Limits Of The Translation Of Notes Written In Sounds: The Example Of The Musical Quest For Authenticity In The Restitution Of Baroque Music

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Playing Bach In His Own Way?

The term authenticity, which was quickly associated with the musical movement that focused on the rediscovery of works from the repertoire of early music and its restitution under the conditions that would have presided over their creations, was very early considered suspect.[1] Thus, the conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt (1929-2016), who participated greatly in this movement, was able to affirm that: "Words as harmless as 'authenticity' include a negative nuance; one contests a priori to its followers a musical practice committed, even, often, competent."[2] As one can guess here, authentic could quickly turn into an insult . . . Nevertheless, authenticity is a notion that has guided and served as a standard-bearer for the rediscovery of early music and its interpretation. Thus, the brave pioneers could pretend to be authentic in their musical approach as compared to the reactionaries who essentially played Bach and Handel with a full orchestra, a style inherited from the nineteenth century, and without resorting to the instruments that had served to convey this music[3] when it was created. These musicians,

[1] We have rather quickly preferred historically informed interpretation rather than authenticity. The idea of historically informed being more relative and open than that of authenticity.
[2] Harnoncourt N. (1982). *Le Discours musical*. Paris, Gallimard. 1984. p. 95.
[3] Thus, in the mid-sixties, two very different versions of Johann Sebastian Bach's Brandenburg Concertos coexisted. The improbable and almost anachronistic recording conducted by Herbert Von Karajan in 1966 at the head of the sumptuous Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra for the firm Deutsch Gramophone and the one made by Nikolaus Harnoncourt at the head of the Vienna Concentus Musicus composed of period instruments, two years earlier in 1964, for the firm Teldec.

rediscovering Baroque music and its rules of interpretation, endeavored to translate, in the most authentically possible way, sounds of scores that, for some, had not been played for centuries.

Such is the case of the great harpsichordist Wanda Landowska (1879-1959) who said: “You are free to play Bach in your own way; I play it in his own way.” This affirmation can today lend itself to a knowing smile. Indeed, while it is undeniable that Wanda Landowska has made great efforts in the past to interpret Bach’s music according to criteria that seemed to her to be a genuine search for authenticity,[4] we are obliged to recognize, despite all the admiration that we can give it, that her way of interpreting Bach is much more in her own way than that of Bach. At least we can imagine it that way today in the light of the musicological works of the last fifty years; which is informed as much by scholarly research as by the ‘taste’ of an era, which always favors certain options to the detriment of others and without a doubt, will, moreover, be very different in another fifty years.

Wanda Landowska’s choice of her instrument, which we hardly dare name today as a harpsichord,[5] is a sufficient proof of this state of mind as it is quite far from the instruments that we usually classify under this category. Thus she could affirm without being too troubled by what she is saying that: “I know very well that the arrangement of the registers on the harpsichords of

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[4] His work published in 1909 at the Mercure de France shows the rigor of his approach. Landowska W. (1909). *Renaissance du clavecin au XXème siècle. Musique ancienne.* Paris, Library Of The Untraceable. 2005.

[5] On this subject, Harnoncourt does not mince words: "We made keyboard instruments of all sizes and in all price ranges, which were built like pianos and whose strings were pinched by hard leather plectrums, and more later in different synthetic materials. These instruments were called harpsichords, while there was between them and the harpsichord about the same difference in sound as between a bad child's violin and a Stradivarius. The mistake went unnoticed, because the criteria were lacking, since the musicians did not know at all how a harpsichord should sound.” Harnoncourt N. (1982). op. cit. p. 97.

the time of Bach differed somewhat[6] from that of my Pleyel. But what does it matter to me if I use means that are not exactly those that Bach could have used in order to obtain the right effect."[7]

How should we appreciate the meaning of authenticity, if we want to continue using this term? Harry Haskell in his highly researched book, *The Voices Of A Renewal, Old Music And Its Interpretation Of Mendelssohn Today,* risks a beginning of a definition precisely from the judgement given by Wanda Landowska. Thus he proposes that: "By striving to play Bach as he would have done, Wanda Landowska has mostly managed to play it in her own way. Can not fidelity to oneself be the beginning of authenticity? "[8]

If we understand what the author tries to approach here from this delicate notion of "fidelity to oneself" we cannot not miss the nonoperative dimension. Is it enough to be "true to yourself" to be on the road to authenticity? The answer is no! Karajan performing Bach in 1966 at the head of the Berlin Philharmonic is certainly true to himself, being in possession of an absolute coherence with what constitutes him as a musician (beautiful sound, dynamics, and romantic phrasings, perfect accuracy of intonation …), however, when we listen to today's beautiful but strange recording of the *Brandenburg Concertos* it is quite easy to believe that it cannot be considered authentic. Would Bach recognize this as his work? This is unlikely to be the case.

