



Movement and the "creative gap" in musical performance¹

Janet L. Sturman

The value of the visible (the score) and the invisible (the subscore) generates the possibility of making them carry on a dialogue, creating a space within the design of movements and their precision. (Eugenio Barba, 2006:114)

Actors have long been encouraged to take control of the gap between what is defined in their script and what is left to the imagination. The experimental theatrical director Eugenio Barba refers to this space as an opportunity for dialogue between the performer and the audience and he regularly emphasizes that this dialogue may be effectively engaged not by spoken delivery of the pre-determined script, but rather by the physical movements of the actor. In music, there are many ways we might understand the concept of a gap between score and performance, but it was Peter Kivy's conception in his book *Authenticities* that first grabbed my imagination and prompted me to embark on an investigation of performance theories that soon ranged far beyond musicology.

¹ This article developed from a presentation offered at the Fifty-second Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, Honolulu, Hawaii, as part of a session dedicated to Integrating Historical and Ethnographic Methods in Ethnomusicological Research in 2006. I am grateful to the organizer of that session, Roberta Lamb, for prompting an invigorating exploration of way to integrate historical musicology, performance, and ethnographic studies of music.



Kivy argues that a musical performer's desire to be historically accurate too often inhibits expressive or engaging performance, and that what might be understood as options for historically-informed realization have become instead a set of fixed demands. He writes: "what was once a performer's discretion, a desirable gap, has become part of the text" (1995: 269). Despite the problems Kivy identifies, his notion of "the gap" is attractive; he views it as desirable, as a window of opportunity, rather than as a threatening separation between the known and unknown.² In his own critique of the so-called authenticity movement, musicologist Richard Taruskin contends that, apart from a few notable exceptions, the early music movement has not lived up to its potential to invigorate concert performances of Western Art music in general. In *Text and Act*, he writes: "A movement that might have shown the way back to a truly creative performance practice has only furthered the stifling of creativity in the name of normative controls" (1995:13).³

As an ethnomusicologist, I find myself making similar observations regarding the integration of non-western music into American academic programs and concert series. Is a similar collapse of practice in store for nonwestern music performance in American conservatories and concert halls? A full treatment of that question is outside the scope of this article, but Taruskin's question invites consideration of the flip-side

² Another kind of gap, that between work in and out of the field, has been explored by Tim Rice in his contribution to *Shadows in the Field*. He is also concerned with performance practice and identifies a gap between sites of experience, including the dichotomy of insider v. outsider, in acquiring a deep understanding of a musical tradition.

³ Richard Taruskin reserves special praise for conductor Roger Norrington for his ability to offer performances of classic repertory that respect historical practice and yet sound alive and fresh to contemporary listeners. I would join *New Yorker* critic Alex Ross in highlighting the work of Spain's early music maestro Jordi Savall for another exemplary blend of historically-informed practice with attention to contemporary sensibilities. (Taruskin, 1995; Ross, 2005)



of the issue: how might the study of non-western performance invigorate concert performances of western art music? This has not been a popular topic of investigation in ethnomusicology, but it merits attention. The discussion that follows addresses this matter from the perspective of the performer. It can be argued that the academy and instruction in the performance of western art music lags behind the world of popular music when it comes to drawing inspiration from non-western performance strategies. Pop musicians and composers in virtually all styles have shown considerable enthusiasm for borrowing, adapting, or appropriating musical ideas from around the world to inform their performances and particularly to use in creating new and original compositions. Musical composition, however, is not my topic here; I wish instead to address the physical and behavioral strategies of performance practice. The techniques of non-western performers in music, theater and dance as they use their bodies to enhance expression and engage their audiences has much to offer western art music performers. This article offers support of this position alongside a discussion of how contemporary academic instruction might profitably draw upon ethnomusicological scholarship to inform performance practice.

