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ROUND TABLE, 'The Legacy of Richard Taruskin'

Performance Studies Conference, University of Surrey, Saturday 2 July 2022

Chair: Ian Pace

Panel: Claire Fedoruk, Anthony Gritten, Julian Hellaby, George Kennaway, Lina Navickaite-Martinelli, John Rink, Eva Moreda Rodriguez

Opening Statement

Good afternoon to everyone here and those viewing online. I am Ian Pace, from City, University of London and am chairing this specially convened session entitled 'The Legacy of Richard Taruskin'. Most of you will have heard the sad news yesterday of Taruskin's death at the age of 77. I am hugely grateful to a range of conference attendees here for agreeing to take part in this special session: specifically (in alphabetical order) Claire Fedoruk, Anthony Gritten, Julian Hellaby, George Kennaway, Lina Navickaite-Martinelli, John Rink, Eva Moreda Rodriguez, all of whom were engaged in various ways either personally or professionally with Taruskin's work.

The format of this session will be a series of statements by the participants lasting 5-10 minutes, reflecting on Taruskin's legacy, followed by open discussion amongst all, including those joining us via Zoom. If you are watching online, and have a question or statement you wish to add, please send a message to Thomas Armstrong, co-convenor of this conference, who is also organising the technical side of this session.

I will include a statement of my own presently reflecting on Taruskin's work. But I just wanted to open with a brief overview of his life and career.

Richard Taruskin was born in New York on 2 April 1945. He grew up in a moderately musical household; his mother taught violin and his father played the piano at an amateur level. He studied cello growing up and went to study at Columbia University in 1965 where he continued from Bachelor's to Doctoral level, receiving a PhD in historical musicology in 1976. That he was part of a 'sixties generation', a student during that period, is something often overlooked, but I think is significant in terms of various iconoclastic aspects of his subsequent thought and work. He taught at Columbia until 1987, when he was appointed Professor of Music at University of California, Berkeley, where he remained for the rest of his life, eventually becoming Emeritus Professor.

In the earlier stage of his career Taruskin was also active first as a choral conductor, overseeing the Columbia University Collegium Musicum, and making recordings with them and Cappella Nova, such as those of Ockeghem and Byrd. He was also a viola da gamba player and toured as a soloist with Aulos Ensemble through to the late 1980s. As such, he was deeply involved in the early music world, of which he would become one of the leading critics.

Taruskin's first book was *Opera and Drama in Russia: As Preached and Practiced in the 1860s*, establishing a scholarly basis for this body of work which was then relatively obscure to Anglophone musicians and scholars. His work on Russian music in general, which spanned several centuries of work, would be extended in his collection *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue*, his mammoth two-volume study of *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, the important volume of essays *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays*, and two later collections of journalist and academic essays, *On Russian Music* and *Russian Music at Home and Abroad*. He was a prominent protagonist in scholarly debates on such issues as the nature of Chaikovsky's death, or the veracity of Solomon Volkov's memoir of Shostakovich, *Testimony*.

Taruskin was also a journalist and 'public musicologist', writing regularly in particular for *The New York Times*. Both in this capacity and also as a contributor to scholarly fora, Taruskin wrote regularly on performance and issues relating in particular to historically-informed performance (or 'authentic performance' or 'period performance', to use two terms now rather out of fashion but still common at the time Taruskin was writing). He was sharply critical of some of the work in this realm, in both musical and methodological terms, with a special focus on the work done by British performers and ensembles, not least Christopher Hogwood and the Academy of Ancient Music. One of his key essays on this subject, 'The Pastness of the Present and the Presence of the Past', was collected in an 1988 symposium edited by Nicholas Kenyon, *Authenticity and Early Music*, and then in 1995 Taruskin collected all his major writings on the subject in a collection entitled *Text and Act*. Amongst his key arguments were those relating to the fragmentary, ambiguous, contradictory and inconclusive nature of documentary evidence into historical performance, and perhaps most significantly he created a range of dualisms, such as between 'vitalist' and 'geometric' performance, concluding from this that many supposedly 'historical' approaches actually represented modernist aesthetics, especially those associated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and the neo-classical Stravinsky.

Taruskin continued to be a prominent public intellectual throughout his career, generating much attention through wider op-eds and pronouncements on music in public fora, such as his support for the cancellation of a performance of John Adams' opera *The Death of Klinghoffer* in 2001, following the attacks of 9/11.

