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FROM "SCRIBE TO STAGE" TO "STAGE TO SCRIBE": BRINGING EARLY MUSIC TO ITS AUDIENCE

Izvleček: Razprava se ukvarja s strategijami za večjo dostopnost stare glasbe, pri čemer izhaja iz nedavnega primera delavnice z naslovom »Od zapisa do odra«. Preučuje družbene ovire, dinamiko trga in povezave s pojmovanjem avtentičnosti v stari glasbi ter zagovarja prepoznavanje stare glasbe kot dinamične umetniške oblike, ki spodbuja dialog med zgodovino in sodobnostjo.

Ključne besede: kulturna demokratizacija, stara glasba, sodobnost, glasbeni festivali

Abstract: The article explores strategies to make Early Music more accessible, departing from the "From Scribe to Stage" workshop as a case study. It examines social barriers, market dynamics, and ideological ties to historical authenticity, advocating repositioning Early Music as a dynamic art form fostering dialogue between history and modernity.

Keywords: cultural democratization, Early Music, modernity, music festival

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In August 2024 a workshop titled "From Scribe to Stage: International Audience Engagement Workshop" was held as part of the forty-second Radovljica Festival. The goal was to offer a glimpse behind the scenes of a distinctly specialized craft, allowing general audiences an introduction to the steps an "early musician" takes before presenting their work on the stage.

Initially aimed at audiences with little to no musical background, the organizers soon found it necessary to change their approach on account of the low number of applicants. Thus they removed the entry fee and expanded the workshop's outreach. However, the resulting group of participants was less diverse than anticipated, with most either already familiar with Early Music or, at the very least, actively involved in music-making. In response to these circumstances the workshop shifted toward the format of a typical specialized conference — a significant divergence from its original intent.

This article emerges from a question posed during the course: how can we design a similar activity that would be more appealing to non-musician participants? To address this question, we have decided to divide the article into two sections, allowing each author to contribute from their respective field of study.

The first section explores the democratizing intent of this workshop and its broader social dimension. Since this is inherently a social question, we begin with a reflection on the factors that hinder broader public participation, interrogating what distances Early Music from a wider audience and identifying the barriers that prevent people from attending these events. We examine obstacles beyond economics, such as symbolic accessibility, and use Pierre Bourdieu's theory of action to explore the inequalities that contribute to this detachment. We consider the dynamics of mass-market production and consumption, which are essential for understanding discourses surrounding music and how they are perpetuated.

The second part explores the ideological foundations of Early Music and traces their transformations over time. The very definition of Early Music presents itself as problematic: is it a repertoire bound to a particular historical period, a set of practices that make its performance possible or merely an attitude towards music of the past? Whatever definition one chooses, an engaged relation to history is inevitably presupposed — a relation that, we argue, must be critically questioned. In response, and drawing on authors from Hegelian-Lacanian and Warburgian traditions, such as Slavoj Žižek and Georges Didi-Huberman, we propose a theoretical alternative for the future of the field, one that questions some of its most rigid principles.

SYMBOLIC CHALLENGES IN CULTURAL ACCESS

According to Bourdieu, access to culture is profoundly conditioned by social inequalities, frequently reinforced by the dominant class that has most of the control over the different forms of capital.[1] This structural configuration is reflected in the unequal distribution of cultural

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[1] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 114–115.

products, as well as the obstacles to their access, which can be analyzed in three main dimensions: economic, geographical and symbolic. These barriers not only restrict access but also influence the social relationship between audiences and cultural products and agents.

One of the most evident obstacles is economic, as many of the activities we associate with the upper classes are intrinsically linked to significant expenditures of money. To access cultural products such as museums, concerts or theatres, a financial investment that exceeds the mere cost of admission is required. Associated expenses, such as transportation, free time and intercalated meals, become significant barriers for individuals or groups with less economic capital. These activities surrounding the actual event exemplify part of what Bourdieu describes as the conversion of economic capital into cultural capital, as they reflect the lifestyle and social codes expected to be adhered to in each moment, along with the economic power to consume.[2]

Geographical barriers significantly reinforce these economic — and therefore social — inequalities by restricting access to cultural and educational resources. In many countries most of the cultural offerings are primarily found in urban centres or wealthy areas, with the result that rural or peripheral communities are deprived of regular access to such resources.[3] More than that: the cultural offerings of urban centres tend to define the hierarchy of taste and the production that is considered "highbrow". These barriers not only hinder access but also influence perceptions of cultural participation, making certain practices seem exclusive or out of reach for those in less fortunate locations or spaces.

There are several solutions to consider that can directly impact the geographical and economic distribution of cultural products. These include offering affordable pricing, encouraging local production and organizing tours to reach wider audiences. The Radovljica Festival is an admirable initiative in this regard, because it addresses crucial solutions that have been highly significant for cultural decentralization.

