteenth-Century New Orleans” (PhD Dissertation, University of Oregon, 2014), for a thorough discussion on the vernacular music and educational outreach used by the Ursulines in New Orleans.

13 Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Lyric* (Boydell & Brewer, 1996), 187-188.

“how often can you do that,” “where else can we do that,” and “do you mind if we do that too?” Thus a seventeenth-century song in triple meter about a young girl taking her sheep hook on a walk in the woods to protect her from a bipedal wolf became a Cajun-style waltz, and the “Chanson de mardi gras” was treated as a fourteenth-century monophonic song and its related performance practices, e.g., “Douce dame jolie” by Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1377), because of its phrase structure and mode. As with the other projects discussed here, everyone left the event feeling enlightened, more knowledgeable, and wondering why music and musicians had drifted apart. All of the musicians in all of the projects wondered, at the end of each event, “when can we do this again?”

To conclude the blending of musical styles and repertoires, I present a brief overview of a recent experience at a BalFolk event.¹⁴ This particular workshop focused on French folk dances from the Berry, Bourbonnais, and Auvergne regions, where particular dances such as the Bourée, Branle, and Rond have been in continual practice since the sixteenth century. Other dances, such as the polka, mazurka, and schottische remain active today and have survived through the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century performance practice of incorporating and arranging vernacular songs and dances into the existing theater and chamber music repertoire. The reverse is also part of this curating of early music and dance; practitioners of vernacular music taking melodies found in art music compositions.¹⁵ This modern practice is thus able to bring together musicians and dancers from different traditions, trainings, and experiences. From my own perspective, as I learn this new repertoire I am constantly reminded that each piece, even the newly composed pieces based on the historical models, are merely parts of two traditions that deserve to be reconnected on a much larger scale. And I find it extremely difficult to not treat the music as if it were written sometime during the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries.

Affirmation and Corroboration

“Corelli after his enthusiasm, falls asleep and his troupe plays the following lullaby”

By the late eighteenth century, music had adopted and incorporated descriptive and defining terms and concepts from art, literature, and rhetoric.¹⁶ The size and type of venue does not matter for performing and consuming music. The distinction, then and now, is that music is performed in both private and public venues regardless of its type (vernacular or classical). House concerts can be quaint settings for 15-20 people, or larger events with rented folding chairs, depending on the neighborhood and number of music-loving friends of the homeowner. Today, coffee houses, tasting rooms, and brewpubs are regularly used by vernacular players to share their music. These venues were historically home to players of both classical and vernacular music, and today some of us consider it a mission of community outreach to take the

¹⁴ A modern recreation of a *bal populaire*, such as a public, village, or festival dance.

¹⁵ Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books; London, 1980), 359.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15-21; 31-47. An eighteenth-century description of music as two types of art may be found in Francesco Milizia, from *Complete Formal and Material Treatise on the Theater* (1794), in *Music & Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe: A Source Book*, Enrico Fubini, ed. Bonnie J. Blackburn, 252-253 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

“scare” out of classical music by putting it in some of its original spaces, and to entice audiences of classical music to see the benefit of enjoying music in a more relaxed atmosphere of a coffee house or tasting room.

Conflict and Resolution

“The Muses awake Corelli and place him at Apollo's side”

Why would people who enjoy listening to vernacular music in a particular venue want to go somewhere else to hear it? And why would someone enamored with the violin sonatas of Jean-Marie Leclair (1697-1764) want to go hear them in a pub? There is no clear answer to these questions, and also to why there exists a musical divide. A component of what I am calling here a “musical outreach movement” includes modern performers of both types of music being willing to make the effort to put music into as many places as possible and reach a wider audience. It is possible that people who frequent tasting rooms and public houses have not realized that they enjoy sonatas written in the middle of the eighteenth century, or dance music from the fourteenth century (although dance music in a pub seems a good fit and possible vehicle of reconciliation). People who enjoy sitting in a formal concert hall or theater might not know that they will enjoy chamber music in an appropriately-sized room similar to one used in eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, or that they have not yet heard, recognized, or realized the connections of vernacular music and its players. The Hôtel de Guise in late seventeenth-century France, however, was a building large enough to hold a public house, a tasting room, and small concert hall; how is a room of this size different from a modern formal theater?¹⁷ Are the size of the room and its location the primary detriments to getting audiences to experience different types of music? In order for the gap between vernacular and classical musics to be bridged, closed, or otherwise embraced by the players and audiences separated by it, something more than a grassroots communication structure needs to be in place.

Conclusion

“Corelli expresses his gratitude”

In particular music environments, the divide between players and audiences of vernacular and classical music does not exist. For musicians who have made an effort to hear diverse styles of music over the course of their study and careers, taking part in a “closing the gap” type of performance is neither an off-putting nor scary proposition. My experience tells me that musicians enjoy collaboration, learning about new musics, and sharing their own music and means of interpretation and teaching it.

My cross section of musicians and vernacular musics discussed here is admittedly a small sample, and even if I included other projects that focused on music from Latin America, or what I refer to as Baroque Appalachia and its eighteenth-century connection to Scotland and Ireland, the increase in numbers of musicians and musical styles remains small. But when viewed as a series of relationships, then each musician in each group brings her or his own musical history

¹⁷ The Hôtel de Guise, home of Marie de Lorraine, duchesse de Guise (1615-1688), was the location of Marc-Antoine Charpentier's (1643-1704) opera performances. Charpentier worked as her house composer for seventeen years, beginning in 1670.

and experiences to the collaboration; and when all of these musical partners, teachers, or mentors get combined into a musical genealogy, then the limited number of performance projects mutates into a fair representation of what can happen when musicians from different traditions decide to get together and share ideas, histories, and music.

My goal here is to demonstrate that the musical-cultural gap between vernacular and classical musicians was a post-Galant era construct that no longer needs to remain in place. The amalgamation of players from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries who participated in both styles of music did so because it was their job to play music. There is a longer history of music and musicians without a cultural divide than there is with one. Our mission, as musicians, audience members, and scholar-performers, is to take our artistic tools and help redefine the musical landscape with the goal of getting more musics to more people in more and varied venues.