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[6] This is a mild euphemism. Indeed, the firm Pleyel who built a harpsichord for the Paris World Fair in 1889 was inspired more by concert pianos of the eighteenth which, still in service, could serve as a model. The Large Concert Model used by Wanda Landowska inherits the technology developed for the piano (with strings spun at high tension) and resolutely departs from the historical harpsichords made during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The general appearance is that of a grand piano. The body is heavy and massive, without bottom and with reinforcements of important sections. The soundboard is made of plywood of 3 layers of 2 mm each in spruce and its dam is similar to that of a piano. This instrument, for which Manuel de Falla and Francis Poulenc composed concertos played by Wanda Landowska, has such specific sound characteristics that it would be very adventurous to use it today in these works composed by an eighteenth century instrument copy. The whole question of the singularity of the articulation of the instrument, of the timbre which is linked to it, and of the work in which they are expressed, is here put.

[7] Cited by Haskell H. (1988). *Les voix d'un renouveau. La musique ancienne et son interprétation de Mendelssohn à nos jours*. Arles, Actes Sud. 2013. p. 99.

[8] *Ibid*. p. 305.

"Fidelity to oneself" cannot therefore be the criterion for judging an approach aimed at a faithful interpretation.

Another mechanism, first and more subjective, seems to me necessary. The mechanism that gives the sense of authenticity to the approach of Nikolaus Harnoncourt in 1964, despite the defects that can not fail to catch our ears more than fifty years later, as for example the accuracy of sometimes random intonation that made Jean-Luc Macia say in a comparative discography of Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos* published in the magazine *Diapason* on November 1998 that: "This version remains unique for its emotional charge and its historical value more than for it's intrinsic qualities." What was unanimously recognized and praised, but which divided listeners, is the shock related to the colors and therefore to the timbres of the orchestra. What directs Harnoncourt seems to be a desire to highlight the original instruments even if they can surprise or even disturb or shock the listener. This approach is what I propose to name: the transference of the unheard.[9] The unprecedented that would announce a sound not yet arrived, not completely stabilized, but that the interpreter tries to approach on the occasion of its rendering. It is this unheard that I propose to think about through the idea of timbre. Thus, Wanda Landowska, despite an instrument rather far from historical harpsichords, and Nikolaus Harnoncourt, despite historical instruments sometimes still incompletely mastered, aim for a sound beyond what is immediately offered to the ear. Certainly, the result is not perfect.[10] And Nikolaus Harnoncourt is a musician far too accomplished not to have known this. Why, then, is he satisfied with it? Because what he was aiming for was beyond what was heard. Where Karajan focused on immediate near-perfect sonic rendering that delights our ears, Landowska and Harnoncourt ventured to aim for something beyond the musical pleasure that was guided by this more than (beyond). Not a beautiful sound but a sound that is 'right' even in its mistakes. What allows that

[9] Vives J.-M. (2012). *La voix sur le divan*. Paris. Aubier.
[10] This is no longer the case today. The popularity of the old instruments and the instrumentalists who play it have made enormous progress in more than fifty years and, for a long time, a baroque orchestra no longer meets this type of difficulties.

the recordings of Landowska and the first recordings of Harnoncourt are not reduced to mere testimonies of the evolution of the interpretation of the old music is that we perceive in them, still today, this searching, stammering but assured, shaping their quest for an incredible sound coming from the restoration of the timbres. It seems to me that Harnoncourt approaches this when he said that: “It’s about knowing *why* a musician decides for this or that sonic medium."[11] After all, it’s right that these sounds heard again after more than a hundred years of silence will still make enthusiastic critics and admirers tear up.