However, even when economic and geographical barriers are surmounted, symbolic obstacles persist. As we saw earlier, these obstacles tend to evolve into something deeper, influencing and entrenching cultural practices and participation. While all these forms of capital are interconnected and mutually influential, it is crucial to analyse the pervasive sentiment of "that's not for us"[4] that is so common among broader audiences. These symbolic inequalities are also mirrored in disparities in access to education, a key mechanism for cultural transmission that can, to some extent, bridge and equalize what is distinctive and otherwise inaccessible through familial transmission.

Symbolic barriers, as conceptualized by Bourdieu, refer to the implicit and often invisible cultural norms, codes and expectations that govern access to certain social and cultural spaces. These barriers are particularly powerful, since they become incorporated in the individuals' *habitus* — the deeply ingrained dispositions and practices shaped by life experiences and social position.[5] As a result, they operate silently, often unnoticed, because they become naturalized as part of how people perceive and interact with the world. The significance of these barriers lies in

2 Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital".
3 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 124.
4 Ibid., 379.
5 Ibid., 170–171.

their subtlety; they do not need to be enforced overtly. Instead, they perpetuate social inequalities by privileging those who possess specific cultural knowledge and behaviours, while quietly excluding those who are unfamiliar with these unspoken rules. Thus symbolic barriers are crucial in maintaining social hierarchies, as they render exclusion almost invisible, reinforcing the dominance of the privileged classes in cultural and social spaces.

Educational institutions play a crucial role in the transmission of cultural capital, providing opportunities to engage with the arts, literature and other enriching cultural experiences. However, disparities in resource allocation create significant variations in the quality and diversity of these opportunities across schools. Some schools can offer richer cultural exposure through programmes such as arts education, field trips and extracurricular activities, while others face limitations that restrict their capacity to provide students with a comprehensive cultural education. This variability exacerbates existing inequalities, since students in less generously resourced environments are less likely to gain access to these cultural resources, further hindering the development of their cultural capital.[6]

Although some practices require the more sustained engagement of a more detailed education, they can also be associated with a subjective experience of taste that is also deeply connected to the realm of aesthetic pleasure. In "Those Things That Hold Us Together: Taste and Sociology", Antoine Hennion argues that the agent's relationship with the practice of taste involves a continuous and reflective disposition, allowing the acquisition of a type of taste through practice and active engagement with the object.[7] This perspective can provide insights into why Classical Music tends to be associated with a taste activity that improves with continued practice and regular exposure. This suggests that a sustained engagement with art stems from a specific aesthetic disposition which, while socially conditioned through the investment it requires, is also inseparably linked to the subjective experience of taste.

Nowadays, when cultural consumption is increasingly characterized by the notion of the "omnivore taste", this interplay between social positioning and subjective engagement takes on new dimensions. The "omnivore taste", as conceptualized by Peterson and Kern, refers to a cultural openness where individuals embrace a wide range of tastes, spanning both "highbrow" and "lowbrow" cultural forms.[8] The growing omnivorousness among high-status individuals reflects a significant transformation in the cultural consumption habits of the dominant class.

While access to a variety of cultural products has broadened, particularly with digital platforms offering everything from classical symphonies to street art documentaries, the ability to engage meaningfully with these experiences still depends on the cultivated aesthetic disposition. This requires time, resources and guidance to develop the capacity to appreciate and understand these diverse cultural forms — resources that are unevenly distributed across social strata. For instance, streaming services may provide access to Early Music performances, but without prior exposure or cultural capital to interpret these forms, they may remain inaccessible or less engaging for some audiences.

6 Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital".

7 Hennion, "Those Things", 108.

8 Peterson and Kern, "Changing Highbrow Taste".

SYMBOLIC ADAPTATION AND CONSUMER DYNAMICS

Reducing these symbolic barriers often requires adapting the cultural codes of a practice to make them accessible to a socially diverse audience. The widespread adoption of new communication technologies and the emergence of generalist discourses play a nearly unavoidable role in this process. As Juan Wang notes, cultural products frequently encounter the dilemma of "'resist' or 'appropriate'"[9] to a logic of consumption, where the public's interest ends up being blended with market values. Thus when the state is expected to mediate between public interest and practices with lower market value, it inevitably finds itself in tension with prevailing economic priorities.