A Case in Point

Some might argue that for musicians to pay attention to movement will distract them from the demands of artistic and expressive sound production, let alone attention to the matter of historically-informed performance. An example based on the author's reflections on a local collegiate choral performance counters that claim and illustrates the musical value of dialogic movement-- movement that links performers to the score and its frame, to each other and to their audience. This particular concert featured music of the Latin American colonial period, mostly



Baroque examples, and one work in particular stood out: "Los Coflades de la Estelya," a *villancico* or *negrito*, by the composer Juan de Araujo (1648-1717) scored for six voice parts, SSAATB with basso continuo⁴. The title reflects pronunciation patterns of Spanish speakers of African ancestry, thus in Spanish it would be: "Los Confradías de la Estrella" or "the Brotherhood of the Star," which in this Christmas song is the Star of Bethlehem. The blend of African rhythmic sensibilities with Hispanic melodic traditions results in an energetic composition characterized by intricate interlocking parts and hemiola shifts, a complex rhythmic composite that, in the case of the performance by the student choir in question, threatened to pull apart. It is to this point that I will return, momentarily.

The conductor had made many decisions regarding the performance of this work. She responded to many "gaps" in dictated performance practice, addressing those aspects not indicated in the score by relying on her informed historical understanding of the music itself. She decided to use two guitars and bass viol to provide the continuo accompaniment as well as sackbut, crumhorn, and recorder to double the voice parts, and supplemented them with maracas and claves. Musicologist Craig Russell, one of the foremost authorities on early Spanish and Latin American music, reminds us that the guitar, although rarely specified in written scores, was the preferred accompaniment for the *guineo* - a dance/song reflecting African influence akin to "Los Coflades" (1995: 72).

However, in considering ways to address other "gaps," the conductor appeared less inclined to take into account the larger interpretive domain. Here I am speaking of the more holistic performance context on which ethnomusicologists often focus. In

⁴ Several recordings of this work exist. The author is fond of the rendition by the Coro Hispano de San Francisco and the Conjunto de Nuevo Mundo, *Ramillete – A garland of choral songs*, Pro música (2003).



particular, an understanding of the performance activities that link individuals to each other was less in evidence, and there were sonic and practical results of that omission. For one, I found myself wishing that the singers would move as they sang. The rhythmic tensions with which the group struggled would have made more sense to the singers, making it easier for them to perform the interlocking rhythms, and the entire performance would have come alive for to the audience, had the performers danced. Maybe this dance needed to happen only in rehearsal, and if on stage only with simple side steps, since the choir stood on risers. Such movement, however realized, would have been perfectly in keeping with the historic and cultural frames that gave rise to the original composition. Several musicologists, including Egberto Bermudez, Robert Stevenson and Louise Stein have argued that *villancicos*, like "Los Conflades," that reflect village and vernacular customs and characters, had moments where the singers dance, and many were dramatized and performed in costume or in processions in association with celebrations of the season.

The concert performance of the *villancico* described above serves as a reminder of how little attention performers in western art music tend to devote to movements not directly related to the demands of sound production; expressive body awareness represents a missing element in the practice of performance. Attention to physical movement, as both an interpretive tool for enhancing sound production, and as a means of connecting performance to a larger community or audience represents an interpretive gap in the contemporary performance and study of western art music, yet it is a domain for which the more holistic ethnomusicological approach to performance practice is well equipped to contribute.

Practical and Pedagogical Concerns



My theoretical interest in ways of linking the holistic perspectives of ethnomusicological studies of performance practice to that of Western Art Music represents work-in-progress and my aims with this article are to invite the kinds of discussion that might prompt development of curricula in college music programs.

In part, my interest results from immediate practical and pedagogical concerns: namely, the need to connect the insights of ethnomusicology to those of historical musicology in a University School of Music curriculum primarily serving students pursuing degrees in the performance of Western Art Music, and where performers tend to view musicology, of any kind, as having limited practical value. This is hardly a novel circumstance and the approach of many ethnomusicologists, myself included, has been to offer a separate but parallel set of courses, with the hope that students will discover relevant connections in the course of their own work. Last spring, with the intention of initiating shared curricular options, I convened a new graduate seminar on Theories of Performance.

The value of exploring contrasting traditions of performance has long been an argument for including non-western performance opportunities in college music programs. In *Performing Ethnomusicology*, Ted Solis and his fellow contributors celebrate this value and also address the problems of accommodating non-western performance ensembles into American concert and university frameworks. The practical orientation of *Performing Ethnomusicology*, and its long overdue appearance in the field of ethnomusicology, draws attention to two primary strands or approaches to the study of Performance Practice. Researchers tend to focus on either on: 1) the how of music making, with its focus on sound production, and identifying what we might call the rules of musical performance in a particular tradition; or 2) the why of music making, with a focus on meaning and reception, attempting to identify what



music making means to a specific group of people. The second approach has dominated ethnomusicological publication of late, but has been of little practical interest to performers, and the first often seems irrelevant to western art music performance.

