



# Musica Antiqua Revisited

*On the future  
of the past*



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## PREFATORY NOTE

*In the wake of the neo-classicist current in the first half of the twentieth century, a renewed interest in period instruments and early music emerged. After 1950 this movement became trendsetting and it gained momentum from 1970 on. The Flemish contribution was considerable. A steadily increasing number of Flemish musicians proved their mettle as outstanding performers, both with and without an ensemble of their own. They shared their musical vision with the most demanding audiences throughout Europe, and later worldwide.*

*It was in this period that Musica originated, then still called “Flemish Centre for Early Music”. This organisation managed to secure a unique niche in the Flemish musical landscape by engineering courses, concerts, and modest festivals. In 1983 Musica railroaded a number of encounters between the key players in early music: musicians, organizers, musicologists... This resulted in the foundation of a publishing house (Alamire), the publication of a periodical (Musica Antiqua), and many other exciting things. This also enabled the breakthrough of some Flemish ensembles and soloists, taking advantage of master classes, concerts, and festivals. In short: the initiative meant a powerful stimulus for historically informed performance practice on the concert platforms.*

*In the quarter century that ensued, historically informed performance practice enjoyed an exponential growth, the movement expanding all over the world. More and more performers got steeped in it. While initially the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Baroque were appreciated as productive periods, gradually also classicism and the nineteenth century were discovered as relevant. Even twentieth-century music became subject to performance on the basis of historical sources and traditions.*

*The founding fathers of the movement stuck to their guns, while concurrently there was an ever growing influx of new and young performers. Some of these young performers interpret the old sources from a contemporary point of view. This resulted in confrontational discussions about repertoire and the tolerance threshold to qualify performances as “historical” or not. There was also pressure on the terminology. The English term “Early Music” still sounds friendly; for the French, Musique Ancienne is apparently palatable enough; but the Dutch term Oude Muziek ended up with a somewhat negative connotation. Sometimes Historically Informed Performance is used as an alternative, but this specialized term is somewhat cumbersome for a general audience. Eventually all this culminated in a discussion about the approach to historical music. Was stylistic faithfulness to be cherished indefinitely in terms of obeisance to a dogma? What about contemporary interpretations of early music? To what extent do sources need to be respected? Are intersemiotic adaptations acceptable, too?*

*With a view to making the discussion more productive, Musica took the initiative in 2009 to organize a new forum for an exchange of opinions. Flanders Music Centre and the REMA (Réseau Européen de Musique Ancienne) both decided to endorse this initiative. The whole event was hosted by AMUZ (Festival of Flanders Antwerp). The meeting was called Musica Antiqua Revisited and was organized on August 30, 2009, during the last day of the festival Laus Polyphoniae in Antwerp.*

**Herman Baeten**  
*Director Musica*



**AMUZ**



The initiative Musica Antiqua Revisited had been thoroughly prepared. For starters, Musica got in touch with a number of players from the world of historical performance. This triggered a considerable amount of response. From the reactions it transpired that there was a lot of controversy. It became rapidly clear that having an elitist assembly was less attractive than an open debate. Flanders Music Centre was prepared to support the initiative and co-organize it, and AMUZ (Festival of Flanders Antwerp) offered in addition to the venue also their logistics in terms of ideas. We took ample time for the preparation. Several formats were considered and a number of potential speakers for the debate were approached. Eventually we managed to develop an interesting format that was also honoured with adequate response in the press.

Meanwhile a cycle of correspondence was induced between Sigiswald Kuijken and Björn Schmelzer. They belong to the older and the younger generation of musicians respectively, and both of them are very active as performers. The weekly *Knack* published the letters online. The debate was further prepared with some more informative articles in the weekly.

The results of the discussion afternoon Musica Antiqua Revisited are being published in this publication. You can enjoy both the letters and a summary of the debate. We have opted for a bilingual edition in its entirety because the discussion deserves an international echo. The problems that are singled out here as well as the vantage points of the audience can contribute to a discussion across the borders. What is the locus of historical music generally, and the role of young performers more specifically? We need a clear sense of direction among organizers, musicians, and educational institutions if we want to avoid devaluation of the achievements of the last decades in the 21st century as eccentricities, if we want to pursue research of our historical musical heritage. This choice will not be supported anymore by a vacant segment of the market, readily available in the previous decades. This choice will need to legitimize itself fully by quality, choice of interpretation, knowledge of the sources and most of all: by dealing creatively with the musical parameters of the past.

Hopefully this publication will contribute to an international debate about the place of our musical heritage in the present landscape of the arts. A comparable debate is already happening in the other arts, but music has one extra parameter: the ever recreated interpretation of the score. Always performers will reach new interpretations on the basis of new insights or of their personality. Therefore playing a score will always be a celebration of particularity, eliciting questions forever and refraining from inflicting a consensual interpretation.

# 1. Letter from Björn Schmelzer to Sigiswald Kuijken

Antwerp, 15 April 2009

Cher maître,  
Dear fellow artist,  
Dear Sigiswald,

We were going to exchange letters, as agreed. We were determined to write to each other, but not casually. The letters were meant to have a certain significance. Moreover, they were going to profile two generations of musicians who have been dealing with early music, thus clarifying the recent past and the near future of what is called “a movement”.

For that was supposed to be the focus of the letters, making them useful for everybody concerned with the movement’s future. Our meeting in Brussels a couple of months ago, Sigiswald, had fired my enthusiasm for that idea, and what’s more: I appreciated the honour of being able to share my preoccupations with you through correspondence. Compared to other genres, early music has not been pampered with a lot of literature, correspondence or essays. An opportunity to provide a dramatic shift, I felt, or at least a first step. However, very soon my intentions were overshadowed by serious doubt.

To be honest, Sigiswald, even though I have only just started I’m already at a loss. What is there to say, what is there to write? On the one hand I think: early music, who cares? On the other hand: our concern with performance practice, instrumentation, interpretation, etc., is that what is of genuine interest for the music sector, from performer to consumer? Apparently there is a need for a debate on early music and its future, but my question is: where does this need come from? What is the subject of our debate, what do we worry about, and why can we be bothered with this?

Outside it is raining, Sigiswald, and here inside, in the pub “Welcome” at the Dam in a proletarian district of Antwerp there are lively discussions about the lotto, about the amount of tips one should give, and, of course, about politics and women. The pub is getting crowded. The umbrella-stand, too. The environment is stimulating.

What at first sight looks so alien to the sacred, aristocratic, elitist attitude of early music, ironically enough, brings me back to the core of what drives us to devote ourselves to early music: life itself. The reality and the life that are inherent in old repertoires. When I look at the old bar-addicts, I don’t wonder what they would think about early music and its future



– whether they would perhaps think of singles by the Beatles, cabaret or juke-box: they evoke the atmosphere of these repertoires of days gone by; they are themselves the incarnation of those phenomena and point towards their essence, their intensity.

I have the impression, Sigiswald, that we share a certain quest, but I don't know yet precisely what this quest entails. Perhaps you could call it to some extent the iconoclasm of established culture, or rather: a stripping-off, a peeling-away of the multiple layers of cultural evidence, resulting in a practice that activates the potential of the unimagined, the unseen or the unheard from past. Does this sound rather abstract? Admittedly, I've not yet reached clarity myself, but I hope that my letter will gradually clarify things as it goes along.

The future of early music: is there a nicer paradox? This is the reason why I love the concept of "early music". "Early music" resists easy takeovers. Rather than a conservative tendency it is the expression of an unruly, historical complexity: it doesn't look as though it has a future by definition, except perhaps a subcutaneous, subterranean one.

But why worry so suddenly? Is the label sold under false pretences? Why do people start to wonder what early music actually implies? Is it a genre, a style, or a branch, a craft, an artistic choice, a medium, a movement, a path? And on the easy assumption that it is a movement: are we then part of it? Are both of us and so many others to be subsumed under the same label? Do all of us defend the same aesthetic ideology?

Further questions intrude. Who is it that worries? The recording industry? The music sector? A new generation of managers and impresarios? Is the problem related to the crisis of the CD market? Changing choices and tastes of committees that grant subsidies? Is it a symptom of a general decline in lifestyle? A chronic lack of appreciation of our heritage?

"Early music. As good as dead. Reanimation! First of all, we have to get rid of the name. Sounds too pathetic." How often that needle sticks in the groove of managers and culture watchers. Reason enough for me to prefer the proletarian Dam precinct to ponder – media vita – what concerns us, rather than sitting in a conference room at a music centre. At least here you stay alert and you don't forget that easily what performance practice is all about.

Taking stock and discussing perspectives for the future are perhaps symptoms of a crisis or a sclerosis in the genre, but all the same they can be expressions of a professionalizing trend that focusses more and more on marketing strategy, box-office success, profitability. Is there a larger audience for early music than in the past? Is there a younger audience? Perhaps, but that doesn't really look relevant to me. Such analyses don't seem to reveal anything about what makes early music intrinsically tick. I don't know how you feel about this, Sigiswald, but it seems to me that a genuine reflection on early music starts with its internal paradox. The relevance of early music has to be weighed depending on the functioning or dysfunction of this paradox.

What kind of paradox is at stake here? Early music looks to me like a

sort of avant-garde movement that, even while breaking with a sclerotic concept of the past, yet refuses to make tabula rasa, unlike the real avant-gardes of modernism. Perhaps this can be conceptualized as post-modernism or a second avant-garde, it doesn't matter very much; early music deals with the past as past, i.e. as a historicity that we are cut off from, while concurrently believing in the possibility of resuscitating the unheard new of that past in a contemporary performance.

On the one hand there are the early repertoires that are now being performed, expecting from the audience a kind of instant "Einführung" (empathy); on the other hand there is the consciousness of their infinite distance. Performances of early music are less concerned with the search for authenticity of origins, but more with the (im)possibility of a transposition to a contemporary audience and the problem of refraction manifesting itself in the experience. This paradox emerges very clearly in the appreciation of early music: the concrete performance is concurrently the necessary condition for the experience of the musical artwork from the past and an impediment to it as well. Because the aesthetic appreciation of an historical artwork coincides fundamentally with its discontinuity in terms of functionality or commodity, and its decline into both ruin and monument. However, what interferes with this decline is the concrete, historically informed performance practice, because its aim is a sort of pristine rendition, not affected by time. This recreation/reconstruction is therefore by definition a denial of its monumentality. This is the paradox and the stake of so-called authentic performance practice: in the interpretation time appears as in a crystal, origin and genesis at the same time.

Perhaps you have different ideas about this, Sigiswald, but for me this is the essence of what is called "historically informed performance practice". For me a performance therefore always results in an experience and a sensation of an *entre-deux*, caught in the middle, balancing between a past that is foreign, distant, exotic, and concurrently a past that is intimate, familiar, dormant – never really absent, at most forgotten or repressed. To perform early music is something like injecting the past as it was never heard before, imparting a simultaneous sensation of distance and proximity. It seems to me that this experience happens at a pre-cognitive and pre-linguistic stage, and is basically musical. Historical performance practice is, as a consequence, hard to apply to a theatrical text by, for example, Shakespeare, because the dramatic experience relates to a large extent to the content, the situation and the meaning of the text, and because the theatre needs other means to transpose the "unheard" of the text into the actual performance. Conversely, however, some avant-garde theatrical theories such as Artaud's seem to be closer to the performance of early music than to a contemporary adaptation of a canonical dramatic text. I remember that Artaud illustrated his *Theatre of cruelty* with an early sixteenth-century painting by Lucas van Leyden in the Louvre which had a tremendous impact on him, because the apparently pastoral scene that is shown in the foreground is coupled in a kind of inversion with the burning and collapsing fortified city that is hit by falling comets in the background.

The sensation of an early music performance is essentially connected to the direct experience of this paradox. This has always struck me as par-

ticular, not only because it offers a way out from the typically modernist artistic scepticism, but also because I believe that a genuinely contemporary artist, in no matter which field, is an historian who deals with time as it has folded itself into the materials. This convolution is historical, but also material, mental, or – why not? – spiritual. To me this is the core and the contemporary relevance of early music, unimpaired.

The so-called authenticity of historical performance has to be seen in this light as well, and has nothing to do with a degree of perfection or a reduction of the distance to an original score or *Urtext*. What authenticity is all about is the rupture with the aesthetic assumptions and the received taste of the audience. This concept of authenticity turns early music into a dormant avant-garde, revealing new sound experiences in ancient repertoires.