The Timbre: Real Dimension Of The Musical Sound

We must, to clarify our hypothesis, define here further what we mean by timbre, this notion being far from unanimous.[12] For this, let’s quickly recall what are the musical parameters of the sound:

- The pitch (a serious / acute sound) measurable in Hertz which determine the frequency.
- The duration (a short / long sound) measurable in seconds.
- The volume, its intensity (a soft / loud sound) measurable in decibels.
- The timbre which, according to Émile Littré’s definition, is: “the character of a sound regardless of its placement in the scale, a characteristic of harmonic sounds that coexist with the fundamental sound and forms a kind of territory accompanying it. This surface accompanying the fundamental sound, the elements of which the ear does not discern, is precisely the timbre.”

The last parameter, the timbre, is the most enigmatic and the most difficult to delimit of all four parameters.[13] Unlike pitch, duration, and volume, it is not measured and therefore escapes

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[11] Harnoncourt N. (1982). op. cit. p. 98. Harnoncourt emphasizes in italics.

[12] Makis Solomos has made an accurate survey of the evolution of the notion of timbre and the difficulties that are associated with its use.
Salomos M. (2013). *From Music To Sound: The Emergence Of Sound In Twentieth And Twenty-First Century Music.* Rennes. P.U.R. p. 23-85.

[13] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who seems to have been the first to have formalized the word timbre in its modern form, had rightly spotted this limit. Thus he says in 1767 in his *Dictionnaire*

any possibility of being fully identified and defined. “One cannot define it in one word,” says composer Charles Koeclin (1867-1950) about the timbre on the occasion of his *Treatise On Orchestration*.[14] Yet it is, and this is one of its paradoxes, immediately identifiable. So much so that the timbre is for a person’s voice the equivalent of fingerprints, one speaks in fact of a voice print.

Thus, the timbre is what makes a sound produced at the same pitch, with the same duration, with the same volume, not sound like any other, thus *creating a unique and singular vibration*. The timbre characterizes what is also called the color of the sound. The color of the sound is never pure, but results from a complex entanglement in which other sound frequencies (harmonics, reverberations) are grafted onto the initial frequency. The timbre also depends on the temporal contour of the sound (attack, fall, maintenance, termination). It is impossible to measure a timbre, but its sound spectrum can be displayed using analyzers which identify and make it possible to visualize the various frequencies which are associated with it. Two sounds can have the same volume and the same power, they cannot have the same timbre.

The timbre is not knowable by direct measurement but it is however discernible. We do not know a timbre, but we discern it. At this point, to speak of the timbre we will be forced to use terms that introduce a comparison with other senses: a timbre can be soft or hard, veiled or bursting . . . We understand that this detour forced by analogies and other metaphors to vainly attempt to define a timbre may annoy those who would like the relationship with the musical tone to be without any remainder, removing thereby from the music whatever could not be said, measured, or calculated.

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de musique: "However nobody that I know has examined the sound in this part (the timbre); which . . . will perhaps find difficulties: because the quality of the timbre can depend neither on the number of vibrations, which is the degree of serious to acute, nor the size or strength of these same vibrations, which is the degree of the strong to the weak. It will therefore be necessary to find in the sound body a third cause different from these two to explain this third quality of the sound and its differences; *which, perhaps, is not too easy*. Quoted by Makis Solomos. Solomos M. (2013). *op. cit.* p. 26. It is we who emphasize.

[14] Koechlin C. (1944). *Traité d’orchestration*. Paris. Max Eschig. 1954. p. 12.

From the elements developed above which show that the timbre is what escapes the power of symbolization in that it remains not immediately translatable in numbers, measures, or words, we can affirm that it constitutes the real dimension of the instrument or the voice that produces it. For psychoanalytic theory, the real is that dimension of the world which imposes a limit on knowledge, a limit from which it cannot be apprehended but rather only delimited and deduced; the real in its entirety and complexity is the impossible to say. The timbre falls well within this dimension of the impossible: the words can try to approach it but never manage to grasp it. I make the assumption that the pioneers of early music were those who wanted to hear a violin, a voice, an oboe whose timbres had not been heard and for which there was no agreement.