Regarding communication adaptation, the broader and more socially diverse the audience, the more there is a tendency to mistrust their information processing capacities. Communication considers determinant factors for data assimilation, such as attention span, cognitive tools and previously assimilated cultural references. In this case, what leads to symbolic loss is not only the process of synthesis but also the tendency toward a lack of scientific and practice-related rigour outside specialized circuits. This perspective becomes clearer when we revisit the access disparities mentioned earlier. As Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer point out, the decision about what is made widely accessible is ultimately controlled by a small group of agents in positions of power, who increasingly underestimate the ability of general audiences to understand what is being disseminated. Rather than genuinely catering for a diverse audience, this process contributes to a false universality that homogenizes cultural products.[10]

Building on this critique, Yves Evrard takes the notion of false universality further by framing it as a paradigm for the dissemination of cultural actions.[11] Democratizing efforts, often spearheaded by state initiatives, consider the population as a whole and are grounded in cultural values deemed "universal". These efforts frequently result in a canonical approach that prioritizes the dissemination of artistic expressions that are often perceived as elitist.

However, the alternative model of cultural democracy, which privileges freedom of choice and the subjective cognitive and emotional engagement of individuals with works of art, also leads to a "universalist" conception similar to that described by Adorno and Horkheimer. In this context, democratic distribution predominantly reflects the tendency of mass cultural systems to create a "false universality" that homogenizes cultural products, ultimately catering to market-driven or populist demands at the expense of genuine diversity.

In fact, Classical Music in general is already embedded within market logic, particularly in contexts such as films or advertisements, so exposure and adaptation do not appear to be the core issue. Regarding Early Music, we can take as an example the peculiar phenomenon of Gregorian Chant in popular culture during the 1990s, with hits like *Sadeness* by Enigma (1990) or *Ameno* by Era (1996). However, it is safe to assert that this has absolutely nothing to do with what we are addressing here, as it represents an extreme symbolic adaptation, even though it may resonate more with the public's understanding. In these examples we observe that vulnerable-to-market influences entail processes of synthesis, simplification and the adoption of

[9] Wang, "How Classical Music is Embedded?", 113.
[10] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Culture Industry", 96.
[11] Evrard, "Democratizing Culture or Cultural Democracy?".

recognizable codifications that align with more popular practices. For instance, saying that "Vivaldi is 'rock 'n' roll'" serves as an attempt to help people partially grasp its emotional impact by drawing parallels with another musical genre. This, however, entails significant losses — not only in terms of symbolic status but also by steering the practices themselves towards a path of mass universalization. Part of what we are advocating is that Early Music does not need to sound like Taylor Swift, or adopt the same codes, to be considered modern.

Even though there are many examples of the appropriation of these musical genres by the market, it is important to emphasize that they are still stereotyped as elitist. In "How Classical Music is Embedded in a Culture Public Sphere?", Juan Wang argues that the hegemony of market value perpetually reinforces the stereotypical elite functions of Classical Music as markers of class distinction. She states that "neoliberalism increasingly reaffirms classical music as an elite practice".[12] What seems to be suggested here is that the system benefits from framing Classical Music as elitist, extending this perception to Early Music as well, while preserving the direction of generalized production and maintaining the resulting hierarchies of power. For this reason, even though Classical Music is present across all mass communication platforms and is becoming increasingly democratized, the persistence of the stereotype as a branding image shifts the narrative from "that's not for us"[13] to "that's not for everyone, so it's probably not for you". Compounding this is an increasing sentiment that reflects: "This is not for me because I don't want to make the effort". All things considered, even if we aesthetically dress the practice in something more popularly appealing and somewhat related in terms of shared imagination, such as popular TV shows like *Game of Thrones*, people will seek not the Early Music itself but rather the false universality that grants it market value.

These markers of distinction produced by market values seem to obscure the fact that within cultural products such as music distinctions arise across all genres on the basis of codes of inclusion and exclusion. For instance, despite its widespread appeal and commercial nature, rock music continues to produce symbolic barriers through its subgenres, rituals, aesthetics and associated lifestyles. A tuxedo or a band tee are both markers of distinction within their respective cultural contexts, linking them to specific practices and identities. Nevertheless, some musical genres distance themselves socially from notions that have been negotiated as elitist, yet manifest their mechanisms of exclusivity on a different scale. Even so, the broader cultural reach and association with informality as a social concept often make music feel more accessible to audiences, offering an entry point into cultural participation perceived as less intimidating in comparison with more formal genres.

To some extent, it is possible to analyse Early Music within the same parameters used for Classical Music, as we have done so far. At this point, it is essential to consider that when we speak about audiences and the democratization of music, we are addressing barriers to recognition. These barriers obscure what is distinct and make it necessary to understand the accessibility of these practices for individuals for whom they remain a mystery — those who lack familiarity with such practices because they have not previously been involved in them. Thus it is reasonable to raise questions about the accessibility of musical products, using examples

[12] Wang, "How Classical Music is Embedded?", 115.

[13] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 379.

frequently discussed by musicologists, such as Classical Music, broadly speaking, and from the perspective of its associated stereotypes.