Dealing with historical materials in early music happens in two distinct ways that also mark the differing “approaches” in the landscape of early music. One direction is represented by ensembles that research the (aesthetic) standards of a certain period and attempt to reconstruct those standards in their practice. Standards provide a stable and harmonious image of a period because they represent the striving for a definite order. However, there are also ensembles that are rather more interested in the contrasts within a given period, in that which is not always explicitly to be read in the sources or what goes against the grain of the standards, what could be called the potential or the virtual substratum of an epoch. Anyhow, early music is a kind of crystal of “sonori-tijden” (time-determined sonorities) that are experienced as a paradox in performance.

Ironically enough, the intrinsic paradox of early music as described above seems to have evaporated lately in favour of a rather pragmatic consumption of music, both of a conservative and a (pseudo-)progressive persuasion.

The “progressives” say: “Early music is a genre like any other: jazz, world music, cross-over”. They want a big music forum without hierarchies or classifications, but by doing so probably throw away the baby with the bathwater.

Because no matter how beautiful the dream of cross-over is, eventually this degenerates into cross-cultural shopping with as its highest aim the entertainment of the diversified audience. And no matter how well-meant, musically speaking it’s mostly sentimental bad taste that rules. The conservatives, on the other hand, foster an attitude of basic mistrust and teeth-gnashing vis-à-vis our time, let alone the future. They cling to early music as a beacon in the whirl of events: here they hear a last authentic cry from the lost paradise, the swan song of a dying time that is gradually stifled by the decadence and the bad taste of the present.

Lately it has been happening more and more frequently that culture managers and those who run cultural centres and festivals pose as artistic innovators and force musicians into hip “formats” that are supposed to meet the demands of a new sort of crowd-pulling. They determine everything: theme, content, duration, even who is allowed to perform in the ensembles. Even more horrible is the situation where early music, allegedly freed from its obsolete and elitist status, is presented as a key issue

to boot, precisely because of its assumed intrinsic potential to please both the exacting connoisseur and the neo-liberal culture shopper, always in search of new sensations.

The rejuvenated image and the impression-management of the cultural sector have only increased the uncomfortable feeling that I have when somebody asks what I do for a living and I have to answer: “early music”.

To give just one example: yesterday I told a friend about our correspondence, that it was going to be about early music. She looked at me in amazement. “How long will this last, this early music?”, intending to utter explicitly and implicitly all kinds of tentative responses, such as: “Surely you can’t go on exhuming music from the past indefinitely, eventually you’ll run out of materials?” and also “If eventually you have achieved the most authentic reconstruction – a perspective reeking of morbid and fanatical conservatism – will you be content?” She for one doesn’t feel that this is creatively or artistically exciting. “Just give me real art or contemporary music or Glenn Gould, who couldn’t care less about history...”. Yes, there you are at a loss. Not so much because of the disarming honesty exuding from this kind of statement, but most of all because they confront you with the enormous clichés that determine the appreciation of the contemporary art-loving public about historical performance. Then I try to explain to her that what it is all about is not so much the quest for the only true Urtext, but that the real issue is the coincidence of the times in which we live and the perspective generated by our times on music from the past (how each epoch creates its own past, for example); that theoretically there are therefore countless possibilities of dealing with those historical repertoires, and that for me it is less important to perform scores that are unknown than to make heard in the performance itself that which has never been heard before. And last but not least I confess my disbelief in the so-called renewal or originality that is often preached in the contemporary arts, foisted upon us as a rupture with the past or a critical reflection on it.

With a view to explaining to her how I often work, I use an example from another genre, trusting to impart a spark of relevance from early music: contemporary dance. Just imagine that at a given moment the language of classical ballet gets exhausted and is affected by sclerosis. Then there arises a new generation of choreographers inventing new gestures, positions and movements that until then were not used in the classical language of ballet, being taboo as it were. To put it differently: the classical language of dance legitimizes itself perhaps exactly by virtue of excluding certain gestures and movements. Those new gestures, creating a turnover in the world of dance, do not come from nowhere of course, they come from daily life – ways of walking, tics – from tradition, from history, etc.

I tell her that in the same way I believe in the craquelures and cracks of an artistic language, that I actively look for these and set to work with them. It’s not only a matter of digging up things from the past; you connect in different or new ways between repertoires and performance traditions that until now didn’t seem to have anything in common. Of course you don’t do that haphazardly, you develop a kind of intuition for it. And the play of that intuition is for me also the craft of early music. History never presents itself as a boundary of creativity, but rather as a window on it. For

me the layers in the musical materials exude fascination, but also tectonic faults.

To be sure, sometimes it's wasted effort... Recently we executed a sixteenth-century polyphonic mass and after the concert someone told me that he found it impressive but concurrently he opposed this "propaganda" for the Roman church.

Dear Sigiswald, this is not shameless flattery, but an important segment in the argument I am trying to build up: for me you are a ray of hope in early music as a movement, the way Dadaism was a movement but surrealism wasn't, being an institution, to draw a notorious parallel with modernism. And today I feel that early music stopped being a movement a long time ago and that early music's role as an institution is passé, too. Today early music can be better grasped as "a sector". A movement is characterized by dissidence and anarchy vis-à-vis the established order, by experiment, dynamics, a sort of immanent process. An institute claims authority, societal positioning and hierarchy, control and transmission of knowledge. The sector is in fact an extension of the institute but liberated from its sclerosis and conservatism: the sector operates institutionally as well, but uses the parlance of the movement. At face value, the sector is democratic, anti-hierarchical and open, but this is only appearance. The manager who dominates the sector shamelessly takes over the language and the concepts of the movement – "network" for example, or "renewal", or "organic growth" – while concurrently pursuing totally different aims.

What I mean, Sigiswald, is not that your role or that of others would be at an end; on the contrary. Because the sector is a kind of vampire without substance, without an ideology or an agenda, drawing materials from the movements and the institutes. What is most vicious about the situation is not so much the double-bind dilemma of the criterion – playing a role in the sector implies being drained, and if you don't allow yourself to be drained you don't play a role – but first and foremost its arbitrariness, or rather: its commercial and mediatized norm.

Vis-à-vis the movement and the institute the sector has put in place a sort of dynamic professionalism that seeps into all partial facets. The sector's concerns are along the lines of "Who is the target public and how many of them can we expect tonight?". And also: "How can we draw a fuller house in the future?" In other words, early music has become a genre like any other, and is treated accordingly with the same prevailing commercial and quantitative standards.

Sometimes it looks as though early music is going through a rejuvenation process, but if you take a hard look, it transpires that everything turns around hip slogans, a more diversified package of choices, extreme variation in the supply that is often geared to instantaneous experiences and cultural shopping. You will say: how far we have moved from early music as a movement, but that is exactly the problem, for the sector, that voracious monster, absorbs everything without differentiating between experiment and recognized achievement, so long as the basic axioms are endorsed. What is afterwards "excreted" tidily is a little heap of "some-

thing to suit all tastes”.

It doesn't sound merry, but I see it like that, Sigiswald. Hopefully you don't read my analysis in terms of the simplistic cultural pessimism that quite a few aficionados of early music like to wallow in once in a while. I'm not a cultural pessimist, nor do I feel that you are one, even though some nostalgic people find differently, shrinking your often polemic statements, hitching you to their war chariot against so-called decadence, while forgetting that yours was always a quest for the movement, the inner renewal, the search for its own sake – or do I speak preposterously in your name? For those people early music becomes a nostalgic, petit bourgeois refuge far from the contemporary artistic madding crowd. “Their” music is, however, a narrowing of the “grand” West-European music from 1600 to about 1900: everything that comes before they call premature, everything that comes afterwards overripe or rotten.

Here we hear the voice of the culture-loving white man who genuflects in front of the highest that the human ear can perceive. A concrete example: recently a review came to my attention, written on a Flemish classical music site, trashing a concert by *graindelavoix*, not on the basis of technical or stylistic deficiencies, but rather because the spirit of the grand, shatter-proof Flemish polyphony, which was allegedly as congenitally inherent in all of us as our love of waffles, had been mismanaged irrevocably and had degenerated into a barbaric mumbo-jumbo, something totally un-European. Even though the journalist in question was affiliated with an infamous right-wing satirical weekly, and putting him in this context helped in situating his uncouth language, suddenly you become aware of the relevance of historical performance practice: a practice that indeed is still in a position to break taboos at the level of historical clichés and petit bourgeois aesthetics. For exactly because a performance is based on historical research this enabling condition can result in such a shock effect: it does not correspond to a common sense idea of the past, but makes the past appear in all its real “brutality”.

However, it begs the question whether a performance still has this power in a circuit of early music functioning as a sector. So I'm back where I started with a first reflection in this pub: who cares?

Even so, Sigiswald, I keep believing in what I'm inclined to call, rather uncomfortably, the resistant force of your performances, for example, and this force remains essential for me. It seems to me that you are endowed with feelers that intuitively point the way to concretize that resistant force. Many people have not grasped this. The fact that this force is expressed as well by an interpretative minimalism at the same moment when everybody is talking about more sound, more notes, more bravura. That you, for your part, want the performance closer to the score, that you want to have the phrasing less extravagant and pompous, doesn't seem to me like an abstract, conservative or less innovating statement, but on the contrary a very logical step in your quest of many years. That quest not only shows an inner logic, but is also intrinsically resistant, so to speak, and has nothing to do with what you are supposed to exude today as a musician or an ensemble: fun!

Dear Sigiswald, it has stopped raining. The atmosphere in the "Welkom" pub is becoming too loud, too hot-blooded. I shall stop short, realizing that I have not come to terms with everything; I'll jump on my bike and try to get home before the next shower. I'm looking forward to your reaction to this stock-taking in the rough. Can you go with this? Or is there perhaps a kind of practical serenity that will bring us eventually to a point where there is no need of further doubt or debate?

Many kind regards from Björn.

## 2. Answer from Sigiswald Kuijken to Björn Schmelzer

Asse, 1 June 2009

Cher ami, esteemed fellow artist you too,  
Dear Björn,

As agreed this reply is meant not only for you, but also (or even more) for the eyes of those who read our correspondence as well.

I have enjoyed your splendid meditations and reflections! The "questions" that you wonder about are most often answered by you yourself, and in such a way that I couldn't have done better and more honestly. And very often they coincide with my own questions, reflections, etc. It doesn't look as though those who expect a polemical correspondence will be satisfied. What's more, I want to urge the "external" reader to reread your letter carefully, as if it already contained my reply to you...It is so much hand-in-glove (my excuses for this easy and somewhat absurd way of "replying")!

It remains a moot question for us who actually demands a debate, and why and how; the reasons elude us to a certain extent...Or are we such duffers that we fail to understand its purpose?

There is indeed the "fact" that both of us are involved in "early music", and perhaps this already suffices to perceive us as brothers-in-arms with the same aim, or something like that. But this has to be seriously relativized: we don't feel first of all like fighters for some cause or other (am I phrasing this adequately?), we only have in our innermost personality an artistic motive that drives us in the direction of a sort of "light". That is what makes us tick – it's not we who frame our preoccupations in a "movement" or something, no, others do that for us, and their way of thinking is the result of something other than artistic creativity per se. It has more to do with a certain socio-cultural perception and analysis which can gradually result even in a conscious vision of "cultural politics". But that is something entirely different from what we do. Not that we would be at a loss to offer an opinion on this, but it's not our profession, not our main preoc-

cupation when we are driven by what fascinates us.

It was interesting to discover that we belong to the same family of mind (somehow artistically connected in a very fundamental way). I didn't realize this, didn't know you all that well, and now this transpires.

How rare, this felicitous way of yours, Björn, to phrase everything so sharply and precisely, yet elegantly to boot! For example in the passage where you write about early music as a movement, as an institution, and eventually as a sector (on your fifth page). That's where you hit the mark. How we are "assigned" a place in the "sector", without any request at our end, and how we are supposed to align ourselves with that (or just the opposite), doing all the right things.

I am under the impression, Björn, that we can count to a certain extent as "Einzelgänger" (eccentrics); "Einzelgänger" in the sense that (correct me if I'm wrong) we couldn't care less about what "the sector" thinks about us; that we refuse to "produce" with a view to meeting the expectations that "the sector" would like to inflict on us for reasons that elude us, since we recognize as valid only the musical reasons that are our own. In this sense we are therefore "not representative", and this makes me feel good. After all the only way to speak authentically is to speak in your own right, about the things that you cherish.

