

# Round Table: Score Revisions Post-Première

## Introduction

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What happens to the status and identity of a musical work once it has been performed for the first time? Although compositional revisions are an innate part of the creative process (and are often themselves the basis of critical, musicological archaeology), the practice of further revision once the work has been realized via live performance, printed publication or recorded artefact enters potentially challenging territory. Indeed, Western music history tells of many composers who have been subjected to intense scrutiny for having dared to alter a composition that had entered the canon of musical works. This round table is intended to begin a critical dialogue that invites interrogation of a murky, divisive issue which relates, on the one hand, to the private relationship between composer and musical work, and on the other, to the ecological web of collaborators (performers, producers, administrators, artistic directors, publishers, agents, philanthropists) who are intertwined in bringing a new musical composition to life.

Perusing music history, we encounter divergent accounts from the composers themselves regarding the ethics of post-première revision: Judith Bingham believes that there is an element of dishonesty connected with the revision of a score, akin to ‘revising a diary’.<sup>1</sup> For many composers, the right to alter works of music is retained *in perpetuity*. For others, the composition is a ‘gift’ to the performer which, once handed over, should not be revoked. We can add further layers of complexity to the discussion when drawing a distinction between large-scale works, such as those written for the stage or orchestral platform, and chamber works written for specific performers (the orchestra might be less agreeable to change than, say, a duo ensemble). The nature of the score – whether a printed publication prior to the first performance or a handwritten autograph – may also factor in resistance to change. Moreover, we may consider the impact of twentieth-century copyright law on published materials; one need only consider the reworking (and borrowing) of pre-existing material by Handel to highlight how much attitudes towards revision have changed over time.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ‘You can revise of course, but revising is always for me an unsatisfactory experience, unless it’s just the correcting or perfecting of little things. I feel like I’m revising a diary, changing what was the truth at the time. I feel quite squeamish about it. I don’t find it easy to make a flawed piece into a good one, and think it’s probably better to just listen to the flawed version.’ Judith Bingham, quoted in Stephen Farr, ‘The Solo Organ and Harpsichord Works of Judith Bingham’ (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Surrey, 2014), 68.

<sup>2</sup> The literature relating to Handel’s borrowing and revisions is extensive. See Sedley Taylor, *The Indebtedness of Handel to Works by Other Composers: A Presentation of Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906); George J. Buelow, ‘The Case for Handel’s Borrowings: The Judgement of Three Centuries’, *Handel: Tercentenary Collection*, ed. Anthony Hicks and Stanley

Many works from the Western canon have been subjected to post-première revisions. Handel revised his *Messiah* several times during the mid-eighteenth century to suit different performance contexts;<sup>3</sup> revised productions of Italian opera proliferated, particularly through the nineteenth century, as epitomized by the *Aufführungspraxis* of Rossini; on the concert platform, symphonies by Berlioz and Tchaikovsky were heard in modified versions after their initial première performance; and the majority of Bruckner's symphonies were subjected to successive reworking. Beethoven revised both of his first two piano concertos; Debussy, Sibelius, Rachmaninov, Berio and Lachenmann all made revisions to works that had enjoyed a first performance; and the evolution of Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps*, mentioned below by Edwin Roxburgh, provides a noteworthy example. Post-première revisions draw an intriguing thread throughout the history of Western music. So why should it present an issue at all?

Critics seem divided. Hindemith's two versions of *Das Marienleben* (1923 and 1948), which have caused notable irritation to composers, performers and musicologists, are a provocative case study – see, in particular, Glenn Gould's essay 'A Tale of Two Marienlebens' and Robin Holloway's polemic 'Corrective to a Fault'.<sup>4</sup> That Hindemith felt the need to justify his theory-driven revisions with an extensive foreword to the second edition shows his defensive stance. The case study is further problematic given the co-existence of both editions in published form: the revision does not wholly replace the original. This raises challenging ontological questions: does a revised work replace the original (as discussed by Julian Dodd vis-à-vis the analogy of upgraded car models) or are potential revisions an innate component of the original work – in other words, does a work contain an inherent allowance for a certain flexibility towards post-première revision?<sup>5</sup> And if so, how much?