However, it is now time to consider the symbolic barriers specifically associated with Early Music, bearing in mind that this movement emerged in opposition to what is conventionally referred to as Classical Music. Indeed, as we will see, it arose as a counter-movement to the canonical structures that create distance between producers and public, portraying musicians and composers as elevated and reinforcing values of distinction that imply that this music is not for everyone. Early Music, however, introduces a series of factors that make it even more exclusive.

From a sociological perspective, Early Music emphasizes exclusivity through its cultural practices due to the highly specialized and socially encoded nature of this activity. There are very few links between Early Music and what people are commonly exposed to and are capable of recognizing. This, however, represents the most superficial aspect of the issue. At its core, Early Music is tied to a much deeper challenge: the insistence on the authority of the past hinders democratization, since it forms the basis of significant symbolic barriers for non-specialized audiences, as we shall see.

FROM NINETEENTH-CENTURY REVIVALISM TO HIP

In the early nineteenth century a movement known as Cecilianism swept across Europe advocating a return to the ideals and aesthetics of the past. In music, figures such as Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina were upheld as symbols of purity and authority, around which numerous choral societies were established, elevating *a cappella* music as both an emblem of virtuosity and a vehicle for moral uplift.[14]

Although this movement has largely been superseded today, examining the underlying symptom driving it might be a worthwhile endeavour, for while these ancient repertoires were championed as tools of cultural and spiritual cohesion, the initiative's ideological core was rooted in the deliberate exclusion of contemporary works as a means of reinforcing the turn toward the past. Antoine Justus Thibaud, leader of the Heidelberg choral society and a fervent supporter of Cecilianism, is quite explicit in this regard:

> It is no exaggeration to say that one half of our music is unnatural — a sort of mathematical exercise without any life; a mere means of showing off to the greatest advantage the cunning of nimble fingers, and such a mixture of unhealthy components that it may soberly be questioned whether it does not exert more influence for evil than for good.[15]

When dealing with this specific revivalist trend, Björn Schmelzer offers a somewhat unconventional perspective by reframing modernity not as a historical period *per se*, but as a state of profound alienation — an experience where individuals feel fundamentally disconnected

[14] Garratt, *Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination*.

[15] Thibaud, *Purity in Music*, 37–38.

from their cultural environment. This disconnection, he suggests, defines the contemporary condition, understood here as the experience of a culture in its own moment of modernity.[16]

From this standpoint, the nostalgic turn to a "pre-modern" past represented an effort to counteract the alienation produced by modernity: the fractured and chaotic nature of the modern world was contrasted with an imagined pre-modern era of coherence and unity, where contemporary anxieties and desires were projected onto an idealized vision of the past. The key insight here is that this reactionary impulse only emerged through the lens of modernity itself, inevitably colouring the process with the very alienation it sought to resolve.

During the twentieth century, efforts to lend the Early Music revival a sense of objectivity intensified, culminating in the 1960s with the emergence of leading interpreters such as Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Gustav Leonhardt. Their work, fuelled in part by the era's strong anti-establishment spirit, focused on rigorous source study, the reconstruction of period instruments and close adherence to historical performance practices, a methodology that radically redefined the movement. Over the following decades, this approach — known as "Historically Informed Performance" (HIP) — emerged as the dominant paradigm in Early Music, gradually redirecting attention from the repertoire itself to the practices that enabled it.[17]

Indeed, with each new generation of "early musicians", the ideas held by the former generations were questioned and deconstructed, giving rise to new and alternative paths. The concept of authenticity, once celebrated as the ultimate goal of performance, has long since been abandoned — a fate shared by the notions of compositional intention or the original sound of a work. What, then, seems to be the alternative? — or, to recall John Butt's question in his review of Richard Taruskin's *Text and Act*: "if authority comes neither from the work nor solely from the composer, where are we to turn?"[18]

We could, of course, insist on a relative freedom for performers, who can take their pick from what is known of the past and produce their own interpretation — a path that many Early-Music practitioners would, to some extent, approve. Before turning to this argument, however, it is worth considering an alternative way of answering Butt's question, one that has gained greater influence, particularly in higher-education programmes for Early Music performance.

In a recent keynote address at the European Early Music Summit, Isaac Alonso de Molina contextualized this approach within a historical framework, advocating for a radical commitment to what he terms *musica pratica* — music as craft rather than art — a proposal that aligns closely with the original *ethos* of the HIP movement.[19] While we can empathize with the motivations — Early Music as an opposition to the canonic structures of Classical Music and its insistence on the deification of the figure of the composer — this intervention inadvertently exposes the movement's inherent contradictions and limitations.