If a pristine "movement" eventually develops into a "sector", that is evidence of success, or so one can assume at face value. However, in the same way that all phenomena naturally rise and fall, begin and end, a fresh success already contains the germs of decadence. I strongly believe that some delay of execution is granted only to those happy few who are prepared to see this success as something secondary, refuse to cling to it and let the Spirit blow any way it wants to. By contrast, an increasing proneness to organization and coordination is the best proof of a futile pre-emptive strike against the impending decline: by fortifying its position, by becoming a close-knit community, etc. As soon as this machinery of directed coordination becomes too important, turning into an issue for its own sake, I feel the worm is in the apple. Inevitably there ensues a complex system of programmes and themes, of artificial profiling and of unique selling propositions, a competitive world that gets entangled too much in a web of lobbying and networking: if you ask me, rather despicable mechanisms, ironically enough even offering suitable topics for doctoral theses! How totally alien this is to everything that we considered our core task. After all we became musicians with a mission in mind; far be it from us to sacrifice on this altar, I'm entitled to say.

If I try to understand or to explain what I had initially in mind when I was unable to elude the urge (or idea? invention? necessity?) to "discover" music in its "original shape" (to the extent that I was able at all to descry it in my juvenile fantasy and relative ignorance), I'm actually at a loss: yes, what exactly was it that I was after? Somewhere in a little corner of my heart, of my intuition, my fantasy, my ambition (how to define it at all?) there was a restless activity of guesswork about "something" that was surely possible, and that I was inevitably going to do that "something"; that "something" was dormant in me (and not only in me, I was not the only one. I was



sustained by a kind of certainty that our family genes contained the same seminal tendency to engage on the same course, and that no doubt there were yet other people with the same odd fixation); there was a growing urgency about tackling the problem now – because it was possible! That the enabling condition for this “something” to succeed was the use of “original” period instruments, invaluable sources and if possible authentic ways of playing, by inhaling as deeply as possible the atmosphere of the period in which the work originated – in short: by contact with the ground from which the work had grown, all that was already intrinsic to the vision unfolding itself in me. Mind you, all this happened in my head at age fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, and was therefore neither a polished programme survey nor suddenly “acquired” travel baggage!

At the same time it was perfectly clear to me that the ultimate parameter was going to be: “quality”, and nothing but quality, at any cost. If it was only going to be “remarkable” or “new” or even provably “exact”, this was not good enough. It would need to carry inside the cogency of the “feast of recognition”, the only standard of quality in depth. That was the key issue, that aspect had to be present, at least in dormant form, and in a seminal way. Most certainly it was not the “scientific” aspect of research that loomed largest, no, that only looked like a subsidiary aspect, one hundred percent at the service of the whole – a whole that was going to be an artistic affair (incidentally, this intuition has continued to live in my mind in a perfectly intact way!).

Björn, you use somewhere a very felicitous wordplay: “sonori-tijden” (sonori-times). Please allow me to plagiarize you a bit cheaply in my discourse, and to speak about “kwali-tijden” (quali-times). As a matter of fact I have always cherished the profound belief, to this day, that quality stands with one leg, if not with both legs, outside time. That’s why the feeling that Bach or Mozart are “the past” is something I can hardly relate to; and please, feel free to substitute Ockeghem and Josquin or Machaut and Dufay, go ahead, or Debussy and Stravinsky and Schönberg. Their intrinsic mastery (which remains intact even with a mediocre execution or even with a barely capable interpretation) determines their greatness above time, as it were. Because the essence of quality is beyond time, it doesn’t matter whether we are dealing with so-called “early” music or not (...and then again: what is “early”? Until just a moment ago?); therefore we have to refrain from isolating “early music” in a separate pigeonhole, on the contrary! All problems deriving from that kind of “classifying” are basically confused and erroneous constructions. There exists a deep core against which all shoptalk becomes mindless and empty parlance. (“Hey, mind you”, says my little devil’s advocate that always stays with me, “it’s totally OK to give nonsense and babbling a chance, this belongs to the fundamental rights of human beings!” Yes, that’s what he says, and again I cannot contradict him).

As you can see, all this is rather “general” and hence can be stretched; “vague”, neither clearly circumscribed nor circumscribable – and that’s fine too, I’m inclined to say, for all programmes that are too “concrete” are concurrently also prisons.

Our epoch has, it seems to me, subordinated the concept of quality in an excessive way to itself (yes indeed, to our own epoch) – to “topicality” or its “topical value” (do we have to pursue our wordplay, throwing the concept of topicality on the market? Who knows, it might be bingo!) This is exactly why, in terms of ideas, aridity often strikes – this kind of one-sided evaluation inevitably results in the drying up of an inexhaustibly rich reservoir.

Therefore I tell everybody who has ears to listen: read Dostoevsky and Cervantes, and so many others connected to the source of Life; marvel at Van Eyck and listen to Bach and Schönberg! Where are the guides that are greater and wiser than they? Go and see Venice, if you can, and let the wind blow in – that’s my advice to the dear and distinguished readers of these pages. Do not hesitate either to take in the modern Guggenheim temple in Bilbao (but perhaps its impact will not last that long, everything being so close to us that we have trouble seeing it clearly. Probably the filter of time will clarify for our grandchildren what is really essential there) – but don’t allow yourself to be bottle-fed with the pap of trendy culture popes! You live only once, and it would be a pity if you didn’t go on a quest for the source yourself!

High time, then, to refrain from putting “early music” apart and imputing to it “specific problems”, with a view to tackling them with “targeted” arguments and coordinated actions once they have been identified, no matter how well-meant. The vitality of a project, once it declines, cannot essentially be saved by “measures”. This vitality comes from the core, and plastic surgery dealing with surfaces is wasted effort.

Music (all music) has to convince from the core – that’s where its authenticity lies, its veracity, its unique character, its life force. This holds true both for composition and for performance; recipes and currents, fashions and cultural politics are never as vitally important as the flowing source itself.

Dear Björn, this is enough for one “instalment” – time pressure forces me to take this decision, and also a gut feeling of “this will do for now”. So I let this balloon fly, and am curious to see which directions it will take on the waves of your free mind.

Meanwhile my warmest regards!  
Sigiswald.

### 3. Answer from Björn Schmelzer to Sigiswald Kuijken

Antwerp, 5 juli 2009

Dear Sigiswald,

Your letter has touched me by virtue of its style and form: crisp and pithy, visionary, but at the same time critical and universal. You wrote that from your point of view there is not much to quarrel about because basically, or at least by and large, you agree with the way I present the situation.

Apart from the compliment and regardless of whether you agree with me or not, you appeal here to an attitude with which I in turn can totally align myself. As if confrontational debate has ever yielded something (in early music this usually degenerates into distasteful bickering about “authentic” and “more authentic” with an eye on the ultimate exposure of the charlatans: the notorious platonic dispute about the good and the bad copy). What is there to argue about anyway – is an argument about the creative act in general meaningful at all? As if it would make sense to channel the diversity of vantage points, ideas, inventions, styles, performance practices, or worse: to measure them by some underlying “great” truth or hidden primal authenticity dormant under all that proliferation of visions and practices. Let that truth slumber underneath. Is this not an example of how genuine authenticity manifests itself between those different visions, or in the seriality of all perspectives, like an elusive demon or a whole series of barely visible demons or djinns, like a bolt of lightning that fatally hits both performers and listeners, like a confusing fata morgana that spurs you on to pursue your quest instead of yielding to the temporary gratification of the oasis.

Do you know what I intend to do in this letter, Sigiswald? First of all I will deal with a number of things that you wrote and which affected me – as it seems to me that whether I agree with your thoughts is of lesser importance, as long as their clarifying power keeps driving me and spurs me on to explore new perspectives. At a following stage, after all self-made essay-flaunting about early music has been buried and after I have also cut short the plaintive voice in me, that keeps indulging in complaining and swearing, an attempt will be made to develop, on the basis of your letter, a possible *Traité du savoir-vivre – avec ou sans la musique ancienne – à l’usage des jeunes generations*. It is the manifesto style of your letter that I find inspiring: we need to break away from the aestheticizing trend, and also from the feigned “innocence” of early music, we need to get rid of the mentality of picture books, we have to dump the parading with naïve historical tableaux: “O listen, how thrilling!” (such a typical outcry of the excited early music groupie), but concurrently also the opposite: “O! How raw! How wild and barbaric!”. We have to get rid of everything that reeks

of historical “re-enactment” and of the pseudo-informative (including the compulsive habit of interrupting a concert for explanations or to spell the names of the instruments: an early music public is always eager to learn, hahaha!). Does this imply that ultimately we have to say farewell to the concept of early music? I don’t think so. While destroying assumptions, I also build up (albeit in an idiosyncratic, characteristic way), with a plea for early music as an indispensable hallucinatory perception.

(In this context I am indebted to Huizinga’s seminal ideas about the ecstatic experience of the past, in the seventh volume of his collected works, easily accessible on [http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/huizoo03gesco3gesco3\\_01/index.htm](http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/huizoo03gesco3gesco3_01/index.htm)

Furthermore: such a perception is not the same as a dream, of course; on the contrary. A dream is visual and representative; harmless, uncritical and directed at meaning and significance. But hallucinatory perception is tactile, synaesthetic and critical at once, political, geographical, mobilizing).

Here you are, this is my ambitious plan, now let’s see where this will lead us.

The last part of your letter, Sigiswald, was what affected me most, because there the topic is early music and the concept of time (all those different modes of time) – what exactly is the time of early music? Doesn’t early music also elude its own era to become timeless, universal? But while reading I also noticed the different intersections of our perspectives. Thus it seems to me that you make a case for a universalistic vision of “early music”, against segmentation and compartmentalizing. The value of repertoires, you feel, has to be evaluated from the inside and determines its timeless character. This leads me to believe that you actually want to strip early music of its characteristic epithet in favour of a timeless pantheon of great masters, early and less early, who to be sure have all lasted – time playing the (objective or merciless) role of just judge. This vision I would like to define as classical, if you agree, insofar that it transcends actual time and space, and is granted a universal, eternal value. The consequences for performance practice have been indicated by you: classical repertoire will always last, no matter how mediocre the performance may be. The question I ask myself, then, is: “Does it mean only a kind of posthumous homage to the great masters that we do our best to execute these works optimally nonetheless? And also: why would we get steeped in all that critical (historical) research if the essence will surface anyway, apart from the actual performance, historically informed or not?”

Not against, but alongside this timeless character that you appreciate as so important, I would like to emphasize the untimely character of repertoires (in the sense of Nietzsche’s concept *Unzeitgemäss*). The untimely also eludes the actuality of its era, goes against the grain of its own epoch, but it cannot possibly claim universality or eternity. It is that which fractures the homogeneous historic line, that which does not fit into the picture or what makes the great current deviate into a tributary. The untimely does not show the greatness of a certain culture, but rather its internal fissure, its wilful forgetting. Not against, but alongside the timelessly classical, stands the untimely: particular, heterogeneous, *Sturm und Drang*, mannerism, ornament.

From my point of view it is precisely this untimeliness that has crucial consequences for performance practice: to perform early music is not

only a matter of dusting off beautiful music, but of revealing an area of tension, with all its implications: internal contradictions, paradoxes, anachronisms. Time is not pure time, nor is it a straight line. It seems to me that we have to believe in such a critical performance practice which shows how we have become what we are, which engages in a struggle with clichés, which proves the relativity of aesthetics and quality – or at least questions them. (In your letter you also talk about quality, but from another perspective: measuring quality against topical values.)

Perhaps a couple of examples will be useful? The omnipresent concept of “homogeneity” in performance, especially in vocal music; I feel historical performance practice should set itself the task of approaching such concepts critically, apart from judgements about aesthetic taste. Why the preference for a homogeneous sound over a heterogeneous one? The classical western music tradition assumes such appreciations as a matter of fact and by doing so often exposes its own latent ambitions. Another example is the technique of heterophony, especially used in non-polyphonic, modal traditions: the musicians play around a pattern or melody transmitted by tradition, they recreate that melody by individual grace notes, a technique that is often developed collectively, sometimes resulting in an effect of organized chaos. In vocal music this also happens in many repertoires, from Moroccan Sufis to Tibetan monks. When this technique is applied to comparable Western traditions, the reaction of many music lovers is a hiccup in their aesthetic barometer, based on the right “feeling”. Early music may be timeless all right, but even so it needs its untimely input: if this second component remains conspicuously absent, I fail to see the sense of historical performance practice.

Reading your letter has also inspired me to the following consideration (I read constantly both trends between the lines): perhaps early music needs for a change to explore other paths than that of archaeology, i.e. reclaiming roots, retracing the past, reconstruction, the quest for source material. Perhaps a suggestion by Michel Serres, who compared time to a handkerchief, can come in handy: now perfectly ironed and folded, then crumpled up and arbitrarily folded together, making corners that are originally far apart become close or even folded into each other by the erratic folding of the handkerchief. Perhaps early music needs to take advantage of topology and spatialize repertoires like a world map: intersections, fields of force, grades of tension, coordinates, etc. Each repertoire is an island or a new world with its own logic and qualities, as I have read also in your letters, never apart from other worlds, though, connected through terrestrial ways and waterways, and themselves endlessly intersected by the canals of history and traditions.