His major later work was undoubtedly the mammoth sole-authored six-volume *The Oxford History of Western Music*, first published in 2005, when Taruskin was 60. A hugely comprehensive but also highly contentious work, which overhauled all sorts of previous practices for history writing, Taruskin claimed a new dispassion and objectivity for his enterprise, in contrast to earlier writers. I am sure various people will have a variety of views on this type of claim.

For the rest of his life and career, Taruskin's work was mostly occupied with some new essays and assembling new collections of others, in the volumes *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays*, published in 2008, and *Cursed Question: On Music and its Social Practices*, published in 2020. Amongst these were a notorious review-article of Cambridge Histories of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Music, which led to a quite exasperated response by Nicholas Cook. Another important article was 'The Musical Mystique', a review-article of books by Julian Johnson,

Joshua Fineberg and Lawrence Kramer all considering the place of classical music today, with quite ferocious critiques of some of these. He was also of course a highly regular conference attendee and guaranteed to enliven proceedings.

I am trying mostly to stick to factual matters here, saving appraisals of Taruskin's work for my statement. I'll just say here that I doubt anyone would deny that Taruskin was a highly opinionated and often polemical figure, whose work sharply divided opinion, and led to heated exchanges with others. Amongst these was that with the pianist and writer Charles Rosen, which became pronounced within the forum of the American Musicological Society after the latter's death in 2012. This was not the most edifying episode in Taruskin's career; I hope that while all can feel free to offer frank reflections on Taruskin's work, including on that body of work viewed as a whole, this does not become over-personalised, out of respect, as the news of his death only reached us yesterday. Also, because of the nature of this conference, I hope we can look in particular at Taruskin's writings on performance, though contributions do not need to be limited to this.

So I will hand over to the first panellist, **Lina Navickaite-Martinelli**.

Then **Claire Feyaruk**

Then **Julian Hellaby**

Then **George Kennaway**

Then me

My Statement

I have found myself led towards engagement with Taruskin's work of various types throughout my own career as performer and musicologist. His work on performance is obviously relevant to me as a scholar of historically-informed performance and performance studies, but also as one whose research has much to do with twentieth-century Germany, in light of Taruskin's views on that region and its music. Also, when working on issues to do with the historiography of music, I could not fail to engage with Taruskin's thoughts on that, and the ways in which they inform the *Oxford History*. Not least in terms of new music and its place both in repertoire and music history and pedagogy. But I can say that his models and approaches for nineteenth- and twentieth century music history have had a profound impact on how I write and teach about it. Without them, I would not have had the same inspiration towards teaching a core music history module which tried to move away from technocratic and teleological approaches, focused above all on advances in compositional technique, towards broader approaches which do not overly privilege this line of development and attempt to consider equally musical developments in terms of their social and political context, though in a less didactic fashion than Taruskin. Also, as one who teaches much about nineteenth-century music, not least opera, Taruskin's writings on that area are regular set readings for my students.

But I want to focus on Taruskin's thoughts on performance, the bulk of which are contained within *Text and Act*. He did occasionally return to the subject in some later essays, amongst the most interesting of which I would suggest is 'Of Kings and Divas', collected in *The Danger of Music*, a review-article of a range of recordings of French baroque music. But to the best of my knowledge Taruskin never wrote or spoke at length about later developments in the fields of performance studies, including the relationship between analysis and performance, ethnomusicological approaches, practice-research and Artistic Research, or the various work emerging from the research clusters in the UK CHARM and CMPCP, especially relating to the study of early recordings. Certainly Taruskin did write on early recordings earlier in his career, but not when the study of them had become a much more extensively developed field of scholarship. The heart of his work on performance has to do with historically-informed performance, the culture of early music, and the ways in which these came to encroach upon the performance of a good deal of mainstream repertoire.

One thing which is striking upon returning to Taruskin on performance, with knowledge of his later writings, is his at least partial advocacy of Adorno's view (though Adorno was writing in a different time and context), and how strongly his critique of HIP is explicitly related to its anti-German tendencies. He only appears to have engaged with Adorno's views as found in the essay 'Bach Defended Against His Devotees', not the *Theory of Musical Reproduction*, which was not available in either German or English at the time of most of Taruskin's writings on performance.