Integrating Approaches and Strategies

An inter-disciplinary, intercultural approach to performance, particularly one that integrates the body awareness cultivated in dance and drama with musical performance offers a less traveled path for us to connect the "why" to the "how" of musical performance practice. Furthermore, the holistic way of looking at performance that has been a signature feature of ethnomusicology, and our willingness to look at performance across disciplinary and cultural perspectives, provides us with untapped tools for guiding performers.

In the domain of theatre, the willingness of European directors and pedagogues to adopt strategies from non-western performance practice has a distinctive tradition in the modern theater performance, and has led to the development of modern western practice sometimes called "physical theatre," credited to the pioneering work of Vsevolod Meyerhold and Jerzy Grotowski working in Russia and Poland, respectively. Both directors emphasized a discipline of physiological movement and gesture as critical tools for expressing character and emotion drawing upon *commedia dell'arte*, acrobatics, mime, as well as dance and improvisatory theatre. Theatrical reformers also undertook intercultural investigations; Jerzy Grotowski studied India's Kathakali dance and was one of several Western theatrical directors who turned to the physical practices of non-Western theater traditions as a means of invigorating Western practice. Others include Robert Lepage, who drew technical inspiration from



Japanese puppet theatre Bunraku, and Steven Berkoff who incorporated elements of Japanese Kabuki theater into his technique. (Martin, 2004:2).

What does Mime have to Do with Music Making?

To their great surprise, the student's in my Performance Theories seminar were most influenced by a visit from a dance and mime instructor as one of our cross-disciplinary explorations of performance theories and practices.⁵ It would be easy to ask, as several of my students initially did: "what can a mime offer a musical performer?" The answer turned out to be: an awareness and sensitivity to the expressive potential of the performer's body. Theatrical mime artist Rick Wamer started us on the path of exploring ways to use that understanding to make communicative links between performer and audience.

One example helps illustrate this power. After having students participate in a series of exercises that allowed them to practice body awareness -- including being aware of others sharing your space and using that sensibility to shape your own demeanor --one student inquired about negative energy, hoping initially to explore the issue of performance anxiety. Wamer, offered in response an anecdote of an instance when an inebriated audience member came up on stage while he was performing. In short, he had two choices: one was to react (logically enough) as if the intruder was a distraction to his performance. The other alternative was to integrate the negative energy of his intruder into to his performance and thereby harness it. Wamer decided on option two and incorporated the drunk's unwelcome presence into his ultimately successful performance, although the resulting drama was substantially different than what he had intended to share with the audience.

⁵ Mr. Rick Wamer, co-director of the Theatrical Mime Theater.



While it might be argued that the world of theatrical mime, offers greater flexibility for such an improvisational response than does a classical music concert, Wamer emphasized less the adjustments to his pre-composed work, and more the sensitivity to the relationship between the performer and audience that developed in the process of performance. For this mime the bond was as tangible, and as subject to nuanced control, as any element in a script or score and his focus on process rather than on an autonomous composition finds resonance in ethnomusicological work.

Ethnographic Investigation

The students in my seminar undertook limited ethnographic explorations of physical engagement in performance, observing and noting various ways that performers directly engage and captivate their audience.⁶ While ethnomusicologists regularly study the interactions between audience and performer, generally our aims have been descriptive not prescriptive. John Blacking's reflections in *How Musical is Man*, are one notable exception. By and large, Western art music performers, have been largely trained to de-emphasize physical connection with the audience. Musical theater, including opera, is one domain where physicality *is* cultivated, and thus my class turned to theater studies to continue exploration. The work of Richard Schechner and Victor Turner on the ritual elements of theatrical performance offered them new ways to think about performance practice, it was the work of theatre anthropologist Eugene Barba that was the most stimulating to the performers in my classes.

⁶ Cellist Zuill Bailey spoke about a class at Juilliard dedicated to rhythm, presumably Dalcroze, where students are told to attend concerts and watch how audiences respond to a performers command of rhythm, noting when listeners lose attention and what is happening musically when they are transfixed (Baily, 2006). In a series of assignments, I ask students to observe performances from an ethnographic perspective that includes the audience. My students found that in addition to rhythmic precision and assertive sound production, the physical gestures of the performer also account for audience response.



