Performance Practice of Thomas Tallis:

An Educational Perspective

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A choral student’s formative music education is often provided by a high school choir. For many student’s, this is where they will receive the bulk of their music education. Consequently, it is extremely important for high school music educators to provide students with a well-rounded education during this time. An important part of a student’s music education that is often overlooked is performance practice. Through examining the performance practice of Thomas Tallis, many of the main issues of performance practice facing educators can be explored. Because of the uncertainty regarding the performance practice of Tallis, many educators ignore performance practice completely severely limiting their students. Instead, the flexibility of Tallis performance practice should be used to foster analytical skills and introduce students to the basic concepts of music scholarship.

Thomas Tallis (c1505-1585) is considered one of the greats of 16th century British composers. Although little is known about his personal life, Thomas Tallis lives on in music history through his many wonderful works produced in a time of turmoil. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Tallis successfully composed despite the limitations placed on him by the reigning monarchs. He adjusted fluidly to the prevailing trends, the constantly changing religious climate, and the introduction of printing presses throughout his long compositional career.

Tallis began composing under Henry VIII, who reigned from 1509-1547. In 1536, Henry VIII passed the Act of Supremacy breaking with the Catholic Church and Rome. As Doe and
Allinson write, “Unfortunately for Tallis the abbey [St. Mary-at-Hill where Tallis was employed] was dissolved on 23 March 1540 (it was the last monastic foundation to fall).” From there, “Tallis returned to East Kent, finding employment at Canterbury Cathedral, which was being refounded as a secular establishment with a much expanded choir of ten boys and twelve men.” Although the style of music that Tallis was expected to produce did not immediately shift with the break from the Catholic Church, his career most certainly changed as Catholic churches were closed across England. Shortly thereafter, it is believed that Tallis left to work full-time for the Chapel Royal. Although it is believed that Tallis may have started serving the royal family much earlier, the first known documentation of Tallis’s employment in the Chapel Royal is remains a lay subsidy roll from 1544. Doe and Allinson note, “In a petition of 1577 Tallis claimed to have ‘served yo[u]r Ma[jes]tie and yo[u]r Royall ancestors these fortie yeres’, implying that his association with the court may have begun even during his employment at St Mary-at-Hill.” Regardless of when Tallis’s tenure with the royal family began, Tallis would remain in the royal household until his death.

Under the various Monarch’s, Tallis continually had to change compositional styles while maintaining his own personal voice in the music. Under Henry VIII, Tallis composed Latin texted music. Doe and Allinson write, “Many of Tallis’s works, especially those Latin-texted compositions that are of an ostensibly early date, have survived in sources that are remote from their date of composition and the circumstances of performance, making the establishing

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
of a chronology of the composer’s music extremely difficult.”⁴ Because of the problematic
dating, it is very difficult to determine the chronological order of Tallis’s music, but some
generalizations can be made. Paul Doe writes, “To judge from their surviving music, composers
of the first forty years or so of the Tudor Era (1485-1525) were concerned almost entirely with
writing on a large scale in three liturgical forms: the Ordinary of the Mass, the votive antiphon,
and the Magnificat.”⁵ Tallis has five surviving antiphons. His Gaude gloriosa is largely
acknowledged as one of the greatest antiphons ever written. Tallis also has three masses as
well as a small Magnificat. During this time, Tallis also wrote many responds and hymns. His
early works are characterized by a florid style inherited from the prior generation of composers,
but as Doe and Allinson note:

The move towards a less florid style during the 1530s accelerated during the last years
of Henry VIII’s reign, in part through the direct influence of Cranmer and other
reformers who demanded audibility in word-setting and greater simplicity in musical
style, but also because of a growing awareness among composers about recent
developments in continental music, where imitation tended to be less ornamental and
more structural, and where there was an increasing desire to represent or express
momentary textual meaning.⁶

Despite the gradual shift, compositions written under Henry VIII’s reign maintain the long
Catholic compositional tradition.

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⁴ Ibid.
Tallis was required to make a radical shift under Edward VI who reigned from 1547 to 1553. Finally in power, protestant reformers made quick work of changing the religious atmosphere. Most notably, Cranmer and his followers pushed to make the church service entirely vernacular. This precluded the use of almost all of the previously written religious music. Tallis and his fellow composers were expected to fill this void with English texted music. As Doe asserts, “Tallis’s contribution to this Edwardian phase includes some of his best-known English church music.” If ye love me is still regularly sung by church choirs, high school choirs, and professional ensembles nearly 500 years after its composition. Typical of this genre, If ye love me is syllabic and homophonic making the text extremely easy to discern.