I do not believe it would be unfair to say that Taruskin held frequently negative views for many things British. His writings on the historically-informed performance movement frequently dealt with the work of Christopher Hogwood, Roger Norrington, Trevor Pinnock, John Eliot Gardiner and their associated ensembles. He did also, for sure, consider some Austrian, German, Belgian and Dutch early music protagonists, most notably in a piece on the Harnoncourt-Leonhardt series of Bach Cantatas, but these were generally treated as the periphery with the British scene as the centre. Taruskin also had little to say about the later growth of HIP elsewhere, especially France (except for in the essay I mentioned before) and Italy.

Yet I believe that the Austrian, Belgian and Dutch early music performance scenes were a central component of the wider international scene for as long as the British, even if some of the associated writings were less familiar to British and American scholars, as few were translated for a long time.

Taruskin's views on German matters in this context were not so wide-reaching; I am not aware of his considering in depth the problematic status of medieval music in Germany after 1945 following its appropriation by parts of the youth movement in the Third Reich. While various movements there which were already active in the 1920s, in regional centres such as Munich, Cologne and Freiburg, continued after 1945 to a limited extent, the growth of many a new *Studio für alte Musik* went alongside a similar *Studio für neue Musik*, as a means of resituating a realm of musical activity in a context which, rightly or wrongly, was for a period associated with opposition to fascism. But it is also surely no coincidence that one of the most important German groups for medieval music to be founded in the early post-war era, the *Studio der frühen Musik* in Munich, was led not by a German but an American, Thomas Binkley.

Taruskin did certainly engage with some aspects of a historically-informed performance and early music movement prior to around the 1960s, but in a fragmentary manner. In this he was no different to plenty of other scholars, but the appearance of Harry Haskell's *The Early Music Revival: A History* in 1988 demonstrated the breadth and depth of a movement which can be traced back well into the nineteenth-century. Since Haskell, there has been a wide range of important wider scholarship – such as Katharine Ellis's on early music in France in the nineteenth century, Celia Applegate's study of Mendelssohn and the Bach Revival, James Garratt on the German Palestrina Revival, William Weber's study of concert programming, or various studies of individual musicians who contributed to revivals of earlier repertoire and performing styles. All of this could contribute to a new comprehensive history to succeed Haskell's, which I believe would set the questions which Taruskin raises in a more nuanced context.

At the heart of Taruskin's arguments are the conviction that historicist approaches are part of a modernist project, which he sets in opposition to earlier tendencies. But I believe this argument is founded upon too homogeneous a view of earlier traditions. Taruskin was without question aware of the extent to which Germanic constructions of musical subjectivity had more limited application in other regions in the nineteenth century, but was not prepared to go the extra mile and consider that some of what he constructs 'modern' or 'neo-classical' might have deeper historical roots. That Chaikovsky's neo-classicism might in some ways resemble Stravinsky's is something I would not have imagined Taruskin denying, but he could have done more to draw the implications of this for a historical model.

Taruskin's work on performance has certainly had its critics, or those who have presented alternative views. John Butt, in his book *Playing with History*, offers a quite witty response to Taruskin's self-presentation as a champion of consumers' rights as against the ideals of historically-informed performers. Butt conflates this position with an advocacy of market forces, which is not strictly accurate. But nonetheless, Butt notes that in purely consumer terms, Taruskin's arguments do not necessarily hold up – as he puts it 'someone must have bought all those records' (of Christopher Hogwood). Other important responses to the gauntlets laid down by Taruskin include those of Peter Walls, in his 2003 *History, Imagination and the Performance of Music*, Bruce Haynes, in his 2007 *The End of Early Music*, which shares some of Taruskin's view of 'modernist' performance. This is presented in an over-homogenised manner, in my opinion, by Haynes, as also by Nicholas Cook and Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, but this view has been challenged by some of the work of Dorottya Fabian. Haynes however creates a tripartite formulation of 'romantic', 'modern' and 'period' styles, the contrast between the second and third of which is at odds with Taruskin's model. Nick Wilson, in his 2013 *The Art of Re-Enchantment: Making Early Music in the Modern Age*, presents a quite different picture of the early music subculture than that at least implied by Taruskin. More recently Stefan Knapik, in a chapter in *The Routledge Research Companion to Modernism in Music* dealing with violin playing has shown how problematic are Taruskin's dualisms, on the basis of wider reading of treatises.