Ethnomusicology and Theater Anthropology

Although Barba has been a creative force in experimental theater since the 1960s, he has not been widely cited by ethnomusicologists, nor has he been well recognized by musicians in general. Perhaps his quest for universal principles, derived from examining technique removed from its specific and cultural performance contexts, might be viewed as unfashionable or uneven in its scholarship. However, his program of Theater Anthropology articulates a profound sensitivity to the many ways that performers can, and do, use their bodies to advance their expressive aims and engage their audiences.

With Nicola Savarese, Barba has edited a *Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, an impressionistic, yet inspiring compilation of writings, photos and commentary concerning the use of the body in theatrical performance. The authors place special emphasis on comparing Asian and Indigenous theatre to European theatre and dance. Theatre Anthropology, Barba cautions, differs from the cultural analysis associated with mainstream anthropology. His studies concern elemental principles of stagecraft and do not attempt to capture, or even respond to, the kind of deep cultural knowledge possessed by native practitioners that anthropologists such as the late Clifford Geertz would advocate learning. Instead, Barba begins by adopting the anthropologist's technique of "questioning of the obvious and looking outside one's own traditions to seek understanding." He writes: "By means of a confrontation with what appears to be foreign, one educates one's way of seeing and renders it both participatory and detached." This stance invites ethnographic study of Western Art Music performance, or at least a comparative examination of performance practices associated with body placement, interaction and movement. Although ethnomusicologists have begun studying their own traditions as if they were foreign,



Bruno Netti's *Heatland Excursions* is an important example, the work has been primarily descriptive in aim, even in its analysis. In contrast, Barba's aim is ultimately prescriptive; he wants to influence technique and practice.

The Engaged Body

From a cross-cultural perspective, Barba categorizes performance in terms of three levels: 1) the performer's individual and personal sensitivities; 2) the particular demands of tradition, culture, style, or genre; 3) and the extra-daily physiological behavior of the body. It is this third level that most interests him, and he defines it as "pre-expressive," noting its universal operation. It is, he writes, an underlying sameness, "an *idem* that does not vary; it underlines the various individual, artistic and cultural variants." By directing our attention to the habits of the body, what he calls its "scenic bios," he explores the behaviors and techniques that render it "decided," "alive," and engaged thereby "attracting the spectator's attention before any form of personal expression takes place" (Barba, 1996:5).

The cultivation of a decided body, one sensitive to other musical partners and ready to engage with and yes, even dance, with one's audience, offers an attractive starting place for remedying the stiff, detached, or at least overly cautious performances that are too often characteristic of concerts of Western Art music. Barba's work provides a useful set of theories regarding cross-cultural, even cross-disciplinary performance strategies, thus providing models for similar work in fields other than theater and dance. One of the most attractive aspects of his work is the value he places on connecting with one's audience. This work, he would argue, begins with how performers hold their bodies, including the way one enter and exits, greets the audience and other performers, and sits or stands on stage. The behavior of the



performer, even in the moments framing a performance must be immediately recognized as extra-daily, distinct from the way one moves in ordinary life. For guidance Barba directs us to the movements dancers and actors who command attention on the stages of the world.

After analyzing how physical behavior influenced both expressive presentation and audience connection in other domains, the students in my class were ready to apply this untapped sensitivity to movement in their own areas of specialty, which included: operatic singing, choral conducting, and performance on double-bass, trumpet, oboe, percussion, classical guitar, and pipe organ. Some focused on the framing moments of a musical performance: how to enter and exit, how to begin and end a piece while maintaining character and appropriate dramatic tension. Others wrote about their attempts to choreograph moments within the performance so as to improve ensemble interaction or to balance the tension and relaxation necessary for effectively realizing a difficult musical passage and yet, like the Noh actor or the mime, to being alert and in the moment, not as their ordinary selves but as performers, ready to engage the audience.