If a specific pedagogy can be connected with early music at all - what should such a training look like for God's sake? – then on the basis of the perspective explained above it should be an experimental and autodidactic training, but also a geographical and ethnological one. I believe it was Braudel, the great connoisseur of the Mediterranean, who answered laconically, when asked what he was doing in Brazil while his area was the Mediterranean, that the old Mediterranean area had long gone from its alleged site, but was to be found in Brazil, living on in the attitudes of its in-

habitants. Such a training would have to trace not only back to roots, but also diasporas, exiles and survivals of repertoires. Never one single source would have to be targeted, but rather complex movements and spheres of influence. Never interpreting only, but also contextualizing and functionalizing (by which I mean to indicate the focus on the usage and the function of a source or repertoire). After all, you should get an opportunity to get to work creatively, the way a sculptor makes a sculpture or the conceptual artist an installation. A programme is also a sort of installation: it's a world on its own, in which you should be able to walk around virtually. To compose a programme is creative, climatology work of the highest virtual level: it's always sink or swim. And it's always different from taking a score from the library with a view to "interpreting" it, as well-meaning people call it. But I don't need to tell you that.

In the field of medieval music – perhaps my preferential area of expertise – I have always admired the inventors/climatologists who make new worlds visible, or rather: audible in the world that is apparently so well-known. To mention only four of them: Pedro Memelsdorff, because he introduced faster tempi, retardations and Lucretian dynamics into a repertoire that until then looked cerebral and unplayable; Paul van Nevel, because he turned polyphony into a landscape, opening unheard vocal vistas and sound perspectives; Rebecca Stewart, because she invented elasticity and the micro-movement, providing polyphony with a hitherto unknown internal suppleness and an impulse (or "impetus", as they said in the Middle Ages); Marcel Pérès, because he introduced the vocality of timbred voices and injected a non-subjective emotionality and pathos into the repertoires.

The auditory shape of the Middle Ages that they create is not a reconstruction nor is it a re-enactment, no matter how strongly some people believe this: it is always an hallucinatory perception of a new, hitherto non-existing world, a dormant world that subsists by activating an interior space. "Ich sehe eine neue Erde" (I see a new earth), I am reminded of the visionary man in Werner Herzog's brilliant movie *Herz aus Glas*, and while he is speaking we see an Irish rocky island with Thomas Binkley and Andrea von Ramm performing one of Abélard's plaintes.

Unconditional admiration is indispensable at a certain stage of life, even though it is devoted to *maîtres de loin* (distant masters) as befits a real autodidact. And afterwards too, it is important to keep admiring, and for the autodidact this is not difficult, since he is not prone to the neurosis of the allegedly necessary "symbolic" patricide.

Sigiswald, who would know better than you whether such a pedagogy is feasible, or desirable for that matter. So I'm passing the ball to you (with or without hallucinations).

It's very late indeed – or very early: the letter will at any rate still reach you in time and no doubt it will accompany you between Kortrijk and Würzburg or wherever. If you don't like it or if you lack breath, feel free to treat it the way some people do with their faithful companion when travelling southward in this season: throw it out of the window!

All the best to you!  
Björn

#### 4. Answer from Sigiswald Kuijken to Björn Schmelzer

Somewhere between Kortrijk and Würzburg and Marseille,  
finished on 9 July 2009

Dear Björn,

Your second letter does not qualify for throwing out of the window between Kortrijk and Würzburg! While Marleen is driving, I start pondering my answer.

It becomes clearer and clearer that both of us are hand-in-glove: and the “useful” debate challenging the other side is evidently not triggered in this kind of configuration. Perhaps both of us are a bit a-social: after all we were invited to a dialogue? But we persevere, and do not regret this: let’s keep chatting, everybody can listen attentively. Yes indeed, we are two stubborn men who want to be left alone. We share the same scepticism about structures and “top-level consultations”, and whatever can be usefully retained from our words as elements in a discussion, is freely available on the table – for whom it may concern.

For what it is all about, we lack the right words; for the “great truth” or the “primal authenticity” we pass. The only perfectly logical consequence would then be: to treasure silently in our heart what we cherish (this expression I always find so touching, reminiscent of the most beautiful sentence from the Christmas story: “...and Mary treasured all these things in her heart...”).

But all the same, this attitude is not correct either, because communicating is absolutely necessary, inherent in the human race; even though at the same time it is true that the things one communicates about suffer from the fact itself that one communicates about them at all: there is no clean getaway. This remarkable fatal fact belongs to la condition humaine, and centuries of desperate attempts have not managed to improve this situation. For communicative purposes we can only try to approach le moindre mal - silence is not an option in all circumstances, and certainly not here.

Some tangential points in your second letter will serve me first of all for some tangential comments, so you can see that I fastened my attention on them, and with great pleasure to boot: With great curiosity I await the day when I’ll be able to read your *Traité du savoir-vivre* etc.; don’t forget to send me a copy! Perhaps it will help me to acquire more self-knowledge – but, Björn, take your time – and should it happen that your motivation ebbs away with the years, I won’t blame you.

Huizinga has been on my agenda for a long time already; now that I have retired as a teacher he perhaps comes closer within reach, hopefully; but because of the timetable of these written conversations with its

constraints I am not yet in a position to engage in a dialogue about him. Too bad, for the concept of “hallucinatory perception” intrigues me very much!

Now more to the core of our subject. Björn, you ended up defining my vision of music (early or not) as “classical”, because I emphasized the inner quality which, according to me, can place an artwork (music or other) “above time”, as it were, into a sort of eternal situation. That’s fine with me, no objections, I can align myself with that adjective “classical”. Yes, Time as a “fair judge” is a beautiful image – comparable to a certain extent to our own individual memory – just imagine that each of us would remember everything that he captures each moment in terms of information and experience – wouldn’t each of us turn raving mad in one second? Let us pay homage to our capacity to filter from this everything that is necessary and meaningful for our life, and to stock it consciously or unconsciously in our memory – this is an essential part of our survival technique, I would say. In the same way time works, I believe, even though it would be better to say: “this is the way time works in our perception” (what time really is we cannot even begin to say). It filters and transmits what will nurture the following generations.

However, the fact that you proceed to ask me whether the performance practice of such a “timeless” work of quality (here we are talking specifically about music then) is not relevant any longer, and whether it’s worth the trouble to get steeped in all that critical historical research, that stops me in my tracks. You will never hear me claim that (by virtue of the fact that the artwork itself per se is supposed to be “timeless”) a particular performance practice would no longer be relevant; this could very well be a very romantic statement, satisfying us only in a “virtual” world, where tangible material performances would be passé and only concepts would determine our horizon. This is not our world for sure, we still have to resort to material realisations that are always riddled with imperfection. What our task here and now is still all about is to determine the hierarchy of these imperfections according to our own priorities.

Quality does in my view have a relative “eternity value” indeed, but bad taste, stupid ignorance or ill will can harm a masterpiece; even though in the case of music no irremediable damage will be done, because it will be limited to the moment of “transmission” to the listener, and the work an sich can be adequately restored on a following occasion (in the case of paintings or sculptures the material vulnerability to the aforementioned negative excesses is of course much greater). The faithful listener is of course entitled to a performance that represents the work unadulterated and in its original colours, but this does not imply that he is not entitled to enjoy the most terrible adaptation of the work as well, should he so desire for one urgent reason or the other... (to put it generally: we are entitled to good and bad taste, to wisdom and stupidity, to warm and cold, and so on...evidently! The Mona Lisa or a picture of Royalty on the biscuit tin, all this is part of The Declaration of Human Rights!). Nobody among us is in a position to objectively “judge” here, anything goes, fortunately so; but nevertheless I dare say that in the framework of this correspondence the issue was not Royalty on biscuit tins, or Mona Lisas on packages of beauty



care products, nor was it a synthesized version of Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* through the loudspeakers at the supermarket, but the focus was rather on consciously meditated performances of culture music, aiming at evoking optimally the essence that is dormant inside it (this limitation of our subject is of course also arbitrary and debatable, yes indeed, but we need to somehow draw a line, we cannot talk about everything at once!).

A performance in the sense described above should be first and foremost inspired, if it wants to claim any qualitative value that does credit to the piece; this inspiration is incomparably more important than any other quality and overrules any other (thus "historical correctness" in early music is no guarantee of inspiration, and vice versa: neither is historical non-correctness, to be sure!!).

I am aware of the fact that this concept of "inspiration" is a very slippery criterion: hard to apply, because very subjective. There is no better one, though, so we have to take the many concomitant misunderstandings and controversies for granted (making it clear once more how a discussion on music and "performance" can soon get stuck in the mud) — indeed, what does one subsume under "inspired"? Let me adopt the commonsense approach that I take it to mean what an average person understands by it, and hopefully we'll be on the same wavelength (this observation is meant mainly for the "external" reader, Björn! I trust that both of us will refrain from splitting hairs). The word is a cognate of "spirit", a concept that isn't such a bestseller today, but even so it is being revived, in all kinds of directions, both honest and fishy.

By "inspired" I mean therefore that there is a personal energy at work, coming from the inner self of the performer and corresponding to his unique personality and insight; evidently "inspiration" is more than a primal, purely "spontaneous" expression of temperament or so-called instantaneous "inspiration", particularly when the music performed is complex and solid. A performance that restricts itself to the above I wouldn't want to subsume under the category of "inspired" (again a possible point of endless discussions).

In the case of "early music", after all the topic of these letters, the following tricky question emerges: until when, until what year, or even until what day (last night??) is music "early music"? (There we go again, ready for another interminable session!). Full of enthusiasm and very diplomatically to boot, I propose to refrain from answering this grocer's question, and to proceed right on.

With a view to zeroing in on your question about the sense or nonsense of our research about historical conventions etc., I want to make it perfectly clear that my gut feeling prefers — as you have probably already guessed by now — inspired performances that concurrently take advantage of the enormous potential offered by research about vitally important and essential executions of early music. This does not necessarily imply the application of *le dernier cri* that has just been launched on the early music information market (but if it happens to be vital and meaningful, why not?).

No, for years already a whole layer of invaluable information has percolated into our (neo?-) performance practice, information that, if understood and “situated” in a meaningful way, does offer an evident and organic perspective on a livelier interpretation of “old repertoire”. By contrast, those performances that align themselves totally (whether consciously or not) with the simplest historical evidence, are already theoretically flawed from the start, and will appeal to me in a persuasive way only in very few cases.

To put it in a nutshell: a memorable performance will, to my mind, eventually match inspiration (including intuition) with knowledge, or heart and brain. A third quality is implied, self-evident without needing comment, namely integrity in the creative handling of all this. This is again an argument that can trigger an endless marathon of discussions: does a professional musician really need to pursue integrity (or try to), in an era when so many notorious key figures and also countless complex multinational mechanisms don't care about integrity? I'm convinced we do need integrity, particularly because we are involved in Art – except if persiflage or irony are aimed at (no, wait a second, let me correct myself: probably integrity is even more basically an enabling condition, if the irony wants to be artfully crafted).

...And thus I really and truly ended up with a sort of “Credo” in connection with performance – despite all my deep doubts and hesitation to fix things too much! And this happened solely through your provocative question whether performance doesn't matter any more, and because you almost insinuated that I probably thought old masters were going to survive anyway even without our efforts, assigning them a sort of timeless value.

I want – to make matters worse? - as a postlude to that “credo” add that these things are essentially valid for all kinds of music: also that music which has not yet received the epithet “early”, as well as the unwritten music that will one day be “early”!

Yeah, no sweat, what does it matter? You picked my brain, so I told you how I felt about it; some people think this way, others that way and the whole of my answer is part of the interconnectedness of things on this little globe; nothing will stay as is, everything keeps rotating, and these “problems” are relatively innocent – even if we can work ourselves up into great excitement about them – or the opposite.

So long as we live, we are confronted with our relationship to ourselves and to others, including those who were there before us and those who will come after us. If you are involved in the arts (music or others) you are implicated in a special way in precisely that which touches their essence most deeply, there's no way around it (even the greatest cynic cannot circumvent exposure of his heart, albeit cynically!). Our profession (if you wish to call it that, our privileged and never-ending contact with art) reflects as a matter of fact how we relate to ourselves and to others from today and the past, and consequently it is much more than a collection of tricks and pieces of information that serve to maintain our status of “artist”, with appropriate prosperity and respectability (or: the opposite again).

Therefore, so long as I live it's not all the same to me how I feel about all this. If things work out all right, music enables us to be connected in a special way to our "source" (that is the eternal Source of everybody and everything) –this connection is something to cherish, to deal with in a personally conscious way; it deepens and transforms at once our understanding of early and new masters, everybody who is trying to develop his way "inwards" will recognize this experience.