After Edward VI’s death, his half-sister Mary took the throne returning the country to Catholicism. Under her reign, English-texted music was banned and the royal composers were asked to return to the more florid styles they had left behind. Because of this, it is very difficult to distinguish music written under Mary’s reign with the music written during the end of Henry VIII’s reign. Doe and Allinson write, “The only work that can be dated with any certainty to Mary’s reign is the seven-voice Mass Puer natus est nobis which was probably written in 1554 for performance at Christmas during Philip of Spain’s residency in London after his ill-fated marriage to the queen.” Despite the abrupt changes in style, Tallis seems to have adjusted without the slightest pause.

Tallis continued to work for the royal family until his death in 1585. His final years of service were under Queen Elizabeth who took the throne in 1558 after her sister Mary’s death.

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7 Crowned at the age of nine, Edward VI did not actually govern England. Instead under Edward’s reign England was governed by the Regency Council led by Edward Seymour and later John Dudley.
Elizabeth once again changed the music of her country. Although various religious factions were attempting to have polyphony banned from the worship service, Elizabeth’s love of ceremony helped to preserve church music and even encouraged it to flourish. Tallis, with the support of Queen Elizabeth, was finally able to compose in both English and Latin. He continued to create many motets, antiphons, English hymn tunes, and responds. In 1575, Queen Elizabeth granted Tallis and his young colleague William Byrd a patent for the printing of music. Tallis and Byrd published *Cantiones, quae ab argumento sacrae vocantur*, a collection of Latin texted motets by both composers.¹⁰ Tallis’s relationship with Byrd continued to develop through his final years in the Chapel Royal. It is believed that Tallis served as a mentor to Byrd and most likely was involved in Byrd’s training as a musician and composer. In fact, Byrd made Tallis his son’s godfather indicating the depth of their relationship. Tallis passed away on either the 20th or 23rd of November, 1585 after many years of fruitful composition while Byrd continued to compose in his teacher’s stead.

Any time one is discussing music, and particularly older music, one is presented with the question of performance practice. Performance practice represents the commonly accepted guidelines for the performance of music. The idea behind performance practice is the concept that one should try to recreate the original intent of the composer, but this leads to many controversies and issues especially when it concerns early music. In discussing performance practice, many scholars and critics become obsessed with the idea of ‘Authenticity,’ but Richard Taruskin posits that historical authenticity is really interpretation: “Authenticity stems from conviction. Conviction in turn stems as much from beliefs – naïve or sophisticated, to be sure, ¹⁰ Unfortunately for Tallis, he and Byrd could not turn a profit through the printing of music, but *Cantiones sacrae* remains an important part of music history.
depending on the state of our knowledge – are what alone can give us the sense of assurance and of style possessed by those fortunate enough to have behind them an unbroken tradition of performance.”¹¹ Taruskin argues that it is the belief in the correctness of the performance practice that gives it authenticity. Other scholars points out the inherent inexactitude of performance practice: “Very little historical performance is, or can be, truly historical – much has to be invented; that the actual styles of historical performance we hear accord most strikingly with modern taste; that the movement as a whole has all the symptoms of 20th – century modernism.”¹² Because of the difficulty in ascertaining the real intentions of composers, Levinson proposes, “The real theoretical question, though, is what accounts for our ability to construct boundaries of interpretive possibility and to denounce some musical or legal performances as fraudulent.”¹³

This question leads one to ask how scholars learn about performance practice particularly for medieval or renaissance music. There are multiple ways that scholars can glean information about the music of an era. The most obvious way that scholars can learn about the music of the past is from scores. Scholars can compare different manuscripts of the same score. They can determine basic performance practice from the markings in scores including the marks singers make. Scholars are also able to discover basics of performance practice from theoretical texts of the time. In addition, scholars look at daily life records like rosters of choir members to determine the place of music in a society and the size and structure of musical


ensembles. Scholars look to literature and art from that time period to depict scenes of music making often giving important performance practice clues. Finally, scholars examine old instruments to help determine the sound of music from the time. When taken together, these sources create a mosaic image of music making in a particular time, but the mosaic is inevitably incomplete. Although scholars may be able to determine some aspects of performance practice with certainty, others aspects are only inferences and still other aspects we cannot even begin to guess about.

