

## BOOK REVIEW

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**Julian Dodd.** *Being True to Works of Music*

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**E-book reviewed by Sevastiana Nourou**

The concept of being true to works of music and how true a performer is to the composer's work has been an ongoing debate for many years. The idea of authenticity in the performance of musical works raises many questions, such as: what does it mean exactly to be authentic in music; how can one be authentic; to what exactly is one being faithful; which rules and conceptions should one follow to realise that authenticity; and can different performances of the same work both be authentic? Julian Dodd's *Being True to Works of Music* is a short but insightful book about musical authenticity and musical meaning. It will be an important source not only for philosophers and musicologists, but also for students, and, most importantly, performers and listeners. It may also be of interest to general music readers.

In the Preface, Dodd proposes that, in addition to historical fidelity, there is another authenticity in the performance of musical works that has thus far been neglected: to be 'true to works by performing them with insight and understanding' (p. vii). From the beginning, Dodd claims that the value in the performance of works is found in the understanding of the musical meaning, which is recognised through the performer's insight as expressed during performance. He proposes that the two practices of performing works of Western classical music that have value are score compliance authenticity, and interpretive authenticity. Both practices are valued for their own sake, and they therefore have performance final value. After dismissing certain theories and justifying others, Dodd defends his own belief that interpretive authenticity is a constitutive norm that governs our practice of work performance.

In the introductory chapter, Dodd briefly introduces work performance and clarifies that there can be different kinds of authenticities that are determined by the intention of faithfulness. Although these authenticities—personal authenticity, score compliance authenticity, and interpretive authenticity—are discussed in more depth in the following chapters, by introducing them Dodd establishes his claim that performers should not be expected simply to follow faithfully a music score, but to convincingly interpret the meaning of a work.

In Chapter 2, Dodd discusses score compliance authenticity, where performers are true to works when they are faithful to the instructions of the composer. He agrees with Stephen Davies and defends his claim that score compliance authenticity is a performance value. He also challenges, among others, Roger Scruton, Aaron Ridley, and Peter Kivy. The main issue in this chapter is what kind of performance value *is* score compliance authenticity, and on what grounds does it have value? Dodd also questions which set of notational and performance conventions should be used, referring briefly to historical authenticity, which is discussed in the following chapter. He concludes that in the practice of work performance, a performance is better when it is more compliant to the score. Therefore, because score compliance authenticity enhances our understanding of the work, it has final value and it is valued for its own sake.

Chapter 3, 'Historicizing Score Compliance Authenticity,' focuses on the historical aspect of being compliant to the score and its musico-historical context: how to be faithful to the score instructions but also to the performance practices of the composer when the work was written. By addressing different opinions on performance and reception, Dodd sums up that, even though score compliance is a performance value, complying with historicised scores is not. A historical approach does not have performance value; instead, it is a performance style—an interpretive style. Rather than historicism, Dodd favours a tradition-based approach, arguing that since a work evolves and develops with musical traditions over time, performers should present to the modern audience an interpretation of the work that is new, yet rooted in tradition.

In the following chapter, 'Against Personal Authenticity,' Dodd denies personal authenticity performance value, as a performance is not better for being personally authentic, even though there are some excellent performances in this category. First, Dodd explains why he disagrees with Kivy's argument of personal authenticity (that it is a performance value because performing is akin to composing, in the same way that arrangements of works are compositions). For Dodd, performers do not create new works, whereas arrangers do; however, this is a different, debatable topic (not all arrangements are considered new works; Stephen Davies, for example, has argued that, when transcriptions are a copy of the original, they are not distinct works, and to be considered as such they must differ immensely from the original).<sup>1</sup> Dodd argues that, although Kivy recognises that there is another kind of faithfulness besides performing a work accurately (when he claims that performance authenticity has final value), Kivy fails to realise that this faithfulness is basically another way of being true to a work, and he wrongly calls it personal authenticity. This variant of faithfulness, for Dodd, is not being faithful to oneself; a work is not used as a vehicle to articulate the artistic personality of the performer to the audience. Instead, it is a different kind of work authenticity with performance value: interpretative authenticity. Interpreting in performance does not mean to express one's artistic personality, but to perform the work in a way that uncovers its meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> See Stephen Davies, 'Transcription, Authenticity and Performance,' *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 28.3 (1988): 216–27.