The question arises, then, how to transmit this "connection to the source", and to share it with others or put them on the right track with a view to discovering this connection in themselves; this leads us to the chapter "education" in the broadest sense.

Education –and art education in particular – should not limit itself to the transmission of factual knowledge and craftsmanship, but needs to take care first and foremost of a broader framework (or better: an open plurality of potential frameworks) in which this knowledge and know-how can contribute to the meaning of life; in the end its purpose must be to offer the questing human being a more harmonious existence.

The more beautiful and glowing the subject material is, the greater the risk of losing its gleam if it becomes "subject matter" in the context of educational structures – educational practice throughout history teaches us how deadening our contact with the Core-Source of Art (and of life itself) can become when it is forced into the straitjacket of a doctrine or "course". In antiquity education took place essentially on a one-to-one basis, and I assume that this approach remained the basis for a long time, until the first universities emerged in early Europe. However, today we see how a tremendously complex educational machinery deploys itself over all fields. I feel like giving the benefit of the doubt about the honesty involved in trying to make everything possible, likewise there is a brave attempt to keep everything under control. Yet such an unwieldy project demands more and more structures and rules, resulting in a self-serving organization that swallows more energy for its own sake. As far as the conceptual aspect of education is concerned, more and more pigeonholes are developed, and specializations proliferate; the negative after-effect being that the sustaining framework in terms of meaning and significance (the relationship inwards) is often drowned under the "useful" information and most of all the practical development of acquired skills.

Therefore: long live the rebel teacher who provides an antidote within this almost "Dantesque" system: he who dares to go beyond his subject and expertise to help a coming generation discover what they are exploring in depth, assisting them with his insights and experiences.

May this suffice as my comment on the first major part of your argument, given the constraints of time. Then you proceed to develop interesting ideas about the "Untimely" as a complementary concept to the "Timeless" as I discussed it. With this idea of Nietzsche's I'm not familiar, but I find it very powerful; all Art for sure contains components that are against the grain of their "own" era. I'm almost seduced to venture that perhaps just there is to be found the essential spark that makes an artefact into a work

of art; who knows, I strongly believe that every living organism (and a work of art certainly qualifies for that!) always harbours an interior “Duality” (in certain proportions), in the end providing its irreplaceable unique quality. This leads us to my cherished yin/yang, which cannot be praised enough, the thinking of the old Taoists, according to which each phenomenon always includes polar opposites, life being possible only when both are present concurrently. Thus the “timeless” and the “untimely”. This new thought sets me daydreaming.

This apparent counter-logic has become dear to me, thank you. I can imagine that the power and impact of a musical performance is also determined by this duality of both complementary, contrasting aspects. (Likewise, our grandmothers also added a pinch of salt in the coffee grinder, to enhance the coffee taste, although they had never heard about yin or yang: the extreme “yin” coffee was being tickled by a grain of “yang” – salt! – and resulted in invigorated life.)

Also what you tell me about Michel Serres (also an unknown quantity to me) is striking and strong: the representation of time as a crumpled handkerchief, where hitherto distant points may touch each other suddenly, unexpectedly. Perhaps this was also the reason why Braudel’s Mediterranean was suddenly to be found in Brazil? Modern physics shows us today the most stunning things that we used to situate only in poetical imaginings before – perhaps this is another case in point?

Where I hesitate to align myself with you (yes, Björn, sooner or later some kind of dispute had to arise on the horizon?!), is where you state that “a programme is also a kind of installation”, my doubt in this case being inspired by my personal aversion to the kind of “emperor’s new clothes” installations with which some charlatans with a touch of genius, and also some without a touch of genius, try to inflict an unsettling effect on exhibitions.

But nevertheless I feel that I do understand what you could have told us in other words as well, words that would not have rattled the child in me so much.

To conclude this contribution I want to quote a great idea of a great writer, perhaps without being clearly connected to what preceded here: Dostoevsky once let one of his characters say: “Beauty will save the world!”.

If you ask me, this is what has already been the case for centuries, against all the odds! Take away the “superfluous” things of life, that inexpressible core of things that makes everything live and bubble up, that makes the green grass grow and turns our hair white (and even that I want to subsume under the core of beauty!), and the world will collapse like a house of cards. Do you agree?

All the best to you, let your hair grow.

With kind regards,  
Sigiswald.

Antwerp, 5 august 2009

Dear Sigiswald,

With admiration and awe, but also with a certain uncomfortable feeling, I read your last letter, written by an almost perfect tight-rope dancer. Admittedly: I for myself have not yet found this balance, not by far. Or perhaps I was not actively looking for it. Or yet again: perhaps my commitment to early music is not concerned with harmonious balancing, let alone with interpreting harmonious scores from the past.

Let me put it differently, Sigiswald: gradually it becomes clear to me, how could it be otherwise, that we deal with early music from different vantage points, that we are clearly representatives of different generations. This is only logical: after two letters, I have this feeling that I am gradually coming to know you, thereby getting both closer to you and more distant from you. Perhaps a correspondence sounding out the depths of what makes us tick should start only now. As if what was claimed and written before was only finger exercise, feeling out, exploring the territory. Perhaps we were too nice to each other, not so much because we wanted to avoid senseless polemics that others would gloat about, but because we didn't feel like tackling immediately a number of hot issues that for many people constitute the concrete problems of early music.

Surely you can hear me coming: there is this feeling taking over that we may have lost sight of the concrete view of the case. I from my side have also done this consciously: there is nothing so terrible as myopically staring at the chaos of assorted facts, social facilities, the ups and downs of an artist's life, the moods and vicissitudes of musicians, impresarios, organizers, the shaping of a career: in fact I hate to speculate on those topics. And I am under the impression that this kind of discourse is a waste of time for you.

At the peril of getting bogged down in some kind of polemics – between us, something I want to avoid absolutely because I respect you and your work far too much – I want to deal with a number of aspects that I find problematic, partly explicable by the generation gap, but also by virtue of my specific approach to early music. Which does not imply that my approach would be typical of my own generation, that is for others to determine. How could I be so preposterous as to assume to be its mouthpiece? I feel a certain urgent need to raise this matter because it leads us to the core of the problems that early music is struggling with at this very moment.

The first problem concerns the far-reaching relativism expressed in your letters, a touching relativism to be sure, and worth pursuing to boot. But

paradoxically enough, this relativism is in turn being relativized and is replaced by an almost medieval triad: inspiration – knowledge – integrity (a variant of the Thomist triad *integritas* – *proportio* – *claritas*?) that for you guarantees quality and a burning eternal Beauty.

I see this paradox also very clearly at work in the performance practice of your generation – without however associating your work with it, and I trust that you won't take my far-reaching polarisations too literally or too personally. A generation that pretends to be merely a mediator, purely a performer, without pretensions and also without a personal input, a generation that does not interpret or set its stamp on the performance, but only does what the composer asks or means – in contrast to the bourgeois classical music tradition that it reacts against. In other words: a generation that minimizes its own contribution, its own “interpretation”, that allows the work to speak for itself, resulting in an almost transcendental musical experience. Is that not too much feigned modesty?

It looks typical to me that eventually the great tenors (both great masters and divas) re-enter by the back door, and with them re-enter the big words, beauty, authenticity, quality, integrity. The generation that reacted against the bourgeois, bombastic stardom in which classical performance practice was bogged down, now seems in the end to continue the classical music tradition, or rather: displaces that mentality onto a domain that remained intact until then. Composers are framed again in genealogies of geniuses, from Josquin to Bach to...

Early music now has become the highest, only precariously reachable rung on the classical music ladder, the cream of the bunch, for real connoisseurs and people with taste.

Just like all revolutionary movements early music, too, seems to end in precisely that against which it reacted, settling in turn in an unheard elitism, a rigid black and white-thinking, new codes and mentalities, worse than before (the strict veto on vibrato in performance practice is only an absurd, trivial example...).

Against this development I would like to set the intrinsic mentality of the early music practitioner: no antitheses, no glaring contrasts or breaches, but a closely knit, complex microphysics of performance practice. My fascination with early music does not derive from the great masters, the superior quality of oeuvres, the pursuit of balance and harmony, nor does it have to do with the desire to be the performer or mediator thereof. Rather my special interest goes out to the margins of repertoires, the paradoxes and contradictions in performance practice, the survivals of traditions that are intrinsically connected to West-European music, but alienate us from what we believed we knew, the fault lines, the aesthetic confrontation. For me the operative element and the dynamics of the practice are crucial in dealing with old repertoires. I feel free to confess that I basically mistrust the lost sounds from paradise that some aficionados seem to perceive in the performance of early music.

Sigiswald, I trust you don't misunderstand me. I can imagine that you don't even disagree with my opinion. I feel this shift of emphasis is im-

portant because of the four resulting socio-cultural consequences for our generation of musicians, still far away from the highest rung of the *gradus ad parnassum* and restlessly itching to be elected and pushed upwards.

First consequence: the almost general blindness for a new generation of early music practitioners and the promotion of imitators. I remember an interview a couple of years ago in *De Standaard* with an important Flemish programme-maker who claimed laconically that there was no new generation of early music practitioners simply because he did not see them. The present generation was so strong, he said, that a new generation did not have a chance of survival: he didn't see any new Kuijken, Van Nevels, Jacobses, Herreweghes – and therefore no renewal either. Everything has already been done, there is nothing to add...Amen!

From this perspective there are only imitators to be seen. Young musicians take their cue from their masters. Perhaps they are technically even better, but an input or style of their own they do not have, cannot have, should not have. Of course there's no harm in improving technique, but technique is never something for its own sake and is always connected to a style and a performance practice in which one makes oneself at home. Therefore a school or tradition in historical performance (the way it clearly exists in classical music practice) is out of the question because by definition it is at right angles to the intrinsic critical function of early music. We shall only emerge from the sclerosis of the super generation and its imitators if and when we quit handling metaphysical parameters and dare to put on a new pair of glasses, enabling us to see new inventors, stylists and legislators. Belief in a new generation of early music practitioners could mean: supporting them in their experimental quest, helping them to create new parameters, opportunities, spaces and associations, rather than showing them the worn paths of existing performance practice or inflicting on them the standards of an ossified aesthetic taste.

Second consequence (partially resulting from the first): the difficult, sometimes untenable relationship between young musicians and the professional sector, the organizers. This is a precarious point, Sigiswald, and I don't want to blame anybody personally. Let me just say in too generalized terms that the arrogance and pretension of some organizers is often proportional to the size of the institution that employs them, but not always. As far as know-how and sensibility are concerned, the proportion is mostly inverse, but not always either (so here you go with sociological truths that are no such thing...).

Let me plead my own special case: if as a young group you don't find partners in crime at a crucial moment, represented by organizers who support you unconditionally, who share your quest completely, who give you a free hand without demanding a genuflection or a lifelong debt obligation, you are lost, your days are numbered. You need such supporters to move on, but also to sustain your precarious trust in other organizers. Because it's a hard, hard world, without scruples... If you are not prepared to be exploited financially for at least ten years, you'd better refrain from starting at all. I'm not talking here about individual musicians who may subsist by playing here and there, but about the long and painful road of a musi-

cal ensemble. Not only financially, but also in psychological and content terms, manipulation and exploitation play a role, witness the parlance about attributes and qualities: it's never good enough, a pat on the back "You're on the right track" implies "But you're not yet there!" (but where for God's sake? Typical manipulative manager jargon). The organizers as judges of musical achievements, constructors of hierarchical ladders and, perhaps illustrative of the creative sclerosis: designers of formats, allegedly to help the performers (but in fact rather to cramp them in a strait-jacket). A reflection on early music has to start here: at the bottom of the ladder, where the performers stand who finally take care of everything that is essential.

Third consequence: a one-sided and rigid performance practice, albeit lately often packaged in hip and catchy jargon, part of the problem being a sometimes one-sided and myopic kind of preparatory research and a counterproductive, regrettable relationship between musicians and musicologists. Every early musical performer ought to be a musicologist as well, if not *de jure*, then at least *de facto* (and in many cases this is indeed true). In early music practice the musicologist is assigned an important and interesting role anyway, as his work often precedes the performance and, unlike with later classical music, does not function afterwards in a purely analytic or interpretive way. The early music musicologist is a constructivist, a creator of frameworks and opportunities, not an interpreter or a sort of failed critic of performance practices. That his role is often reduced to the latter I can only explain in terms of an inadequate methodology and a failing educational system that turns musicology into a half-baked musical court of justice. A fundamental reflection about the relationship musician/musicologist is in order, together with the contrast research/intuition that is often attributed as a quality to each of them respectively. As if a performance doesn't demand intelligence, nor interesting research intuition as a necessary condition. Such methodological adjustments would have to be situated in a broad interdisciplinary field in which "performance" could offer an intersection.