If performance practice is so uncertain, one must ask why it is important. Taruskin states, “Postmodernist performance value, I would like to think, have to do with the opening-up of borders, in particular that border between the creative and the re-creative.” He argues that it is the ability of performance practice to allow performers to take greater ownership of music and creative license that makes it important for musicians today. While older music does indeed free up the performer to make greater interpretive decisions, it is the historical value of performance practice that truly makes it important for the performer. In order to understand the music that one is playing one needs to try to understand how it was intended to be performed, how it was actually performed, and how one’s modern understanding of music is going to affect one’s performance of an older piece. It is only through a knowledge of the past that one can understand the present.

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Chapter 2: Renaissance Performance Practice

If one is to discuss the particulars of Thomas Tallis performance practice, a cursory understanding of Renaissance music performance practice must be attained. While there are many different aspects of performance practice, this paper discusses only a few. Many aspects of performance practice are only accessible to highly trained singers and are not reasonable expectations for high school choirs. This paper focuses instead on only those areas of performance practice that can be incorporated into the average high school choir’s performance: key, tempo, voicing, dynamics, and *musica ficta*. These aspects of performance practice are either part of the score, as in key, voicing, and *musica ficta*, or they are aspects of performance that can be addressed to a certain extent by any level of choir (tempo and dynamics).

A major aspect of performance practice of Renaissance music is determining the correct key in which to sing the piece. Peter Phillips, the director of the Tallis Scholars, states, “I am not in principle prepared to argue for or against any one pitch standard for Tallis’s music. My purpose is to show that there is no easy answer to the problem posed by his ranges, whatever pitch or whatever kind of music is chosen.”\(^{15}\) Despite the seeming simplicity of determining the key of a piece, many scholars still disagree on the correct ‘modern’ keys for Renaissance music. The *Musical Times* includes a series of four letters to the editor between November of 1979 and April of 1980 regarding the correct key of a single Tallis work. In his letter to the editor, Peter

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James writes, “The pitch of 16th-century English sacred music is by no means as straightforward a matter as J. G. C. Milne suggests.”

There are a few key beliefs about the pitch of 16th Century music that create all the confusion. In 1967, David Wulstan published research on the pitch of 16th Century English vocal music. His research has led to many different schools of thought regarding the ‘correct’ pitch of Renaissance music. Wulstan writes, “Now if the pitch of pieces found in partitive sources were known, it would be a simple matter to allocate the correct voices; alternatively, if the precise vocal scoring were known, it would be comparatively easy to decide on the right pitch.” Unfortunately for scholars, neither can be definitively proven.

The first problem facing scholars is the fact that modern pitches do not correlate exactly with their Renaissance equivalents. Scholars now believe that Renaissance pitch levels were a half step lower than their modern counterparts, but this assumes that pitches across Europe remained fairly constant. In an interview with Paul Hillier, Bernard Sherman quotes him as saying, “I think the important thing is to be clear that there was no such thing as a fixed pitch standard, that it varied from place to place – maybe not wildly, though maybe more than we might expect.” Because of the variation from place to place in pitch levels, there is very little to suggest that Renaissance composers were particular about the key in which their compositions were performed. Hillier states, “It’s perfectly appropriate to perform a piece at more or less any pitch” Although many scholars would disagree with this statement, Hillier’s

19 Ibid.
point is more the fact that one can make a legitimate argument for the “historically accurate” use of nearly any pitch level.

In addition to differing overall pitch levels, Renaissance music includes “chiavette” or high clefs. Renaissance composers would use various combinations of clefs which some scholars have suggested served as a code. Many scholars believe that chiavette were used to indicate transpositions. In his entry on chiavette in Oxford Music Online, Patrizio Barbieri notes, “Pieces notated in high clefs were intended to be transposed downwards, according to Ganassi, by a 5th, and according to Banchieri (Cartella, overo Regolei, 1601) and Pincerli (Specchio secondo di musica, 1631) by a 4th when the B♭ is present in the signature and by a 5th with no key signature.” While there is a large amount of evidence suggesting that in some cases manuscripts that have chiavette are meant to be lowered, often scholars disagree about whether a chiavette argument should be used in particular instances. This issue, along with the general uncertainty about overall Renaissance pitch levels, presents editors and conductors with a large number choices for potential keys in which to sing.