Closing the Circle - Preserving the Gap

The experience of my students indicates that ethnomusicology has important contributions to make to the methodologies of the performing arts, even in areas where we have not always been taken seriously. The kind attention to the holistic, physical aspects of "engaged" performance that ethnomusicologists have long documented, is of interest to western art music performers, but there is a need for a distillation of varied practice into a set of performance recommendations, not unlike



what Barba has attempted for theater. Such an approach would revive aspects of the earlier comparative aims of ethnomusicology's disciplinary founders, but today's scholars have accumulated far more data than did their predecessors, and therefore we may approach the job of comparison with a greater sophistication.

Similarly, while ethnomusicologists have often stressed the intrinsic bonds between movement, dance and music making, much of that work remains descriptive and un-integrated. In other words, we know how actors and dancers move, but too few studies systematically relate body movement to sound production and to the aim of human connection. Furthermore, when ethnomusicological work has been prescriptive in nature, generally the intended application has been to continue or recreate the specific performance tradition in question, not to inform a larger view of performance strategies appropriate to new and modern contexts.

In summary and to conclude, my aim has been to stimulate a recognition that ethnomusicologists are poised to invigorate western art music performance, in part because our work has so frequently recognized the importance of a holistic view of performance that includes physical behavior and social relationships. Music theorist Nicolas Cook anticipates this potential when he writes: "the problem [of addressing the interface between music and society] disappears if instead of seeing musical works as texts within which social structures are encoded we see them as scripts in response to which social relationships are enacted: the object of analysis is now present and self-evident in the interactions between performers, and in the acoustic trace that they leave" (Cook, 2001:31). Despite Cook's recognition of the applicability of interdisciplinary performance theory to musical performance, he stops short of proposing applications for contemporary performers of western art music. That gap is left for the performers themselves to address.



This essay has attempted to link the recognition of the social relationships embodied in musical works to the physical demands of enacting them in performance. It proposes that new ways of teaching are necessary to cultivate techniques for performing western art music that treat the relationship between performer and audience as the living embodiment of the music performed. While musicologists have focused on scored-based interpretive gaps in ways that seem to limit options for expressive engagement; a body-based approach, particularly one that stress human connection, keeps open an array of largely untapped options. The interpretive gap, understood as an opportunity for confirming physical connections --in ways as subtle as body stance, eye contact, and awareness of other bodies -- rather than isolated sound ideals, is neither rigidly prescribed, nor empty.



Resources

Bailey, Zuill

2006 Cello Master class, Louis Rich Theater, Tucson, Arizona, October 22.

Barba, Eugenio

2006 "Angelanimal," Speech of thanks on the occasion of the Honorary Doctorate bestowed on Eugenio Barba by Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts on 7 July 2006.

<http://www.hkapa.edu/media/general/download/pr/ANGELANIMALING.htm>

Accessed Nov. 2, 2006

1991 *A Dictionary of Theater Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*. New York: Routledge.

Bermudez, Egberto

2006 "Villanos y Canciones," *UN Periódico*, 53.

<http://unperiodico.unal.edu.co/ediciones/52/19.htm>

Cook, Nicholas

2001 "Between Process and Product: Music and/as Performance," *Music Theory Online*, 7 (2)

<http://mto.societymusictheory.org/issues/mto.01.7.2/mto.01.7.2.cook.html>

Accessed Nov. 2, 2006

Goehr, Lydia

1992 *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Kivy, Peter

1995 *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance*.

Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Leabhart, Thomas

2004 Jacques Copeau, Etienne Decroux and the "Flower of Noh," *New Theatre Quarterly*, 20 (4): 315-330.

Martin, John

2004 *Intercultural Performance Handbook*. New York: Routledge.

Solis, Ted



- 2004 *Performing Ethnomusicology: Teaching and Representation in World Music Ensembles*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Stein, Louise
1998 "Eros, Erato, Terpsichore and the Hearing of Music in Early Modern Spain," *Musical Quarterly*, 82 (3/4): 654-677.
- Stevenson, Robert
1968 "The Afro-American Musical Legacy to 1800," *Musical Quarterly*, 54(4): 475-502.
- Ross, Alex
2005 "The King of Spain," *The New Yorker*, May 2.
- Russell, Craig
1995 *Santiago de Murcia's "Codice Saldivar No. 4" A Treasury of Secular Guitar Music from Baroque Mexico*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Taruskin, Richard
1995 *Text and Act: Essays on Musical Performance*. New York and London: Oxford University Press.