To this point in the book, Dodd has slowly built his argument that interpretive authenticity is both a constitutive norm and the most fundamental performance value. After dismissing personal authenticity in the previous chapter, in the subsequent one—‘Meaning, Understanding, and Interpretive Authenticity’—Dodd further explains interpretive authenticity and explores how the meaning of a musical work may be determined. He suggests that the meaning is not found in the composer’s intention, but in the way a composer treats the medium. Performers are the voice of the music. They determine insightfully the musical meaning and shape the performance so as to evince an understanding to the audience of ‘why the work is as it is’ (p. 136). Dodd defends his belief that interpretive authenticity is the most basic value, and proposes that performers may ‘sacrifice a little score compliance for the sake of achieving a performance that better reveals elements of the work’s meaning’ (p. 142).

The latter argument leads to the last chapter, in which Dodd concludes that interpretive authenticity has a normative profile. Score compliance authenticity and interpretive authenticity sometimes conflict with each other. As Dodd suggests, when this conflict arises, performers should sacrifice some score instructions in order to have a greater authenticity. As he claims, the literature thus far has not considered in depth what really matters to listeners in the authenticity of performance. Musical works are composed to be understood; therefore, interpretive authenticity uncovers that meaning in greater depth. The book ends with an afterword, where Dodd contextualises his book *Works of Music: An Essay in Ontology* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), and applies his view discussed in *Being True to Works of Music* to see whether it is compatible. After raising issues concerning musical meaning that could potentially come into conflict with his previous work, Dodd explains why they do not, as well as why his claim that ‘departing from full score compliance for the sake of enhancing a performance’s interpretive authenticity’ (p. 175) does not oppose his ontological position published in *Works of Music*.

*Being True to Works of Music* challenges different theories of authenticity, work performance and musical meaning. Dodd explores his argument in clear language without complicating the topic with difficult theories, and, when sophisticated theories that may be unfamiliar to the general reader are used, Dodd clarifies their meaning. In the future, *Being True to Works of Music* could be elaborated upon by considering uncanonised works. Dodd’s examples, especially how listeners perceive authenticity in the performance of a work, are based on works from the Western canon. Therefore, most listeners are aware of the music, and their different listening experiences may influence their understanding and appreciation of the performance of a work. But what happens with unfamiliar works by unfamiliar composers? Is interpretive authenticity still the most fundamental value? When listeners do not recognise the work and cannot distinguish the type of authenticity, how is the performance value of the work criticised, and how is the work appreciated? The answers to these questions may conflict with those of canonised works, especially where the listener’s understanding of musical meaning is concerned, because the authenticity of a work depends upon the level of understanding of that meaning as recognised by listeners.

Dodd’s careful building of his argument that authenticity is fundamental to performance leads to quite a few repetitions. Even though some of these could have been avoided, they, along with the use of clear language, aid the reader in fully comprehending his point. It is for this reason that the book is a great source for students and general readers who may not be completely informed about the different arguments in the literature. As Dodd very

convincingly explains, this kind of authenticity should also be considered by performers, as well as music critics and enthusiasts who may be sceptical about authenticity in the practice of work performance.

**About the Author**

Sevastiania Nourou is a PhD candidate at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her research concerns the reception and influence of Ignaz Moscheles in the nineteenth century, and she has launched a website on Moscheles's concert life. Her research interests include virtuosity, concert programmes and canonicity, piano arrangements and free fantasias, audience reception, listening experience, and attentiveness.