In addition to questions of key, the tempo of Renaissance music is difficult to determine. In describing the tempo of Renaissance music, there is much debate. Howard Mayer Brown and Claus Bockmaier note, “In theory the tactus in 16th-century music measured a semibreve of normal length (integer valor notarum), a breve in diminution (proportio dupla), and a minim in augmentation.” Music theorists of the time stated that the beat should be equal to the beating of a walking man’s heart. While this is a very eloquent way of describing tempo, it

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leaves much to interpretation especially for the modern musicians used to tempo markings. As Giulio Ongaro writes in his introduction to Renaissance music, “Occasional remarks by Renaissance writers tend to give us only generic indications, and for the most part the tempo of modern performances of Renaissance music is the result of the educated guess made by performers trained in that particular type of music.” Performers make a judgment call based on the particular situation and their personal aesthetic ideals placing the tempo within the researched acceptable range.

Besides the uncertainty of the starting tempos of Renaissance music, scholars also argue about the amount of rubato that should be included in Renaissance music. Alejandro Enrique Planchart wrote, “It appears that the tactus was meant to stay constant throughout a composition, though there is a small amount of evidence that it could vary slightly.” Many performers of Renaissance music ascribe to Planchart’s suggestion that rubato should be limited as much as possible in Renaissance music and yet, Robert Donnington quotes multiple 17th Century theoreticians who advocate flexibility in tempo including Frescobaldi who wrote in 1615-16 that tempos should “be taken ‘now slowly, now quickly, and even held in the air, to match the expressive effects, or the sense of the words.’” Since composers did not write any tempo markings into the scores, it is questioned whether, and how much, natural ebbing and

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pushing of tempo occurred during performance. Although most scholars agree that Renaissance music should not be sung with the amount of tempo variation one would expect in Romantic music, there is still much room for interpretation of tempo within the scholarly community.

In discussing choral music of the 16th century, an interesting aspect of performance practice includes the voicing of choral works. In most instances, Renaissance choral music has four or five parts. Roger Bowers writes, “It is clear that in fact treble, alto, tenor and bass voices were the only voices available, the tenors always needing to have sufficient strength of numbers to cope with two parts.” While we have many records of the actual numbers of singers in each church or household, most of those lists do not include the voice types of the various singers. In addition, boys may not be listed at all. Because of this, there are many questions about the blend of choral music. Bowers notes that “the numerical balance established between boys and men demonstrated enormous variety.” Because of the discrepancies in the ratio of boys to men, it is believed that in some choirs the boys sang two top parts and in others the boys only sang the treble part leaving the alto to the adult men. Bowers writes, “investigation establishes the fact that of those choirs in which the division of the boys’ voices into two distinct timbres, treble and meane, is so far known or believed to have been practiced, all shared one common feature: all came from those particular classes of

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25 Interestingly, the human heart naturally speeds up when one inhales and slows down as one exhales. The comparison of tempo to the human heart may be purely pragmatic, or it could indicate an amount of flexibility in the tempo similar to the natural variations in tempo of the human heart.


27 While it is generally believed that Renaissance music was sung with a fairly even blend of voices (no one part more important than another), it is impossible to determine the definitive ideal blend of Renaissance choirs without hearing them.

28 Ibid.
choir in which the proportion of boys to men was such that the boys almost equaled, or even exceeded, the men in number.”

This demonstrates that many choirs in 16th century England did not have ideal circumstances. Whether the choir had larger numbers of men or boys, they had to adjust for their particular situation to sing the works available to them.

Along with struggling to determine the voicing of Renaissance choirs, early music performers have created an ideal tone quality for early music that has little historical support. As Paul Hillier states, “what we ‘know’ [about Renaissance voice production] is actually very little. What we can imaginatively reconstruct depends on cross-referencing all sorts of information . . . none of which is remotely conclusive from the singer’s point of view.”

As the ideal tone quality of a choir differs today in various places across America much less across the globe, we can be fairly certain that Renaissance choirs would have had a different tone quality than modern choirs. In addition, we know that physiologically Renaissance singers were different from modern singers. They were shorter and hit puberty later. In determining the ideal tone quality for Renaissance music, many scholars advocate a vibrato-less tone for early music. Scholars argue that the close harmonies of Renaissance music require straight-tone singing to tune properly. While this may be true of some Renaissance pieces, it does not necessarily follow that Renaissance musicians sang this way. Decisions made about the tone quality used for early music are almost entirely aesthetic. Regardless, most musicians accept the general rule that early music should be sung with a lighter tone with little to no vibrato.