Molina begins by pointing out that the fall of the so-called *Ancien Régime* led to a dramatic change in the system of arts, separating art from craft, aesthetic experience from function. This is by no means an uncommon argument: the very concept of modernity as a historical category is

[16] Schmelzer, "Monstrosity of Early Music".
[17] Butt, *Playing with History*.
[18] Butt, "Acting Up a Text", 324.
[19] Molina, "EEMS 2020 - Musica Practica".

often tied to the rupture initiated by the French Revolution, where religion ceded its hegemonic ideological role to the scientific positivism of the Enlightenment. Within this framework the idea of "art for art's sake" emerged as a new paradigm. Artists, no longer employed by patrons for their skilful service, were compelled to market their creations as autonomous artefacts — commodities in a rapidly changing social and economic landscape.[20]

The problem with this argument is twofold. First, it tends to overlook the disruptive potential inherent in these works. Viewing them solely as functional components within an ideological system consigns them to complete social domestication, stripping away their capacity to transcend their original context. If such works are mere documents of their time, why would they continue to captivate us long after their surroundings have radically changed? Is there not a tension — an uncanniness — that emanates from them even today? Moreover, how can we understand the full impact of these repertoires in their own time without acknowledging its disruptive presence — a presence well-documented in historical sources?[21] And what term could encapsulate this disruptive force better than art? The assumption that music existed at any time as a purely functional or harmonious phenomenon denies the radical possibilities it carried in its original context.

On the other hand, rejecting the Romantic notion of genius as an immediate and divine source of inspiration is indeed an essential step in the critical analysis, and it is true that a focus on the historical practices ostensibly makes the act of mediation more transparent. Yet, does this not merely replace one fantasy with another? Has practice itself not assumed the role of the substantial element, offering an illusory objectivity — the very objectivity that modernity persistently fails to realize?

While the nineteenth-century revival was problematic for the particular ideological assumptions it openly carried, the alternative proposed by Molina risks perpetuating the same issues under the false pretence of neutrality. Molina himself falls into this predicament when characterizing the relationship between master and student as "one of the most *natural* social hierarchies experienced by people", a telling reversion into the essentialism that plagued nineteenth-century revivalists.

Why not remain with a less radical option, then, such as the one we introduced earlier? To take João Vaz's useful example: would it not suffice for a musician playing a *Praeludium* by Buxtehude on a Schnitger organ simply to remember that he is not Buxtehude, but a modern performer situated in the present and therefore fundamentally detached from the original event?[22] This perspective aligns with both John Butt's[23] and Richard Taruskin's[24] positions, which frame HIP as a symptom of modernity rather than a genuine recovery of a lost past.

The main issue with this vision is that, in seeking to expose the false universalities at work within the HIP project, it ends up renouncing universalism altogether. This is most evident in

[20] Shiner, *Invention of Art*.
[21] Wegman, *Crisis of Music*.
[22] Vaz, "Do manuscrito à performance".
[23] Butt, *Playing with History*.
[24] Taruskin, *Text and Act*.

Butt's analysis, which treats historicity — that is, a conception of history based on some form of common ground between us and the past — as effectively obsolete.[25]

To be clear, Butt is not completely wrong here. Historical paradigms exist and the ways in which human beings signify the world around them change, sometimes drastically. In this article, we have ourselves argued that there is very little in Early Music that people can readily recognize as their own. However, the idea underlying this view seems to be the performance of a plurality of interpretations intended to mirror the plurality of the past, so as not to ignore historical details that fall outside the dominant narrative. Yet is this not a fantasy in itself as well? And, more to the point, how can one think of democratization if the very idea of the universal is abandoned from the start?

All this raises the question: is there a way to engage with Early Music without succumbing to these cycles of constructed fantasies? In what follows we will argue that if there is something with which we should identify in other historical periods, it is with the very impossibility of identification. This begins with how we conceptualize the past. Terms like "pre-modern" or "early-modern" while useful for categorization, carry within them the very essence of what must be questioned. They reveal the first challenge for Early Music: the "pre-modern" as a symptom of alienation, an idealized construction that perpetuates the very estrangement it seeks to resolve. But this is only the first step. Reality itself, whether pre-modern or modern, must be conceived as structurally open, never fully contained within its own internal logic.

IN DEFENSE OF ANACHRONISM

A common warning heard by musicians engaged with earlier repertoires is: "we come from the future". This cautionary phrase could, of course, be translated as "beware of your bias", suggesting that some aspect of contemporary perspective must be subtracted from the analysis. Avoiding anachronisms is, evidently, an impossible task, a fact also acknowledged in the field of Historically Informed Performance, but while the HIP approach is usually to isolate a few aspects of what is deemed historical while allowing contradictions to plague the rest of the field, we would claim that anachronisms should be embraced and instrumentalized.