Fourth consequence: early music remains willy-nilly caught in conservative clamminess, inappropriate nostalgia and museological snugness, without it admitting as much, but on the contrary engaging in futile attempts to mask this sad state of affairs with new, often trendy disguises. However, much worse than this conservatism is the dour, narrow way of dealing with the musical past and historical performance, the lack of a truly open and dynamic working atmosphere – early music as workshop remains a utopian perspective – and the impossibility of exploring alternatives and experiments in performance practice and in aesthetics tout court. Fundamentally, for me the question remains moot whether and how such desirable changes will ever materialize.

Dear Sigiswald, I end this letter with a somewhat bitter pill, not because I am a pessimist, but rather because for me lucidity can emerge from bitterness as well (in this case that of pseudo-truths originated from pseudo-sociology). Concurrently I realize that my relationship with early music is a fragile and ambiguous one, and that I don't feel like conforming to the unwritten laws that govern its business. So I remain, in my own right, a



believer in its fundamentally nonconformist power to extract original and hitherto unheard sounds from the dormant past.

Many, many greetings,

Björn.

## 6. Latest answer from Sigiswald Kuijken to Björn Schmelzer

Asse 10 August 09

Dear Björn,

Once more I have to admire you for your crystal-clear phrasing of things that are not immediately apparent – a true pleasure to follow you!

You're right, I guess: gradually the running-in stage seems to be over in the course of our dialogue. In that stage we have gone through our paces very respectably, I feel, *plein de savoir vivre* I am inclined to say (even though this may sound self-congratulatory); no damage done so far, and on the contrary benefit found, probably. We have indeed been friendly to one another, also because we share an aversion to those potential sensation-mongers who wanted first and foremost "confrontational stuff". And rightly so.

Now you have found a more rapid stride, Björn (aware of the fact that this is our last round?) and that is OK too. I'll keep up with you...

You have found in my letters a number of aspects, opinions that you find "problematic" on closer scrutiny, and you elaborate on those. Thus you deal with my "far-reaching relativizing" that relativizes even itself and in doing so results in "an almost medieval triad: inspiration – knowledge – integrity". From my point of view you could hardly have complimented me better than with this synthesis, even though you may not have intended it that way; and whether this triad is "medieval" or so far as I am concerned will be claimed from me by the twenty-fifth century is hogwash to me, who cares? At any rate: thanks!

That you define "the relativizing of even relativization" as a paradox and try to score a point on that account looks to me (excuse me) as a little fallacy: doesn't it belong to the essence of "relativization" that it indeed relativizes itself too? If not, doesn't it end up at its opposite?

Furthermore, you claim to encounter this paradox again in the performance practice of "my" generation, you write; and you proceed to describe this generation in your own way, capping it all with the reflection: "isn't that too conspicuously feigned modesty?"

I know what you mean and will in turn try to explain myself: these basic tenets of the above-mentioned “triad”, which indeed implies the clear subordination of the personal, renewing input, could be trafficked with, could be turned into a smart game, calculating that even such a system might catch on. Yet it is over the top to state that the older generation (that is: mine) has instrumentalized this system – I feel it’s already a wild exaggeration to assume that this generation in its entirety would be überhaupt disposed to endorse this beautiful triad! If I count my colleagues, those of my generation who really subscribe to this philosophy are few and far between!

In other words, I’m afraid that your argument mobilizes me too much as a “representative” case in point... When you then proceed to argue that this philosophy (pretended or not) and the concomitant modesty (too conspicuous to be true) serve as the back door to enable this older generation to re-enter the scene again like “great tenors” (great masters as well as divas), then you are really building on quicksand. What I find unsettling is that I sense behind this statement a kind of general condemnation, without any redeeming differentiation, of the phenomenon “great tenors”. What is the basis for such a harsh judgement? Every era and branch of the fine arts has its lesser or greater tenors, de facto. And here I don’t mean in the first place the biggest stars who know how to manipulate the public and the cultural managers with their musical and socio-diplomatic talent, but most of all those who, from their core being, couldn’t help exerting an essential influence (that they did not even pursue as their main objective). It’s not fair at all to impute to those people the betrayal of their youthful ideals with a view to reaching the top of the success pyramid, and to joining the ranks of those whose “traditionalist” approaches they initially wanted to alter. That’s what you insinuate: “the generation that reacted against the bourgeois, bombastic stardom in which classical music performance was bogged down, now in the end seems to continue that same classical music tradition, or even sharper: displaces this mentality to a field that had hitherto been intact, etc.”. I can only go along with this very “selectively”: while it may apply to some “great tenors of today”, whose tactics I don’t cherish either, even so the fact remains that those figures in addition to their business instinct, must also have a strong basis of unmistakable artistic talent to sustain their enterprise. If not, they would rapidly be caught out and disappear from the stage like a flash in the pan (after all, it’s not easy to prove your mettle like that! All the while considering that *de gustibus non disputandum est*).

After all, those who without calculating and over-ambitious career intentions make it in a big way nonetheless, those artists develop during their career organically into greater fame and recognition; and while you may be tempted to state that they emerge this way again as “great tenors” in “general” musical life, I for one would refrain from lumping these extraordinary figures together with those described above, but on the contrary show them deep gratitude: for it is they who (by virtue of a long and genuine process of self-development) manage to re-invigorate even the “traditional” music scene, exactly there where this is clearly not in the least evident!

Moralité: everything in its place and time! Also in our judgement of history this is not without importance. I'm afraid you were a trifle too self-indulgent.

Your concluding sentence of the "description" of the characteristics and the consequences of the "old" generation's method (before you start discussing what is essential for you and the "newer" generation) is therefore very bitter and generalizes too wildly: where you indict unprecedented elitism, rigid black and white thinking, etc.

Admittedly it is true that in a worrying number of respects the so-called "early music movement" is heading in a direction that initially it opposed (this is also a point in my analysis that I keep emphasizing), but even so this is balanced by achievements revealing depths of aesthetic experience corresponding to changing times. The immense influence exerted for forty years or more by a figure such as Gustav Leonhardt (although he has been very visible for a long time already in all great "established" concert series and festivals) cannot be debunked in terms of "he has joined the traditionalist camp that he initially reacted against, he has become a turncoat for the sake of his career, etc.". On the contrary, those who know him feel that for him this sort of comment is totally out of place. The fact that he was and is eminently successful, however, is beyond question, and that's what he fully deserves. And there will always be figures who transcend pedestrian definitions of pedestrian mechanisms, that's for sure!

Preaching the revolution and carrying it out is a very useful undertaking, when the circumstances cry out for it. However, even then wisdom commands us to throw in differentiation for good measure: to become obsessed with a sort of "revolutionary duty" (often resulting in charging at open doors with great conviction) is as counterproductive as the opposite, namely: to reject all revolution. I am convinced that the truly important leavens also change with the changing society, and only in this way can they remain active at their own stage and according to their own timing.

Now I proceed to your description of the "intrinsic mentality" of the early music performer, with a view to contrasting it with the mentality of the preceding generation. It is my impression now that you go overboard in the opposite direction, comparable to the way you generalized about the "older" mentality before, perceiving this younger generation too exclusively through your personal pair of glasses, as if you yourself happened to be representative (no matter how much you protest that you don't want to be understood as a "mouthpiece"). Björn, it already became clear to me a long time ago that neither of us can be considered truly "representative" (luckily?). Thus we are doomed to speak on our own behalf (all the better!); let's keep that in mind.

What you argue testifies to a kind of juvenile violence that may (can? must?) for a while be a productive attitude in a human life; however, in the end I cannot align myself, or only to a very limited extent, with the core of your argument, namely that early music should be a "workshop" – not even in the meaning that you apparently dream about (later in your letter you sound a bit disillusioned about this wishful thinking, admitting that

you don't know how this workshop dream could ever be realized). The factors that you enumerate as components of the "new" mentality, that of the "younger" ones (I quote: "My fascination with early music does not derive from the great masters, the superior quality of oeuvres, the pursuit of harmony etc. [...] but from the margins of repertoires, the paradoxes and contradictions [...] that rather alienate us, etc. – in short: confrontation), all those factors clearly belong to a stage of "expansive" thinking and living and feeling, a stage that is indispensable for any musician in the first half of his active life, at least. But allow me to mention that, in keeping with the nature of things, expansion is followed by a stage of turning inward: this is the fundamental law of expansion and contraction, of yin and yang (to take our cue from the Taoists, to whom I feel very close) and that second stage then announces what human beings in their totality will have acquired and achieved, in their short existence. The minimizing or even denial of this aspect after the expansion is to me a somewhat brash train of thought, one that I dare to qualify as immature.

Unfortunately, however, most critical and progressive analysts of our western consumer society all too often bypass this reality in a gross and rash way: there is the compulsive desire to glorify only the expansive power of all that lives and moves (just to keep abreast?), and to neglect the reversing movement or even ignore it. At the terminal point of this fishy reasoning we arrive at the general and tyrannical denial of the only certainty in life, namely death as our final destination: a monumental taboo in our so-called liberated welfare society! As if you could beat death by just pretending that it doesn't exist. It would be a blessing for education if youngsters were already exposed at an early age to the idea that this inevitable finality is essentially good, because it is the key to the life cycle, instead of being railroaded in the direction of denial; young and old would only profit from a positive attitude towards death, by experiencing it not as an ugly disharmony or a miserable defeat, but on the contrary as the ultimate harmony (yes, you could see life as a continuous oscillation, to and fro, of dissonant to dissonant always bridging an almost virtual minute line of consonance, that subtle bit where standing still is hardly possible, until the oscillation comes to a stop on the small line).

Admittedly, I have suddenly travelled a long way away from our topic, but I did not want to leave this connection undiscussed: this denial of the natural, organically developed moment of "withdrawal" that is satisfied with less "action" (because the inner relativity and connection of things become clearer), is the source of trendy and superficial mechanisms being pushed in the name of energetic and radical "renewal", if not "progress" (in the parlance of today's intensely fashionable journalism this is even called "sexy", God knows why!), as if hot water has been invented again. Many of those trendsetting ideas are empty boxes, the emperor's new clothes, if you ask me. Festivals and concert series, "classical" radio channels and culture supplements in the better newspapers are devoted disproportionately to this unseasoned fashion. Whoever dares to oppose this is dubbed a candidate for the old people's home, or is not considered a politically correct person any longer.

(My God, Björn, I would never have thought that I would ever set off such a conservative tirade – but there it is, and I'll let it stand; now it's my turn to

ask you not to take all of this personally, as if you stood as a symbol for all these sorry states of affairs.)

The thesis that early music should be a workshop where the practitioner of early music can experiment to his heart's content, indulging in confrontations and new tensions, has almost become (at the stage that we have reached now) an abomination to me. For the so-called "creative dealing" with the past has become a little system. Often again the emperor's new clothes: what is there important or innovative about having songs by Mozart and Schumann performed by "the best counter-tenor in the world", accompanied by the most fantastic lute player, in an early music festival? (Even so, I understand the performers better than the programmers, after all they are the professional "artists" and hence entitled to do something "funny" for a change). Is this the road to salvation for classical music (let alone early music) with a view to salvaging it from the scrap heap, according to the innovative and refreshing modes of thought? Name me an honest person who can still follow those aberrations; is "sensible" so distasteful, do we really have to call it quits for all those worn-out normal Lied recitals (incidentally, joking apart, there is already a dearth of such recitals: if we continue like this, Schubert and Schumann, Brahms and Wolf will soon be merely as dead as doornails, perhaps only mentioned in old history textbooks, for the happy few who will be still lucky enough to pick up some history). This is an extreme but real consequence of the concept of early music as a workshop, no matter how interesting or mind-broadening this may look at face value. Although not all realisations of this concept will, I hope, end up with this kind of absurdity, even so I have reasonable fears that from the trendy pursuit of this workshop idea more nonsense of this kind is to be expected, and I would resent it very much if the naïve, harmoniously minded music aficionado were relegated to the "sheltered workshop" by the fancy runners of early music workshops.

Also what happens in the field of insane and pretentious adaptations of plays and operas (foisted on us as "intersemiotic" or whatever in truly intellectual fashion) where every connection to the original work is avoided as much as possible, is justified by the above-mentioned concept...I'll try to end my list here.