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31 Another tone quality issue prevalent in Renaissance music is determining the sound of a castrato. Because Tallis’s music did not require the use of a castrato, I will not be addressing this issue.
As for dynamics in 16th century music, extremely little is known. Donnington writes, “Caccini [Giulio Caccini] in the famous preface to his Nuove Musiche of 1602 spoke strongly of ‘Encreasing and Abating the Voyce’ as ‘the foundation of Passion.’” While Renaissance singers certainly used dynamics to some extent, they neither used the term dynamics nor wrote any instructions as to dynamic levels in their works. Even entering the baroque period, the concept of indicating dynamics was rare. Donnington notes, “While some dynamic markings for loud and softs, crescendos and diminuendos, occurred early in the baroque period and became rather more numerous later on, by far the chief reliance was placed, as so often, upon the performer’s intelligence and feeling.” Ongaro instructs, “We know from accounts of performances that listeners enjoyed hearing different dynamic levels in the same compositions.” Unfortunately, because dynamics are a relatively subjective feature of music and difficult to describe, scholars have very little way of knowing the true extent to which dynamics were employed. As Ongaro states, “we must be aware that, as far as tempo and dynamics are concerned, almost anything we hear in a modern recording of Renaissance music is the result of the training and the musical sensibility and taste of the performers, rather than being rigidly prescribed in the score.”

Finally, in Renaissance music, a performer must be aware of the convention of musica ficta. Music of the Renaissance did not adhere to the same tonal system that modern listeners are used to. It contains characteristics of both the modal music system based on hexachords

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33 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
and the beginnings of the major-minor system. As part of the hexachord system, a set of practices were evolved to avoid certain melodic and harmonic intervals. Nicholas Routley defines *musica ficta* as, “The conventions governing the introduction of chromatic inflections into early Renaissance music.” These rules had been passed down for centuries and consequently, the accidentals were not written into the music but added by the performers. As Sherman writes, “It [*musica ficta*] suggests that some of the accidentals that the composer assumed would be sung in a piece weren’t written down, but were understood by convention.” Unfortunately, many of the practices of *musica ficta* have been lost.

While some music theorists of the time did write down the basic rules, much is still unknown about *musica ficta* as the rules are much more complex when applied to actual music than they are when treated theoretically. Scholars disagree about the extent of which dissonance and chromaticisms were used in Renaissance music, yet Routley suggests, “In general, far more ficta was applied in medieval and Renaissance practice than is to be found in even the most adventurous of modern editions.” In order to try to understand the complexities of *musica ficta*, scholars have studied accidentals written into the manuscripts of Renaissance music. These accidentals, whether added by the composer, choirmaster, or singer, serve as clues into the conventions of *musica ficta*. According to Roger Bray, “One can generally

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be confident that a puzzling accidental represents the intentions of somebody aware of the correct performance of the music.”\(^{39}\)

Even though Bray argues that one should trust accidentals added to manuscripts, he admits that the accidentals are often contradictory. In discussing the anonymous setting of ‘O bone lesu’ in the Gyffard Partbooks, Bray writes, “This example therefore indicates how subjective were some of the decisions of the time, and provides a warning against too dogmatic an approach on our part today.”\(^{40}\) Bray explains these inconsistencies by noting that the instances where accidentals were written in are often the same instances where the conventions of \textit{musica ficta} are least clear. He writes, “These written accidentals, then, are present to indicate a particular difficulty; in normal circumstances the singer could be relied upon to produce an appropriate accidental spontaneously.”\(^{41}\) Routley also notes that various manuscripts of the same work contain conflicting applications of \textit{musica ficta}.\(^{42}\) He states, “Several different ways of applying \textit{musica ficta} were acceptable to Renaissance musicians.”\(^{43}\) Clearly, just as in many other aspects of Renaissance performance practice, there is much disagreement as to the “historically accurate” choice leaving a large amount of room for personal interpretation.

As seen, all the areas of Renaissance performance practice addressed in this paper have a certain amount of uncertainty imbedded in them. Hillier states, “I think the most important


\(^{43}\) Ibid.
thing to remember regarding this music is that there is no such thing as a norm to which we must try to adhere, which means that the question is very open." While there are some general ideas about Renaissance performance practice, the conflicting opinions of scholars also leaves choral conductors with much room for their personal beliefs and interpretations in performance. In looking at various recordings of Thomas Tallis works, it becomes exceedingly clear that even among the leading early music performance groups performance practice varies widely.