This idea was particularly well articulated by Georges Didi-Huberman in his analysis of Fra Angelico's *Madonna in the Shadows*, a fresco in the monastery of San Marco in Florence. The work is divided into two parts: a purely figurative painting at the top and, below it, four panels of what seems to be a strangely looking blotched marble. Didi-Huberman begins by claiming that it is only through multiple discourses from various periods preceding Fra Angelico that one can even begin to extract some meaning from the work, revealing the existence of the painting as a representation of time itself. To this, Didi-Huberman adds:

> What is needed, I shall venture to say, is one more strange feature that confirms the paradoxical fecundity of anachronism. To gain access to the stratified multiple times, to the survivals, to the *longues durées* of the more-than-past of memory, we need the *more-than-*

[25] Butt, *Playing with History*.

> *present* of an act of reminiscence: a shock, a tearing of the veil, an irruption or appearance of time, what Proust and Benjamin have described so eloquently under the category of "involuntary memory." What Landino and all the art historians were incapable of seeing and showing before the mottled painted surface of the fifteenth century — and here comes the anachronism — Jackson Pollock proved himself to be quite capable of seeing and showing.[26]

The point to be stressed here is that every historical reality has access only to a fragment of the meanings generated by its discourses and objects — an argument also made by Jacques Lacan when framing Velasquez' *Las Meninas* through the *ready-made* objects of Marcel Duchamp.[27]

An anachronistic view would then recognize that many of these meanings unfold only retroactively, shaped by later interpretations. It is important to note that this is not a claim for a presentist reading of the past. Rather it is a claim for a layered understanding in which the past is not treated as a self-contained totality, but as a field of potential meanings that can only be accessed through subsequent cultural, artistic and interpretative interventions — allowing, via modernity, the articulation of "what a culture cannot directly articulate about itself".[28]

Taken to its radical conclusion, this perspective suggests that events, at the moment of their occurrence, are essentially contingent, without any intrinsic guarantee of necessity or meaning; only afterwards are they re-inscribed as if they had always already been necessary. In other words, reality is not a closed chain of determinations but an open field of indeterminacy, whose contours are continually reconfigured by subsequent acts of interpretation. As Slavoj Žižek puts it:

> According to the standard view, the past is fixed, what happened happened, it cannot be undone, and the future is open, it depends on unpredictable contingencies. What we should propose here is a reversal of this standard view: the past is open to retroactive reinterpretations, while the future is closed since we live in a determinist universe. This doesn't mean that we cannot change the future; it just means that, in order to change our future, we should first (not "understand" but) change our past, reinterpret it in such a way that opens up towards a different future from the one implied by the predominant vision of the past.[29]

If this stance seems nonsensical, it would suffice to observe to what degree the past has already been instrumentalized in such a way. An idealization (and subsequent "change") of the past is the common denominator between all reactionary movements that headed the biggest conflicts of the twentieth century and it resists today in slogans like "Make America Great Again". More intriguingly, however, is this dynamic not also at work within the field of Historically Informed Performance, as we have seen?

[26] Didi-Huberman, "Before the Image, before Time", 41–42.
[27] Lacan, "Le Séminaire, Livre XIII".
[28] McGowan, "Bankruptcy of Historicism", 92.
[29] Žižek, "Hegel, Retroactivity & The End of History", 5.

Early Music has the potential to foster a more inclusive and forward-looking engagement with history — one that recognizes the ever-present connection with modernity. However, for this inclusivity to truly materialize, it is essential to move beyond the current narrow framing of HIP and establish it as a contemporary art movement in its own right.

The first point to stress is that it would be too paternalistic to reserve the uncanniness of past works for ourselves, as if they had been entirely domesticated and functional for the cultures that produced them. To recall the previous example: it is not enough for the modern musician to remember that he is not Buxtehude; the further step would be to recognize that Buxtehude himself was never fully "Buxtehude". This understanding of fractured identity aligns with Sigmund Freud's discovery of the unconscious, where "the ego is not even master in its own house, but must content itself with scanty information of what is going on unconsciously in its mind".[30]

It follows from this that what connects us to the past is not a set of shared meanings, values or identities, but the very dislocation that the encounter with art makes palpable: a distortion of reality where meaning falters and disintegrates. It is in that void that lies our commonality with the past — a commonality of anxiety, so to speak. Seen this way, we avoid both the trap of strict particularisms (which would reduce past works to closed cultural artefacts, or documents) and the illusion of false universalities (which would pretend that we transparently share the same essence). What remains is a crucial insight: we *have* nothing in common with the past, and this "nothing" is precisely the positive ground of our relation to it.

The Historical Other, which Early Music so often idealizes, must thus be repositioned in a space of shared uncertainty — a place where both past and present belong. Instead of treating the historical past as a repository of fixed truths, we must recognize that our engagement with it is rooted in the same anxious search for meaning that defines our present, but that also defined the past. By embracing this uncertainty, Early Music can become a reflective practice that reveals the fractures and tensions of history, encouraging dialogue rather than resolution. It is in this openness, rather than in false notions of objectivity or purity, that its true potential lies, challenging fixed narratives and offering tools to navigate the complexities of the times we live in. Such an approach would invite audiences to feel: "This is for me, and I am a part of it".