And so to the performers. Particularly in the case of solo works, the performer has probably dedicated many hours of practice, rehearsal and analysis to the preparation of a musical work, encountered for the first time and unheard by others, for the intense demands of live performance. Are they to be expected simply to relearn a revised score without complaint or reimbursement? Do they not retain the right to another performance of the work, or was all of that endeavour solely at the service of a single première? Some works are left unaltered from the moment they are handed from composer to performer; others are continually workshopped and revised, against criteria such as reception (did the audience like it?), technique (were the performers working too hard for a given effect?) and structure (was that middle section longer

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Sadie (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), 61–82; and Richard Taruskin, 'Borrowing', *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 6 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), ii: *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, 327–40.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Burrows, *Handel: Messiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 32–46.

<sup>4</sup> Glenn Gould, 'A Tale of Two Marienlebens', *Das Marienleben* (CD liner notes, Sony BMG, B001UC189E, 1978, 1995), repr. in *The Glenn Gould Reader*, ed. Tim Page (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 151–63; Robin Holloway, 'Corrective to a Fault', *The Spectator*, 27 March 2010. See also Simon Desbruslais, *The Music and Music Theory of Paul Hindemith* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2018), 177–221. It should be noted that one of the points for antagonism in Hindemith's revisions was its basis in a theory, which ran against the grain of more abstract artistic endeavour.

<sup>5</sup> Julian Dodds, *Works of Music: An Essay in Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 55–6. See also Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) for a discussion of the concept of 'variants'.

than necessary?). Questions abound: is the performer *a priori* complicit in post-première revisions? What of the contractual and ethical rights of patrons, commissioning organizations and publishers? What if there is a change in dedicatee between versions? We can observe the strict approach of the pianist Paul Wittgenstein, who would secure exclusive performing rights to his commissions for at least five years after their completion; indeed, he was ‘notorious for collecting full scores and orchestral parts of these [new] works after each performance to prevent them going astray’.<sup>6</sup>

‘Score Revisions Post-Première’ includes four articles following this introduction. The first two foreground the views of the musicologist: David Maw examines the concept of post-première revisions in medieval music, namely that of Guillaume de Machaut, while Charles Wilson explores Hans Werner Henze’s re-evaluation of his entire output, which led to retrospective changes affecting nearly a quarter of his works to date. Both articles interrogate authorship control through self-cataloguing – including Machaut’s now lost ‘Book’ (and its resonances through the Machaut manuscripts) and Henze’s *Ein Werkverzeichnis, 1946–1996*. Maw explores what he coins the ‘Machaldian dilemma’ (the challenge of simultaneously available work versions), which is echoed in Wilson’s discussion of the posthumous legacy of Henze’s revisions in the internet age, where the ongoing circulation of withdrawn titles invokes wider issues concerning an individual subject’s right to control information, including the much-debated ‘right to be forgotten’. Two subsequent articles stem from composers who provide personal views on post-première revisions. Edwin Roxburgh focuses on issues of performance pragmatism, particularly in relation to conductor competency, while drawing upon contemporary examples across the twentieth century. Tom Armstrong narrates and examines the specific reworking of his *Dance Maze* into three separate compositions. It is noteworthy that both Roxburgh and Armstrong are drawn towards the issue of how revision practice might interact with open works that include a greater emphasis on performer freedom and decision-making.

Such is the divisive nature of the topic that this round table is intended to stimulate more wide-ranging discussion. There are many issues not covered which would benefit from interrogation. What of commission and performance fees for revised works? How do these issues interact with revised recordings? (Glenn Gould’s two *Goldberg Variations* recordings of 1955 and 1981 are a case in point.<sup>7</sup>) I shall end with two questions for the reader to consider: should the première performance represent the final, fixed composition? And from the moment of the première, does the work remain the property of the composer?

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<sup>6</sup> Clare Hammond, ‘To Conceal or Reveal: Left-Hand Pianism with Particular Reference to Ravel’s *Concerto pour la main gauche* and Britten’s *Diversions*’ (Ph.D. dissertation, City University London, 2012), 152–3. See also Georg Predota, ‘Badgering the Creative Genius: Paul Wittgenstein and the Prerogative of Musical Patronage’, *Empty Sleeve: Der Musiker und Mäzen Paul Wittgenstein*, ed. Irene Suchy (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2006), 71–102.

<sup>7</sup> Glenn Gould retired from live performance to focus on recording, precisely because he wanted the privilege to revise: ‘The most creative artists are able to tinker and to perfect’ (*The Glenn Gould Reader*, ed. Page, xxi).