Now I realize, Björn, that you with your "workshop" do not have such horrendous things in mind. However, your description leaves the way open to such aberrations, and I wonder whether the early music that you deal with does not satisfy you by itself. Why do you want to perform at all? It's a fact of course that concerning the performance style of the very old repertoire there is a lot of groping in the dark with a view to achieving a correct-sounding result with panache, a performance that sticks to the ribs. There is a lot of latitude and the clues are few and far between, thus making interventions of your own almost inevitable; doing this successfully is not impossible, but demands an extraordinary talent and subtle intuition, coupled with great insight and respect for the evolution of the arts. An exceptional task, then, that has nothing to do with the brash manipulation that, alas, has taken over to a large extent. That's precisely where for me the fault-line lies, so I prefer to resign rather than following a fad. There are already CDs available of the music of ancient Egypt: can this be more

I believe it is part of a growing maturity to accept the limitations as they are, and to refrain from forging ahead beyond those evident limitations into unknown territory that can be explored only in a very speculative way. After all there is so much beauty to be found right here, and as such it is not transient. Do we really need to “arrange” on top of that, and to re-create (perhaps also in a “recreational” way)? Isn’t that a bit weird, wouldn’t we be well-advised to use our talent for truly contemporary creation, instead of developing interpretative opportunities of materials from the past that are intractable? My doubts are very fundamental here. It’s so easy to “invent” a sort of new, fresh style on the basis of “old materials”, exuding an aura of “actuality”. Let the gentlemen who today “recreate” *Don Giovanni* with fads and fancies rather design and write an opera themselves instead of trafficking with Mozart and Da Ponte, and let the baroque musicologists stop reconstructing lost Bach cantatas. Has our creative potential shrunk to such an extent that our era does not get beyond tampering with the remnants of the past, and outstripping colleagues with “new creations” of recovered “masterpieces”?

In this context I also want to make it perfectly clear that from my point of view the “early music musicologist” should not by any means be a “constructivist, a creator of frameworks and opportunities” as you enthusiastically proclaim: if you don’t watch out, he’ll soon be the composer of his own musicological “products”. Where will this end? This can result in a triumph of speculation with the capital of the other. That something like that may happen as an exceptional and rather humorous “flirt” with the past (as in Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella*) is OK (particularly if it happens with a touch of genius, and geniuses do exist!). But should this become the rule of thumb and a structurally pursued method, the standard for contemporary practice by the classical music professional, the *sine qua non* for being taken seriously and perhaps also for securing subsidies? This goes very far indeed, for my taste.

This brings us to the “social” aspect of the arts, how art works both ways, as it were: on the one hand as a sort of objective de facto “sedimentation” and “condensation” of what society liberates in terms of creative energy (comparable to the inevitable sooty smut of a torch!) and on the other hand as a mirror in which the same society could “read” the reflection of its achievements and its creative wishful thinking. This vision of art as two-way traffic allows for everything, does not assume imposed tracks nor censorship, but it remains an eternal truth that one reaps what one sows, and I like to add that our nourishment depends on the harvest!

Surely art can contain an aspect of *Spielerei*, but also something more substantial. No harm in some commentary to make it more palatable, but this should stay of secondary importance and not become the main menu. No harm in support from the government, if it feels like that, but don’t let it become a poisoned chalice that promotes superficial and trendy programming in an opportunistic way. It’s fine for art to celebrate youthful expansion and enhance it, but may it also create space for the experience of the other dimension, the turning inward instead of outward at all price

(preferably with the support of those who are in a position to sustain, and of those who are supposed to do this!). To be sure, this is not likely to evoke the most grateful and flattering reactions from the listeners, the spectators, the readers. Art demands courage, and a deep non-conformism, a willingness to go against the grain even when the lucky stars point into the other direction.

*Panem et circenses*, hopefully this ancient expression and its intrinsic ideology will not seduce our cultural managers, nor inspire our artists to facile showing-off or smart little theories.

This does not imply an answer to the urgent questions, nor a solution to the problems, I have only ventured to sketch my present frame of mind, my convictions as they make me tick at this stage of my life. I'm not seated in a judge's chair nor am I the minister of culture, but I do speak and act from the base (albeit my specific spot in the base...); my discourse was in many respects very critical, and I dedicate these thoughts to the critical mass of music and art lovers who, as I know very well, align themselves to a large extent with me, but rarely get the opportunity to raise their voice.

Let this suffice, and may my words be understood in a constructive way! Many kind regards, Björn, it was a very enriching experience to exchange ideas with you, also keeping in mind that all this will be catapulted into a larger audience. I shall always treasure this memory!

Looking forward to meeting you again personally, I send you my best!  
Sigiswald

(Translation: Joris Duytschaever)  
(Revision: Richard Condon)





# Programme

## Musica

### Antiqua

### Revisited

The programme of Musica Antiqua Revisited was subdivided into three major themes.

Below you can find the complete programme.

- 13:45 Introduction by chair Stephan Moens
- 14:00 Session 1 | Herman De Winné discusses performance praxis with Claire Chevallier and Bjorn Schmelzer
- 15:00 Session 2 | Herman De Winné discusses concert life with Florian Heyerick and Koen Uvin
- 16:00 Session 3 | Herman De Winné discusses music education/coaching with Sigiswald Kuijken and Peter Van Heyghen

Each session results in a public debate

- 16:45 Conclusions by chair Stephan Moens.

# Report on the debate Musica Antiqua Revisited:

## FROM STRICT STANDARDS TO DIVERSITY

Twenty-five years ago a debate on the future of early music was organized by Musica, impulse-centre for music. High time to take stock again and to look forward. This happened during Musica Antiqua Revisited, the debate that concluded the festival Laus Polyphoniae on 30 August 2009, with as initiators: Musica, Flanders Music Centre, AMUZ (Festival of Flanders Antwerp) and REMA (Réseau Européen de Musique Ancienne).

Venue: AMUZ in Antwerp. On the programme were three partial themes about early music, each of them dealt with by a panel of two experts and a discussion with the public. The themes: performance practice (with Björn Schmelzer and Claire Chevallier), concert life Florian Heyerick and Koen Uvin) and education and training (Sigiswald Kuijken and Peter Van Heyghen). Chair was music critic Stephan Moens, while Herman De Winné, a collaborator of Klara (the Flemish classical music channel) served as moderator.

## PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

*A quest for the correct standards of performance: is that what should be the main concern of performers of Early Music? “No”, is the answer of Björn Schmelzer and Claire Chevallier, but their motivation derives from rather different vantage points.*

Björn Schmelzer rejects the search for original standards and absolute truth as uninteresting and absurd. A performer does not necessarily need to try and capture the past, but rather “to look for what happens in the fracture between our times and the remains of that past period. He needs to introduce and to shock at the same time”. Furthermore, in the past as much as today there was already a difference between the standards set in a given period and living, flexible practice in a complex reality. Schmelzer illustrates this with a well-known anecdote about Josquin des Prez (1450?-1521). Allegedly he worked himself up into great anger against one of his singers, who indulged in all kinds of grace notes, demanding from him to perform the music as it was notated on the score. “This anecdote has been fielded already several times as an argument against my approach with graindelavoix. But the anecdote’s only source is a conversation held forty years after Josquin’s death, and from

a reactionary protestant vantage point to boot. For protestants the text had to be intelligible, that is: one tone for each syllable. While the polyphonic music of Josquin des Prez, by contrast, is ambiguous, layered, and therefore seductive”.

For Claire Chevallier, following in Jos van Immerseel’s footsteps, researching the sources is one element, but concurrently a lot of knowledge derives from the study of both the power and the limitations of the instruments themselves. This approach was a revelation for her as an eighteen-year-old, “because I was close to a bore out in the regular circuit”, she confessed candidly. Interpreting is for her in the first place a question of practicality. “A new score always starts for me with the instrument. There is still a lot of research to be done in that respect, there are conspicuous gaps in our knowledge. This certainly holds true for the keyboard instruments, but also for the string instruments”. Instrument builders engaging on this track cannot count on any substantial support. Chevallier herself subsidizes research about the well-known Parisian clavier builder Erard from the beginning of the nineteenth century. This approach on the basis of the instrument also transforms the task of the musician. “A harpsichord needs to be tuned, so you have to become a tuner yourself. In many cases there is no frame of reference for the things I try to take care of. It often happens that three days before a concert I’m less busy with rehearsing than with the tuning of an instrument. To be sure, this exacerbates the nervousness of everything, but after all that’s what I have chosen for.”

*Inevitably the question of “integrity” emerges in connection with this partial theme: a term that is often used to differentiate between historically informed practice and other approaches.*

“I’m not a follower of Aquinas, so I’m not sure what ‘integritas’ means, Björn Schmelzer says. “There are thousands of ways to perform a repertoire with integrity. Evidently I am committed to what I’m doing, otherwise I’d better quit. But I do have problems with that term, because it has been instrumentalised by people who imply that they are above the mêlée. The question is not only how to handle your sources with integrity. There are people who read the sources with painstaking scrupulousness, yet sadly enough fail to understand them. To evaluate the quality of a performance, it is not even necessary to fall back on the sources, it’s the expressive value that counts”. A rigid approach is disgusting, he feels. “As a performer you take risks, you reveal a diamond in the rough that admittedly may need more polishing, but suddenly pedantic critics rush to condemn you on the basis of the sources. Such a tribunal of Early Music is perverse. It would be preferable for us to use our sources like in the theatre, in a constructive way”.

According to Claire Chevallier, too, integrity is a subjective concept. “The degree of your integrity is a personal matter. In that respect there is no law to be abided or not. And this holds true for all music circuits, also pop, jazz, or world music, certainly not only early music”. However, what the public thinks is important: “The audience is a gift from heaven. I’m not scared by criticism, on the contrary. In the final analysis making music is to communicate, you want to win over the audience. The relationship with the public is the strongest one I know. “Moreover, 80% of her public does not belong to the early music circuit, and she opposes attempts to subsume her entirely under that trend. Both she and Björn Schmelzer feel that there is a public for many

sorts of performances, hence controversies about what is good and what is not good are futile (pace the music critics). Furthermore Schmelzer relativizes the public as the sole criterion, for “you can make music for an audience that does not exist yet, also in Early Music”.

And finally there is the question of the instruments and of musicological research. A listener perceived in this respect progress in performance technique during the last decades, but also an evolution in terms of thinking. “What was rejected as false notes in the 1970s is now appreciated as authentic”, he stated somewhat extremely.

Claire Chevallier agrees that there is progress in performance technique, but this does not imply equal progress in the know-how about instrument building. In connection with research about the Erard instruments she says: “The pioneers of this research are starting to get fatigue-ridden, and succession is in order. They work most often independently by standing order, without subsidies, but they need to be urgently recognized as valuable partners in discussions about Early Music”. After all our generation runs the risk of losing forever certain insights of craftsmanship. “We have become digital people, the old physical laws that were so fundamental in the nineteenth century elude us to a certain extent. The mechanism of the Erard is a case in point: its adjusting exacts expert judgement, it’s a Chinese puzzle. But for me these glorious instruments are at the core of my performance pleasure, while concurrently inspiring my research. Instrument builders tell what works and what doesn’t, and I myself spend a lot of time with my head between the hammers”.

Both panel members conclude that the work of musicologists ought to be much more practice-oriented. “Musicologists do not need to be dust gatherers. They can be creative as well in their own right and productively contribute to renewal”, as Björn Schmelzer clinches this discussion.

## CONCERT LIFE

Historically informed performance practice has become an important factor in concert life, and the sector has a major stake in the subsidy scheme. So one may wonder whether there is a problem at all. But yes, there is, starting already with the definition of Early Music itself.

Panel members Florian Heyerick and Koen Uvin disagree immediately about the meaning of the term Early Music. Heyerick rejects it as meaningless, while Uvin appreciates it as useful: “Defining the concept is perhaps difficult, but you recognize it when you meet it. A term such as ‘historically informed performance’ may look clearer, but actually the concrete interpretation can be as vague. Perhaps the bottom line is: in Early Music the work and its context are at the centre, elsewhere the focus is more on the performer”. Contradicting this thesis promptly, Heyerick explains: “As a musician I always approach music in the same way, whatever its genre: through my personality. The special attention for context is not so important for me, that’s mainly a commercial aspect”.

Early Music as a label is a commercial affair, both debaters agree. As such its

core business is dominated by the urge for innovation. “Commercially speaking, there are two magical words: ‘for free’ and ‘new’”, Uvin says. “The former is not manageable, hence the emphasis on the latter.