What would this mean practically? To begin with, it must be said that the workshop "From Scribe to Stage", in the format in which it was presented, has already taken significant steps toward the geographic and economic decentralization of Early Music. By being held outside a major urban centre and offering economically affordable admission, it created essential conditions to encourage the participation of people beyond the specialized circuit. Moreover, because of the event's relatively informal nature, the activities developed fostered closer interaction between the organizers and the audience, creating opportunities for conviviality and shared experiences.

However, it became evident that a significant portion of the participants were themselves already engaged with Early Music, which highlights a gap in relation to the organizer's stated goal

[30] Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 285.

of reaching new audiences. As discussed in the opening section of this article, overcoming geographic and economic barriers alone is not sufficient to engage audiences outside the circle of Early Music specialists. It was also necessary to examine the social barriers that need to be addressed, the relationship between Early Music, the media and contemporary audiences, as well as the origins of the HIP movement and its relationship with the past, alongside the ways in which anachronism can influence the accessibility of this repertoire. Building on this exploratory work, we therefore put forward some possible conclusions regarding how to enhance the accessibility of a festival of this kind, bearing in mind the inherent complexity of promoting and cultivating new audiences.

Firstly, we should make the (apparently not so) obvious step of treating this music as music. Theoretically speaking, we can say that listening is participation in practice — what Christopher Small would call "musicking".[31] When there is a clearly defined role to be fulfilled — such as that of listener — the individual feels empowered, since it is a role they can effectively inhabit, especially when they understand that they are not expected to grasp everything. Teaching technique, by contrast, imposes from the outset an insurmountable limitation.

For Early Music to resonate widely, it must cultivate an environment where the listener's presence is not secondary or peripheral but integral to the event itself. Bridging this field with a general audience does not require that the historical practices themselves are taught, in the same way that one does not need to be a musician to enjoy a concert regardless of the genre. What is needed, we would claim, are initiatives that foster aural engagement, tools that teach the audiences "to listen", to create predisposition to this kind of sonorous organization, a normalized event in the present instead of an artefact of the past. In Classical Music, figures such as Leonard Bernstein have already demonstrated how powerful and inclusive a pedagogy centred on aesthetic recognition — rather than the exclusive language of music theory — can be.[32] Accordingly, should we not insist, for example, on aural engagement with the dramaturgical aspects of ancient repertoires, an element largely absent from historical sources, yet clearly a concern for the composers themselves?

Secondly, Early Music should recognize itself as part of the realm of contemporary art. This would require, above all, a stronger emphasis on interdisciplinarity. Today's art is not shy in engaging with concepts from different fields — artistic or otherwise — in order to reveal new dimensions of analysis within the work of art. Current subjects such as identity, globalization, technology and social issues have become the structuring axes of many exhibitions and concerts, yet these are by no means the only possibilities. As a field busy with the past, Early Music is in a privileged position to engage with countless historical discourses and ideas.

But how is this relationship to work? In the foreword to the Short Circuit book series, Žižek stands for a critical reading of a canonical notion through the lens of an apparently "minor" and unrelated concept or work. The idea is that this opposition decentres the topic from its conventional framing, revealing "its 'unthought', its disavowed presuppositions and consequences".[33] What might a Renaissance polyphonic Requiem reveal about how

[31] Small, *Musicking*.

[32] Bernstein, *Young People's Concerts*.

[33] Žižek, "Series Foreword", IX.

communities related to authority and ideology? How could one approach a motet through the lens of mystical scholasticism? What do fifteenth-century reactions against polyphony tell us about gender inequality? Questions that may seem nonsensical on the surface can, in fact, generate analyses that move beyond the narrow, common-sensical horizon within which HIP has developed over recent decades.[34] Moreover, a seminar or workshop built around this framework could attract audiences not typically interested in music but drawn to the subject under discussion, which might help to reduce social barriers.

Maybe it is time to turn the journey *from Scribe to Stage* — a unidirectional attempt to reconstruct the past — into one that runs in the opposite direction: *from Stage to Scribe*. Here, performance becomes the starting point for rewriting, questioning and reframing history, revealing that every encounter with the past is always already missed. It is precisely in this missed encounter, in the shared "nothing" of past and present, that Early Music might find its space.

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[34] An interesting exercise in this regard is the confrontation between polyphony, the painting of Jan van Eyck and the mysticism of Nicolas of Cusa as effected by Björn Schmelzer in "Met Cusanus op straat", an exploration that ultimately culminated in a Cusanus Summer School held in Antwerp in August 2025.