I would say that Taruskin's model is both British-centered and also centered upon a particular state of play which existed in the 1970s and 1980s, which is not unnatural

as some of his first writings date from this time. We certainly know a good deal more now about 'modernist' performance from the early twentieth century, but Taruskin was definitely onto something by making the link with Stravinsky, Hindemith and other early twentieth-century figures, including José Ortega y Gasset or Ezra Pound not primarily associated with music (referencing Pound's interest in Arnold Dolmetsch and the particular culture around him and his work). That these and others such as Alfredo Casella, Gian Francisco Malipiero or Carl Orff were very significant in terms of the revival of some Renaissance and Baroque music is clearly documented. Hindemith, amazingly listed by ethnomusicologist Henry Kingsbury as an example of a composer who did not also perform, was not only a leading viola player involved in premieres of works from Webern to Walton, but also a prime moving force in the development of early music at Yale University after his relocation to the United States.

What is described most harshly as the 'sewing machine' style of baroque performance in mid-century grew out of some of the objectivist ideals of these composers and their interactions with the interwar early music scene. Adorno's notorious essay was a response to this, and entirely in line with his own antipathy towards Stravinsky and Hindemith. But performance styles did change, and in some ways the branch of historically-informed performance which developed from this point was in some ways a reaction against this, seeking more nuanced and stylistically aware approaches through excavation of historical data. Taruskin's all-purpose 'modernist' model takes too little account of these changing tendencies. There was of course also the radical shift in the 1970s away from the more 'counter-cultural' approach to early music associated with Binkley's group in Munich, The Early Music Consort of London, and the Clemencic Consort towards the more austere *a cappella* approach pioneered by British groups in the 1970s, of which Christopher Page was the most eloquent spokesperson. Taruskin considers Page's work in one essay, 'High, Sweet, and Loud', but does not really filter this shift into his wider arguments. All of these things point to the fact that the early music movement has been – and continues to be – a diffuse and diverse movement. Occasionally Taruskin acknowledges this, as in his contrasting of the 'crooked' work of Reinhard Goebel and Musica Antiqua Köln with some of their more 'straight' British counterparts, but does not draw the wider implications that would have been possible from a wider and more generous perspective.

What would have strengthened Taruskin's arguments is the considerable cross-fertilisation between the early and new music worlds in the Netherlands in the 1960s, with common cause found between the likes of conductor and recorder/flute player Franz Brüggen, and the new generation involving individuals such as Louis Andriessen, Reinbert de Leeuw and Misha Mengelberg. All were united in antipathy to what they perceived as a conservative Dutch musical scene with pronounced Germanic elements, and espousing an objectivist style, in part influenced by American jazz and wider aspects of an idealised view of Americana, not dissimilar to the view of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and others associated with *Amerikanismus* in Germany in the 1920s. In this Dutch context we absolutely see a commonality of purpose between those in early and new music, though married to a particular far left politics which I doubt Taruskin would have shared. To be fair, though, much of the information on this period in musical history was little known other than to Dutch specialists until recent work such as that of Robert Adlington, not available at the time

Taruskin was writing. But it could fruitfully feed into reevaluations of Taruskin's arguments.

Part of the problem is Taruskin's tendency to employ a monolithic view of 'modernism', which he knew as well as anyone constituted a heterogeneous body of music and aesthetic thought. But the tendency to employ an all-purpose conception of 'modernism' as a rhetorical strategy for dismissing musical work, in the process knowing the populist implications of so doing, was a shame. Few now would surely deny that Stravinsky and Schoenberg represented very different musical tendencies, and charged debates between factions associated with either have informed musical discourse since the mid-1920s. But Taruskin was not above associating one with 'modernism' and then using this as a stick to beat the other.

Taruskin's views on many things German, which could translate into blanket remarks about European culture and thought, could have a waspish and xenophobic tint to them (which he would have been the first to condemn if applied to other regions or peoples), akin to the thought of Brexiteers and American neo-conservatives, especially in his later work. For one so unafraid to speak harshly of others, sometimes in ways I believe were *ad hominem*, Taruskin would cry foul if others did the same. In one article, he presented four of us, J.P.E. Harper-Scott, Christopher Fox, Franklin Cox and myself (all except Cox British), as his arch-opponents, almost as if part of a conspiracy. But I do believe the critiques of all of these were fundamentally about Taruskin's *work*. My view may be more generous than some of the others, especially Harper-Scott, though I concur with some aspects of the latter's critique, especially of Taruskin's sometimes quite fanatical anti-German pronouncements, such as in 'Speed Bumps'.