It is on this real dimension that the instrumentalist and the listener will hang their desire to hear this sound[15] and not another, even if this sound is not the most perfect at the moment where it is found and produced. This desire for timbre is illustrated in a striking way among those who love lyrics and who prefer the voice of this or that singer as being the one that will thrill them, or even make them soar to a state of ecstasy.[16] An illustration of this *melomania*[17] could be found in the famous clashes between the admirers of Maria Callas and

[15] It is on this issue of timbre that, I believe, the choice of a musical instrument is also made for a child who does not yet know the full extent of the instrumentarium at her disposal. So my 5-year-old daughter, hearing Mozart's clarinet concerto on the radio, asked me for the name of the instrument that was playing, and confidently said that she would play the clarinet; which she did. We see here on the occasion of a masterpiece a timbre expressing a call. This is what we could call the transfer to the real, or the unheard, of the timbre.

[16] A scene in Gérard Corbiau's *Farinelli* (1994) illustrates with great accuracy the effect of the timbre on the listener's body. The famous castrato begins a tune and sees a distracted listener flipping through a book and drinking tea in her box. He interrupts the orchestra and begins to inflate a sound that seems to never end. The young woman becomes attentive, throbs, blushes and finally surrenders . . . lyrical ecstasy and enjoyment related not to a melody or rhythm. This is only a note held, so it is a timbre that touches the listener and makes her faint.

[17] The Greek language has a certain number of compounds in-manês (adjectives) and -mania (nouns), which refer to various forms of follies or passions: the music lover is, etymologically, crazy about music (melos). The language did not choose to make a lover of music, a 'melophile,' but a maniac, someone who is possessed . . . Let's say that our valiant conquistadors, gone in search of the lost timbre, were possessed by this question. So we could

those of Renata Tebaldi. The frenzied search for a single preferred timbre by the fan as the place from which 'it' calls to them suggests that they hear in the timbre a response. The enthusiast perceives its object there and tries to approach it, even to seize it . . .[18]

This concept of timbre is however so problematic that some authors went so far as to propose to do without it. Thus Michel Chion does not hesitate to affirm that: "Other notions must be abandoned, since they are, behind their false obviousness, causalist notions unfit to qualify the sound. This is the case of the timbre. After Schaeffer, we must therefore repeat that the concept of 'timbre,' always taught as scientifically valid, is an amalgam without consistency of various inputs."[19] The charge is severe and this is by no means a provocation on the part of this author who has so precisely studied the dynamics of sound but rather the highlighting of the limits of this notion to account for contemporary developments in music. Nevertheless, for the period which interests us this notion remains insurmountable. It is to make some specific timbres resonate that Monteverdi so precisely indicated the composition of the orchestra on the cover page of *Orfeo's* score and that Bach composed his *Brandenburg Concertos*.

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venture to say they were enchanted by these *timbres and none others*. It is this notion of timbres which underlies my hypothesis and makes it possible for me to answer the question of Nikolaus Harnoncourt quoted above: — "*Why* a musician decides for this or that sound medium?" Because, I assume, he wants to hear and sound this timbre and not another.

[18] As we can see in the movie *Diva* (1981) by Jean-Jacques Beinex where Jules, a young postman, is fascinated by a famous diva, Cynthia Hawkins, who never agreed to make recordings of her voice. At a Paris concert at the Bouffes-du-Nord theater, Jules secretly recorded her recital. After receiving an autograph from the diva, he steals her dress behind the scenes and then runs away. Unknowingly, Jules also comes into possession of another record sought by him, by thugs turning the quest for the voice into a dangerous car chase.
The Jules Verne novel T*he Carpathian Castle* (1889) also deals with this possession by and of the voice.

[19] Chion M. (1998). *Le son. Ouïr, écouter, observer.* Paris. Armand Colin. 2018. p. 184.

"The Very Sound That This Music Was Making"

This hypothesis of a transference by the concert audience onto the timbre can already be spotted in the works by Philippe Beaussant thirty years ago who, while the baroque movement was beginning to forcefully impose itself in the concert halls, the festivals, and the houses of opera,[20] did not hesitate to assert that: "it is possible to communicate with the music of an era not only by the forms it transmitted to us, but through *the very sound that this music made* . . ."[21] It is interesting that Philippe Beaussant uses the term 'noise' which refers us here to the sound material that can be located on the side of what escapes measurement, precisely where we could locate the timbre. Indeed, as Michel Chion has perfectly shown, the instrument that produces a note written on the score also produces spurious noises that, if they are not noted on the score, belong to the musical sound production:[22] the clinking of keys for the flute or the clarinet, the acute slips created by the displacement of the fingers on the strings of the guitar, the indistinct deep bass rumbles of the double bass or the organ, and the friction of the bow on the strings of the violin . . . All these sounds can be perceived as noises which actively participate in the constitution of the timbre of the instrument. From there, we could say that the music stands on and against the