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Povzetek

OD »ZAPISA DO ODRA« IN »ODRA DO ZAPISA«: PRIBLIŽEVANJE STARE GLASBE OBČINSTVU

Pričujoča razprava se ukvarja z izzivi in možnostmi širjenja kroga poslušalcev stare glasbe, pri čemer izhaja iz primera nedavne delavnice »Od zapisa do odra – mednarodna delavnica z vključevanjem občinstva«, ki je potekala na 42. Festivalu Radovljica avgusta leta 2024. Delavnica, ki je bila prvotno zasnovana za občinstvo z malo ali brez glasbenega znanja, je namesto tega privabila udeležence, ki so bili s staro glasbo že seznanjeni. Tako se je delavnica preoblikovala v dogodek, ki je bil bližje strokovnemu kot poljudnemu. Ta izid je organizatorje in avtorja razprave spodbudil k razmišljanju o tem, kako bi zgodnja glasba lahko dosegla širše in novo občinstvo ter se izognila zaprtosti. Da bi odgovorili na to vprašanje, je članek razdeljen na dva dela, pri čemer vsaka od avtoric razmišlja na podlagi svojih osebnih izkušenj.

Prvi del je naravnan bolj sociološko in se naslanja na teorijo Pierrea Bourdieuja. Analizira ovire, ki pogojujejo večje vključevanje v kulturne dogodke: ekonomske, geografske in simbolne. Čeprav stroški in lokacije dogodkov dejansko omejujejo dostop, so simbolne ovire tiste, ki so odločilne. Med take ovire štejemo zakoreninjena občutja izključenosti, ki botrujejo misli, da določena vrsta glasbe »ni za nas«. Poleg strukturnih ovir avtorja poudarjata, da je sodelovanje v okviru fenomena stare glasbe odvisno tudi od trajnejšega izpostavljanja in estetskih nagnjenj posameznikov, kar odraža idejo o okusu kot reflektivni praksi, ki jo je razvil Antoine Hennion. Čeprav so digitalne platforme razširile dostop do kulture, poglobljeno sodelovanje še vedno zahteva neko predhodno ozaveščanje o pomenu kulturne dediščine, ki pa je ni deležen vsakdo. Poskusi, da bi se tej ekskluzivnosti zoperstavili s poenostavitvijo ali komercializacijo stare glasbe, pogosto vodijo v nekakšno lažno univerzalnost: homogenizirane izdelke, ki izničujejo umetniško specifičnost in hkrati okrepijo elitistične stereotipe. Posledično kljub večji prepoznavnosti stara glasba še naprej nosi avro ekskluzivnosti, ujeto med prizadevanji za dostopnost in vztrajnostjo simbolnih hierarhij.

Drugi del preučuje ideološke temelje oživljanja in izvajanja stare glasbe ter sledi njeni poti od renesanse v 19. stoletju do vzpona zgodovinsko utemeljenega izvajanja (*Historically Informed Performance* [*HIP*]). Vseskozi si to gibanje prizadeva za avtentičnost, objektivnost in zvestobo preteklosti – načela, ki so hkrati na nek način tudi omejevala njegov razvoj. Čeprav *HIP* spodbuja znanstveno strokovnost in zvesto rekonstrukcijo, avtorja ugotavljata, da stremljenje k objektivnosti nikoli ni bilo nevtralno, temveč je vedno prepleteno z ideologijo. Tudi novejši poskusi, da bi se zgodnja glasba ponovno opredelila kot obrt in ne kot umetnost, so nevarni, saj predstavljajo tveganje za ponovno uvedbo esencialističnih hierarhij, pod pretvezo nevtralnosti.

V zaključnem delu avtorja ugotavljata, da je za resnično dostopnost stare glasbe potrebno več kot le zmanjšanje ekonomskih ali geografskih ovir: treba je ponovno razmisliti o odnosu med staro glasbo in občinstvom v luči kulturne zgodovine. Namesto da se staro glasbo omejuje na tržno

usmerjene oblike, predlagata, da se spodbuja aktivno poslušanje in vključevanje občinstva kot udeležencev glasbenega doživetja, ne da bi le-to od njih zahtevalo kakršnokoli tehnično znanje. Poleg tega bi bilo treba izvajanju stare glasbe zagotoviti status sodobne umetniške prakse. Izvajalci stare glasbe se morajo namreč s preteklostjo kritično ukvarjati prek anahronizma, reinterpretacije in ne-odnosov z drugimi zgodovinskimi subjekti. S premikom perspektive »od zapisa na oder« k »od odra k zapisu« postane izvedba ne le sredstvo za rekonstrukcijo zgodovine, temveč tudi prostor za njeno preizpraševanje, rekonstruiranje in novo interpretiranje.