It’s also true that an interpretation is subject to wear, perhaps the more so in proportion to the power of its original impact”. Florian Heyerick seconds this observation: “The compulsive desire for innovation starts a life of its own. For example, Jos van Immerseel’s idea to organize his singers in groups of four because he felt they sang better that way may initially have been productive, but eventually such a trend is liable to wear. Then another innovation crops up: the Huelgas Ensemble starts singing in a circle, this becomes intensely fashionable and results in a quality label: who else can sing in a circle? After a while one sits wondering in the train: ‘What else could I invent?’. And discussing a trendsetting idea with managers, you are likely to get opinions in terms of ‘In fact I don’t like it, but it is innovative and the audience wants it’.”

*The audience, then. A factor of vital importance in concert life, of course. To what extent is it decisive for programming? At this stage the debate is joined by listeners, among them a number of concert organizers.*

For Koen Uvin an organizer certainly needs to take into account the audience: “Nothing is as bad as a musician playing for himself alone. You want to have a sounding board, that’s just the way it is.” However, that audience is perhaps thinning, and organizers are building up anxiety about losing it altogether, thus influencing their decisions. Heyerick: “This does not only apply to Early Music. The audience ages, also because the ‘concert’ as a traditional phenomenon is bourgeois and somewhat pathetic. The key question is not whether to bring Bach or something completely new, but how to persuade youngsters to go to something as artificial as a concert. Without subsidies the sector would rapidly collapse”.

Contributing from the public, organizer Herman Baeten (Musica) cannot entirely align himself with that view. “If you fail to attract an audience for your concerts, the subsidies will also be stopped. Without subsidies the struggle may be tougher, but there are musicians who say: ‘Even with less support, I would go ahead anyway’. Even though the audience is always right, organizers do have a mission to try out new things. I for one find it completely normal for older people to be the majority of concert-goers, as people in their thirties are still struggling mid-careerists. And should we really build up anxiety? After all there was never such a vast audience for classical music as today”. Bart Demuyt, the organizer of Laus Polyphoniae, joins in. “Evidently the audience is very important, but it is good for the public to be exposed to a wide gamut of interpretations. Diverse vantage points of performers result in thinking, debating, discussing after the concerts. Admittedly there may be fashionable trends that you capitalize on as an organizer, but you can match them with alternative approaches. If I contract Jordi Savall, predictably the concert will be sold out in two days. To be sure, he will be invited once in a while, but we also want to have the gamba player Paolo Pandolfo or Thomas Baeté. Programming adequately is a question of many checks and balances, it is a creative work of art in its own right. But one thing is certain: if half my concerts draw no audience, I’ll run myself out of business in no time”.

*Is Early Music a question of a closed circuit? Who determines who's in and who's out? Do youngsters get enough opportunities to make themselves heard?*

What applies for organizers is also relevant for radio Klara. What do you select, and what do you avoid? Koen Uvin is the right man to deal with this question. "We try to develop a two-track approach: to do justice to what already exists, but also to introduce new talent. Klara is not in a position to accomplish that alone. In the past it sometimes happened that ensembles were founded with a view to making specific studio recordings for the radio, but that does not happen so often anymore".

Youngsters sometimes get the impression that they are exploited by the organizers. Wouldn't it be a good idea to create productive ties between musicians and concert organizers, like in the theatre world, as the enabling condition for them to produce joint ventures? The younger generation reacts in different ways to this challenge. Peter Van Heyghen (Les Muffatti) appreciates the potential opportunities: "This kind of collaboration gives you as a performer a small platform to develop things that you absolutely want to do, without necessarily scoring commercially". However, Björn Schmelzer's reaction is as sober as it is shocking: "It is very problematic to get a fair deal from organizers. What we have been doing in that respect has been underpaid no matter how you look at it. Even though Graindelavoix can boast a successful contract with a prestigious CD label, featuring four CDs that are widely acclaimed, this does not yield anything for the musicians in terms of income. Graindelavoix has been steadily improving for ten years, yet financially our situation is hopeless. Without the bounty of my girlfriend I could not subsist, for I am too proud to rely on the dole".

From this problem of precariousness to the policy on subsidies, there is only a small step. Herman Baeten, once the chair of the committee on subsidy schemes for music, is also familiar with the disadvantages. "Does the system as it now functions need to be preserved? Wouldn't it be more productive for concert houses to receive more money to create productions with ensembles? Today there is no fair competition on the market. Big orchestras whose concerts are terribly expensive can afford, thanks to subsidies, to play for 5000 euros in a room without a proper stage. This way young ensembles don't get a chance". A listener agrees, but remarks that it is not feasible to do a better job without rules. "And everybody hates rules. So there you go: at that stage of the game the demand for artistic freedom resounds again..."

Stef Coninx, director of the Flanders Music Centre, asks the concluding question: "Two years ago we started drawing the landscape of the classical music scene. Actually it is we ourselves who have to determine what this landscape should look like, and then the government has to make decisions. Does Early Music deserve special consideration in its own right, or not?". Florian Heyerick answers: "There are differences. Big orchestras do not depend on one person, they function structurally. Contemporary ensembles are looking for new challenges and opportunities to impart new ideas, relying on youngsters who have to struggle to bring works that are not easy to perform. The Early Music trend is more orientated towards personalities with a high visibility, and more often than not consist of project ensembles. Therefore the sector is very heterogeneous and needs to be approached in that vein by the policy makers".

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

*Both panel members for this discussion theme teach at a conservatory. However, concurrently Sigiswald Kuijken is highly critical vis-à-vis the system, and Peter Van Heyghen too is not that fond of the institutional aspect.*

It was precisely the narrow-mindedness of conservatory education in his days that motivated Sigiswald Kuijken to develop alternative approaches. “I started with Early Music as an autodidact. I realized that my training had nothing to do with this and felt intuitively this sphere had to be protected, as a conflict-free sphere of identity. Something positive about the training was that we learnt how to play the violin, even though we never used the acquired techniques afterwards. But the essence of being an autodidact is the greatest treasure you can discover in your life. When I was approached at age 27 to teach in The Hague, I hesitated for a long time: I was still struggling myself with technical problems and was not mature enough. Eventually I did accept the challenge because I felt that the other track was worse. What I accomplished there has been aptly described by my brother Barthold in an article for the weekly *Knack*: I have taught people how to be autodidacts. I have tried to keep as much room as possible for experimentation and to transmit what is not transmittable. Forming a school was the last of my thoughts”.

Peter Van Heyghen, too, feels that “educating to autodidact” is the only valid choice for a department of Early Music. “The great advantage of having a class is that you are dealing with a group that chooses for a style of playing that is compatible for everybody. In other words: it is possible to develop bigger projects together. The disadvantages can be contained if you are inventive yourself and work in an autodidactic way”. The task set for Van Heyghen needed to be labelled with the name of an already existing course, and almost accidentally this was: ‘Philosophy and Aesthetics of Early Music’. “I gradually developed appreciation for this name. The course has developed from the transmission of a repertoire to a personal quest and the offering of methods sustaining that quest”. Later he explains himself: “If we feel that the music of Monteverdi or des Prez is important, we have to educate people to play that music. Inevitably you’ll also come across autodidacts who don’t want to have anything to do with conventional music education and who surprise you with new ideas. What do you tell the students? I want to help you building up mental and technical flexibility, enabling you to engage the music with new insights. This way we increase the chance that Monteverdi’s music will be re-invigorated in fifty years”.

*The conservatory as institution: is it still stifling, or does it offer opportunities? It all depends how you look at it.*

Sigiswald Kuijken keeps basically mistrusting the way conservatories deliver musicians: “Today you have fifty times the number of students for traverso needed for orchestras. Same situation for transverse flute: flautists with golden instruments rush around for auditions hoping to land a position of second flute or fourth piccolo in the Boston Symphony. I’m afraid there is a big problem in a system that takes itself so seriously: restructuring, discussing, modifying all the time...Honestly, as far as that aspect is concerned I’m delighted to retire”.

Peter Van Heyghen's view is more positive: "This compulsive restructuring has always been the case, as long as I have been teaching. But one thing has remained the same: the conservatory as meeting place. There needs to be a laboratory atmosphere, with bubbling sounds galore. The diploma itself is worth nothing. As long as there are enough contact hours between teachers and students, the system can be called Bologna or Chakamaka, it doesn't matter. When Verdi's brain was picked about restructuring the conservatories, his advice was: don't change anything, just appoint good teachers".

Sigiswald Kuijken cannot get rid of his mixed feelings: "In recent years I have talked more about other things than the violin or even music, and the students have certainly not developed for the worse. You try to open up a world for them in which music acquires a new resonance, in which their reflections gain value. The worst that could happen to us is for all this wonderful music to become subject matter". But perhaps imminent changes are not for the better. "Now you earn a master; in ten years, you may need one of those fancy doctorates to be hired by a conservatory. Half a century ago we had a First Prize; perhaps one out of ten students pursued a Higher Diploma. However, ten years later everybody was trying to secure a Higher Diploma, because for the same job you got a higher salary".

*What is the real value of a diploma?*

A diploma of a conservatory is no voucher for a job as a musician, because, as Van Heyghen puts it, "orchestras do not hire musicians on the basis of a diploma. It's useful for a job in music education, though". That many former students of music do not perform is no problem for him: "At the university you have exactly the same: many people deviate from their field. The crucial point is for students to be in a position for a number of years to try out ideas and to indulge in experimentation". When the academies for amateurs and the arts high schools for aspiring musicians are mentioned in passing, Sigiswald opposes the idea of having as many pupils as possible play Early Music. "The real issue is to interest as many youngsters as possible in music. How this evolves later, is at that stage a detail".

Especially for vocal music, training is sometimes less important than the search for paths of one's own and the attendance of master classes. There is no need to integrate those components into the official course package, according to both panellists, although they could conceivably be counted as credits towards the final diploma. Voice training for Early Music does not loom large at conservatories, but this is also due to the fact that there are fewer indications of how to handle this. Van Heyghen feels that training in this field ought to loosen up its constraints: "Look at the way pop singers use their voice to best advantage. Classical singers may say: it's dangerous for the voice, yet those pop singers manage to maintain life-long endurance. There is a great diversity of ways in which you can use a voice, and that's why I regret the fixation on the one and only vocal sound that would be a panacea for all situations. Why not teach people instead to use their voice in different ways?".



## CONCLUSION

Chair Stephan Moens picked for his concluding remarks a number of quotations and observations from the debate, both of the interesting and of the disappointing kind. “Björn Schmelzer mentioned the problem of ambiguity in vocal music. Now, ambiguity is more interesting than standards, because it provides layering. To deal with Early Music in this way is more exciting than the search for absolute standards, which don’t exist anyway”. Another felicitous expression of Schmelzer’s: ‘the tribunal of Early Music’. “A horrible term, but the phenomenon does exist in the minds of some performers and critics and organizers alike. We ought to get rid of that tribunal as quickly as possible”, Moens exhorted.

*Also the conclusion of the discussion about the structure of ensembles for Early Music in Flanders inspired him to a reflection: “We have indeed many ensembles centred around personalities. Perhaps some of those persons ought to consider leaving their ensemble to the community, conducted by young talent”.*

“Early Music is immediately recognizable” was the definition proposed by Koen Uvin. Moens contradicts this on the basis of his 35 years of experience in the sector as a journalist, “and I keep discovering new things every day. Björn Schmelzer said that you can also perform music for an audience that does not exist yet: a fabulous challenge. This does not concern Early Music per se, what it is all about is a particular way of interpreting music: how to critically deal with voice, score, and public. This approach within Early Music has also had a great impact on the ‘conventional’ approach: someone like Simon Rattle (conductor of the Berliner Philharmoniker as well as guest conductor of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, ed.) would not have been conceivable thirty years ago”.

Moens endorsed Bart Demuyt’s reflection that the audience can take advantage of diversity, and demands it. “There are so many different interpretations possible, each of them consistent with their own exciting point of departure. Diversity in Early Music has been tremendously expanding. This is not a paradox: it does not happen in spite of, but precisely thanks to our increasing knowledge about the past”. And furthermore, Moens noted, there are people who approach Early Music neither historically, nor from the conservatory, but for instance on the basis of the countless opportunities of the human voice. “We have to avoid narrowing our scope too much”, he admonished.

Regretfully one element had been conspicuously lacking in the debates, according to Moens: the mutual illumination with the other arts, and more specifically baroque opera ought to have been dealt with. Hopefully this theme will be singled out for special consideration at a future debate. Many participants agreed after the official sessions that this initiative deserves a follow-up. •

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# Colofon

*Co-ordination:* Bart De Vos

*Text:* Herman Baeten, Sigiswald Kuijken, Björn Schmelzer en Peter Vandeweerd

*Redaction:* Karolien Selhorst

*Translation:* Joris Duytschaever

*Revision:* Richard Condon

*Design:* Michel van Beirendonck

*Print:* Drukkerij Buroform n.v.

*Published by* Flanders Music Centre