[20] The aesthetic shock associated with the performance of Lully's opera, *Atys,* in 1987, in a staging by Jean-Marie Villégier and directed by William Christie at the head of the flourishing Arts (the representation of which has been such a huge success with the public that it was difficult to foresee) marks in a certain way the victory of the baroque camp. Ancient music is no longer confined to a few specialized and peripheral festivals but now attracts a large audience who is enthusiastic about a work that obeys codes that have nothing to do with those of nineteenth-century opera and yet succeeds in touching them and convincing them beyond the 300 years that separate them from the creation of the work.

[21] Beaussant Ph. (1988). *Vous avez dit baroque*? Arles. Southern Actes. 1994. p. 18. The italics are from the author.

[22] Chion M. (1998). *op. cit.* p. 71-79.

noise which in return forever haunts it through the timbre, forcing it to pay its tribute to the real.

André Schaeffner (1895-1980), an important French anthropologist and ethnomusicologist who led the ethnomusicology department of the Musée de l'Homme, gave an interesting illustration of the relationship between music and noise in his book *The Origins Of Musical Instruments*.[23] He quotes Gide, who spotted on his trip to Chad how much the musicians of this country, "horrified by a too well-defined sound, need to disturb and drown its contours"[24] by the adding and intermingling body sounds so that the vibration of the one follows on that of the other. The sound thus produced is no longer pure but incorporates a dimension of the contour of random, equally interesting fiery noise. Rather surprisingly at first glance, André Schaeffner goes further and compares this with ornaments or amenities in the French harpsichord music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Producing agreements named biting, pinched, tremolo, flattering by which, according to the magnificent expression of Schaeffner, "an old desire for noise is still heightened by the pure 'contour' of sounds."[25] The pioneers of the Baroque movement, attaching themselves to the instruments that had been used by the composers, would be those who would not have been horrified by this "old desire for noise."[26]

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[23] Schaeffner A. (1968). *Origine des instruments de musique. Introduction ethnologique à l'histoire de la musique instrumentale*. Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales. Paris. 1994.
[24] Ibid. p. 52.
[25] Ibid. p. 53.
[26] A little girl around me, one day when she was attending the recital of a famous harpsichordist friend of her parents, was asked by the concert artist the following question: "Do you like the harpsichord?" To which the girl answered: "Yes, but it's a little ugly . . ." This little girl who had become a musician herself today no doubt heard "that old desire for noise" that haunts the harpsichord and that the cultured listener represses by focusing on the "pure contour of sounds." It is amusing to note that Rousseau could, like this little girl, say: "There are even

Philippe Beaussant insists in this direction and specifies that: "All these questions (tuning fork, temperament, uneven notes . . .) are important, and we must speak about it: but they are only technical. They have meaning only in the perspective, which alone is fundamental, of a concern, a search, for sound, the *color of sound*, the *truth of sound*, the *sound truth of a work*. What has oriented and directed the new relationship that has been established between performers and early music is neither the nostalgia of the 415,[27] nor the worship of the white lanes, nor the ritual of dotted notes, nor even fundamentally the desire to find historical authenticity. It is because some have gone "in search of the lost sound," and others have not. Hyphenation is exactly at this point."[28]

Translated in the terms that are ours it would become: the "baroqueux" are the ones who have transferred onto, and allowed themselves to be guided by, this forgotten even rejected 'unheard' that was the timbre of instruments and voices; this real which, while escaping measurement, gave direction to their step (advance).

It is therefore interesting to note that one of the essential moments of this reconquest movement was the transfer of the *counter-tenor voice* from the religious scene (the choir) to the secular scene where it became, strictly speaking, the *megaphone* of the musical revival during the years 1940 and 1950. The singer who ensured this transference is Alfred Deller (1912-1979). Alfred Deller proposed an unheard in the true sense of the term, a not yet

instruments, such as the harpsichord, which are both deaf and sour; and it's the worst timbre," Quoted by Makis Solomos. (2013). op. cit. p. 26.

[27] The pitch of the tuning fork is preferentially used by the baroque instrumentalists but can also fluctuate while the tuning fork is stabilized at 440 Hz. The contemporary tuning fork (440) would be half a step higher than the baroque tuning fork (415).