Taruskin's knowledge of and interest in new music was, by many accounts of those who spoke to him about it at length, considerably more rich and nuanced than one would necessarily discern from some of his writings. He took, for example, a great interest in the work of Belgian pianist and musicologist Luk Vaes in the work of Mauricio Kagel. I regret that he did not write more from this perspective, though can see how it might have seemed uncharacteristic in the context of the wider views he frequently expressed.

Taruskin had a striking ability to identify the fundamental issues at stake in many scholarly and other musical debates without obfuscation. As a result his writing can be very direct and clearly expressed. Furthermore, he did not shy from viewing music in social, historical and political context, including specifically in relation to its meanings *today*. He was not one simply to take the views of composers or performers at face value, and recognised musicians' self-fashioning immediately. All of this, from when I first encountered his work, was a breath of fresh air in the context of what I found, and still find in some ways, a rather stultified musical and academic culture in the UK, in which so much depends upon saying the right things to the right people with power rather than entering into more trenchant debate on the basis of conviction, with passive-aggressive demands to conform to prevailing group-think, and short-term demands of careerism and certain artificial rhetoric about 'collegiality' can supersede quests for truth.

As time went on and I became more familiar with his work, I came to realise that Taruskin was not someone with whom I would associate a balanced examination of evidence and a measured conclusion. The very possibility of moderate conclusions appeared to elude him. Both of these things are very significant flaws in a scholar, I believe, but also characteristic of a polarised world. Taruskin was highly critical of others for drawing wide conclusions from fragmentary information, but was far from averse from doing the same himself to ram home points. An example would be his arguments about tempo flexibility in Beethoven Symphonies depend heavily on the account by Anton Schindler, with just token recognition of the various information which points to the unreliability of Schindler as a source. I would contrast this with the thorough examination of the conflicting accounts of Beethoven by Schindler and Carl Czerny in George Barth's book *The Pianist as Orator*, which also arrives at a conclusion that some of what Schindler claimed may be correct, but Barth does so on far stronger scholarly grounds.

Nonetheless, I believe Taruskin was a very worthy opponent and without doubt a tremendously significant figure in the landscape of musicology, from whom I will greatly miss the possibility of reading new writings.

So that is my statement. Just before I hand over to Anthony Gritten, I would also like to read out two statements sent to me. The first is by Marina Frolova-Walker, Professor of Music at the University of Cambridge:

I think most of us in Russian Music Studies feel orphaned right now. Richard created our field on the international stage and presided over it for several decades. Everyone reading him or listening to his papers immediately wanted to argue with him, but arguing with him was difficult, and not just because he was so intimidating - because he was so good. His encyclopaedic knowledge, his incredible memory, his persuasive and beautiful prose - in all these he was head and shoulders above the rest. He was a tireless generator of new ideas and arguments, which will hopefully give many further generations of scholars and students something to contend with. His passion for musical scores, musical performances and scholarship itself was boundless. He cared so deeply. Rest in peace, Richard, while we still have some time here to re-read your books.

The second is by Franklin Cox, of Wright State University, who wrote the most comprehensive critique of Taruskin's *Oxford History*. Frank says:

I am tremendously sorry to hear of the passing of Richard Taruskin. He was a brilliant historical musicologist, deeply committed to research; he was also one of the finest stylists around.

History is among the most perishable of disciplines; the greatest achievements of each generation tend to crumble as each new generation, standing on the shoulders of the previous one, investigates the domain more closely. Facts established by an older generation become mere generalizations, as thousands more facts are established and the terrain becomes immensely more detailed. With the passage of time, each new framework for making sense of facts might reify into a generational dogma.

Style, though, remains seductive across generational boundaries, and I trust--and also fear--that readers will continue to be seduced by Taruskin's still-vivid manner. I value a great deal of his work, but I also regret deeply that his immense gifts were all too often put into the

service of unreliable, highly ideologized portrayals. Above all in his magnum opus, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, relevant facts and context were too often jettisoned in the service of attractive but simplistic dichotomies; the sort of basic fact-checking that a team of qualified scholars can accomplish appears to have been neglected. Ideology lurks behind all scholarship, but not all scholarship is premised, to the degree of Taruskin's epic, on an explicit ideology. The stylistic results are brilliant, but the illumination one attains is largely the result of a performance by a superbly gifted narrator; too often it dissolves when one examines the relevant facts more closely.

Nevertheless, I lament the passing of this gifted and accomplished scholar. He raised effective challenges to the ideology of traditional musicology, and the best response to them is to discover better answers.

Then **Anthony Gritten**

Then **Eva Moreda Rodriguez**

Then **John Rink**