[28] Beaussant Ph. (1988). op. cit. p. 19. The author always highlights with italics.

heard, by rendering in his concerts and recordings the timbre, a sonority forgotten because it had been combined with the masteries and the English choirs where it still existed.

This revelation was not without consequences and Philippe Beaussant amuses himself with the horrified transports of some critics listening to this voice interpreting the *Ode To Sainte Cécile* by Purcell: "I remember . . . outraged transports, furious altercations, which made my radio shake when Antoine Golea's rocky voice came up: "It's indecent . . . it's obscene . . . I can not get rid of these androgyne sounds . . ."[29]

But what was the specificity and the burden, intolerable for some, of Alfred Deller's approach? Not only did he revive Elizabethan music, but he did so by returning the timbre which was indissolubly linked to it.[30] The British composer Michael Tipett (1905-1998) did not make a mistake when he said that Deller's voice traced the centuries backwards. The importance of the rediscovery of the countertenor's timbre is in line with the assertion of Arnold Dolmetsch (1858-1940), a naturalized British Franco-Swiss musicologist, violinist and instrument maker who worked all his life for the rehabilitation old music with authentic practices and who from 1930 stated bluntly that: "the study of music from whatever period it comes . . . should begin with that of the instruments of the said period."[31] We find here the idea of a necessary negotiation between the instrumentalist, the appropriate instrument, and the interpreted repertoire. A negotiation that involves losses for it to succeed and that

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[29] Beaussant Ph. (1988). *op. cit.* p. 48.
[30] Philippe Herreweghe has pushed this research into its most successful practical consequences by choosing to create or borrow the phalanges allowing him to have the most appropriate vocal or musical group for each of the repertoires that he addresses: the Collegium Vocal to interpret the German vocal baroque and the Royal Chapel for French baroque. The orchestra of the Champs-Élysées, created in 1991, to interpret the classical and romantic repertoire. The ephemeral European vocal ensemble was used to interpret the polyphonies of the Renaissance. And finally the use of the Oblique Music Ensemble to interpret contemporary music.
[31] Cited by Haskell H. (1988). *op. cit.* p. 295.

will specify the quest for musical authenticity. Thus, if we return to the recording of the *Brandenburg Concertos* performed by Harnoncourt with the Concentus Musicus in Vienna in 1964, it is clear that the conductor agrees with the choices he makes to lose the sureness of intonation, and sometimes the correctness too, in order to gain in richness of colors and the timbres of the instruments at times on the occasion of this recording. It is the unheard of timbres of the instruments of the eighteenth century that guides his work. Harnoncourt poses the question in these terms: "Am I willing, for such or such conquest, to pay the price inscribed in the very nature of the thing? To lose authenticity, for example, to gain in power, nuances and subtle colors as well as technical ease (piano); or to take up a perfect evenness in terms of dynamics and intonation of all usable semitones by losing the specific intonation of each tone and the individual timbre of practically every note (flute, among others)? Examples of this kind could be given for almost every instrument. Most often, in fact, fascinated by the 'improvement' obtained each time, it was not at first noticed that it was also necessary to sacrifice something at the same time; much less, the object of this sacrifice."[32]

This quest for sound is not specific to the Baroque process — even if it is particularly active there — and Philippe Beaussant in 2001, during an interview, stated with acuity that: "I could conclude by adding that the Baroque phenomenon of recent years is not isolated. It is parallel to the discovery, in other areas, of the sound specificity of non-European music, for example. It is parallel to the discovery, in contemporary music, of a splendor that also, in

[32] Harnoncourt N. (1982). *op. cit.* Paris, Gallimard. 1984. p. 91.

its own way, exceeds the standard of the symphony orchestra. And, therefore, I think it's a phenomenon that is part of a much broader movement that is a new listening to music."[33]

And Today?

It is clear to everyone today that the active minority of the baroquex *timbres* has won: the old music ensembles playing on period instruments or on copies have invaded the musical landscape and are imposing themselves on international festivals of the most exclusive operas such as Salzburg or Aix en Provence to accompany the Monteverdi, Charpentier, Handel or Mozart operas. For their part, the young instrumentalists choose to play on the instrument that best suits the repertoire played— ranging from a baroque violin mounted with gut strings set in vibration by a specific bow for the interpretation of pre-classical works to a modern violin. The great symphony orchestras playing on modern instruments are unlikely to interpret the Baroque repertoire; and when they do it is under the baton of leaders familiar with the historically informed interpretation such Nikolaus Harnoncourt or John Elliot Gardiner who then transmit to them knowledge acquired elsewhere. Would everything go for the better in a world that has become "baroque" again?

It seems that this is not quite the case. Indeed, here and there voices rise up regretting the institutionalization of this practice which could wind up repeating itself and could become as sclerotic and sclerosing as that against which it was built during the twentieth century. The process that happened was as follows: the disturbing timbres— countertenor, harpsichords, natural wind instruments and other wooden flutes— were tamed by the

[33]Beaussant Ph. (2001). « À la recherche du son perdu ». *Le son des musiques. Entre technologie et esthétique*. François Delalande (under the direction). Paris, INA-Buchet/Chastel. p. 115.

instrumentalists. Intonation and accuracy is no longer a problem that might annoy or repel the listeners, now the plebiscite. The transference onto the unheard is fading. For example, the counter-tenor voices that had been scandalous with Alfred Deller are now recipes . . . The recordings asking for them sell for thousands of copies. And Franco Fagioli, the countertenor Argentine star, a powerful mezzo far from the fine and ethereal voice of the pioneer Alfred Deller, receives the enthusiasm of the concert halls, singing the title role of an opera of Cavalli, *Eliogabalo* at the Paris Opera in 2016 and signing an exclusive recording contract at Deutsch Grammophone who, through Herbert Karajan, resisted the baroque revolution in 1966 . . .

Is the quest for lost sound completed, so that musical taste has returned to the time and place when the unheard would be heard less and less? This is not certain. The transference onto the unheard which I hypothesize has directed the movement of rediscovery of the old repertoire still works as musical creation and it is still the unheard that the ears of the nonprofessionals desires to hear.

To give only two examples in connection with the productions realized within the framework of the Cultural Center of Encounters of Ambronay, I will first of all mention the exciting recording of the *Diluvio Universale* (created in Messina in 1682) directed by Leonardo Garcia Alarcon in 2011.[34] By soliciting the Iranian percussionist Keyvan Chemirani, whose improvisations in zabre, oud, and tambourine create seasides of exotic sounds between the lamentations of the choruses and the interventions of the soloists,

[34] *Il Diluvio universale* de Michelangelo Falvetti. Cappella Mediterranea, Chœur de Namur direction : L. García Alarcón. 1 CD Ambronay Éditions. 2011.

Alarcon defies the listener, leading him to hear with a renewed way the timbre of voices and instruments.

Another example of this always active quest is the remarkable recording of the young Prisma ensemble:[35] *The Seasons*. Critics are not mistaken. What is put forward once again is "this old desire for noise" in front of which the young instrumentalists do not retreat. What is remarkable about Prisma, beyond their perfect musicality and the instrumental qualities of each performer, is their great inventiveness. This is expressed first in improvised little preludes: for spring, the flute of Elisabeth Champollion allows us to hear the wing beats of butterflies (yes, yes!); in summer, it is Franciska Anna Hadju's violin that turns into a whirring insect; in autumn, the lute of Alon Sariel evokes the nostalgia of falling leaves; and to introduce the winter, it is the turn of David Budai's viol to evoke the weight of the ice.[36] The *weight*, the *beating*, the *whirring* . . . so many terms that do not relate directly to the musical sound but points out its acquaintance with the noise that haunts it and makes it pulsate. It is this pulsating of the real that continues to guide the inspired interpreters and renew, again and again, the quest for timbre forever lost and yet still always desired.

The rendering grates, that's for sure. The idea of authenticity has been abandoned. The transformation of the notes deposited on the score into sounds produced by instruments is only an ephemeral realization and does not claim to be what Lully, Charpentier, Handel or Bach heard. Nevertheless, it is this unheard-of, from which the music is made and which makes it possible, which reveals itself, *in fine*, at the same time limited to a perfect rendering and a further rendering.

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[35] *Les Saisons*. Ensemble Prisma. 1 CD Ambronay Éditions. 2018.
[36] Cécile Glaenzer. December, 13, 2018, for the ResMusica site. https://www.resmusica.com/2018/12/13/ensemble-prisma-the-seasons-ambronay/.

trans. by Andrew Stein