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Chapter 3: Tallis Performance Practice

Tallis had an exceedingly wide range of compositional material. His works span from the simplest of songs to 40-part motets. To get an appropriate picture of Tallis performance practice, two contrasting works have been the focus of this paper. *If ye love me* and *Lamentations of Jeremiah*, while both written by Tallis, are extremely disparate works. Despite this fact, they share many of the same issues of performance practice. Various professional recordings of the works contain quite different renditions. These groups often take conflicting positions on performance practice creating a wide range of interpretations of the works. In addition, both *If ye love me* and *Lamentations of Jeremiah* are commonly recorded Tallis works.

Peter Phillips states, “*If ye love me* and several of the other anthems which Tallis wrote in Edward’s reign deserve to be . . . admired both as successful experiments and as first-rate conceptions in their own right”\(^45\). Tallis’s music from the Edwardian period comprises some of his most singable compositions. Despite the simplicity of many of these compositions, Tallis’s anthems stand out as some of the most exquisite music of the period. Phillips continues, “The best Tallis anthems have a beauty which has rendered them timeless: not only did they give a stylistic starting-point to Anglican composers from the 16\(^\text{th}\) century through to the 19\(^\text{th}\) . . . but they have been performed without break in the English cathedrals from Tallis’s day to our own”\(^46\). Most scholars consider the urtext for *If ye love me* to be the Wanley partbooks which

\(^46\) Ibid.
were written around 1547-1549. They would have been some of the first partbooks to contain English texted anthems as Edward VI only took the throne in 1547.

There are three main keys in which *If ye love me* can conceivably be set. The urtext is set in C. Using the chiavette argument, Peter le Huray set his OUP edition (1965) in the key of F, a fourth up. The King Singers use this key in their recording of the anthem. In addition, editors can argue that Renaissance pitch was a half-step lower, and consequently set *If ye love me* in E. Pro Cantiones Antiqua uses this key. Finally, Peter Phillips has additionally set the piece in E—the key which the Chappelle du Roi uses in their recording. Cantus and the Choir of King’s College both sing *If ye love me* in the key D on their recordings. While the key is usually not considered the most important part of performance practice, it is fascinating that there would be such a discrepancy in performance key among professional ensembles when key is potentially the most certain aspect of performance practice available to performers.

In many ways related to the key, the voicing of *If ye love me* is often dependent on the key in which the editor chooses to set the work. A quick search on any sheet music sales website, will invariably demonstrate the variety of voicings of *If ye love me* currently available in print. Although very few of those octavos are scholarly editions, the large range of editions suggest that many different types of groups are regularly performing *If ye love me*. Despite the

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47 The King’s Singers. “If ye love me.” *English Renaissance*. RCA, 1995. CD.
49 Interestingly, although Peter Phillips argues for the E setting of *If ye love me* in his article “Treble or soprano? Performing Tallis,” the Tallis Scholar recording is in the key of E.
52 Choir of King’s College. “If ye love me.” *Music for Holy Week*. EMI, 2003. CD.
53 J.W. Pepper is currently selling SATB, AATB, SAB, SSA, and SSAA editions of *If ye love me* according to their website.
fact that *If ye love me* historically would have been sung by mixture of boys and men there are very few recordings of the song utilizing this voicing. In fact most of the recordings of *If ye love me* are done by all male groups. In addition multiple groups that would normally use women for the top parts have recorded this piece utilizing only the men. This discrepancy between ‘historicity’ and the majority of professional recordings may be due in a large part to the economics of the music industry, yet that does not explain the preference for all male renditions by groups that would usually use women.

In his book “Text and Act,” Richard Taruskin notes that the tempo of fairly modern pieces varies quite greatly. This is even truer with Renaissance music. There are no tempo markings in the urtext of *If ye love me*. Consequently, the tempos of the various professional recordings has an extremely large range. Cantus is the fastest with an approximate tempo of 66. Lasting only 1:47, the song has a feel of two rather than four. In contrast, the King Singers have an approximate tempo of 66. Their rendition is 2:35, nearly a minute longer than Cantus’s recording. Rather than a feel of two, the King’s Singers’ slower tempo allows all four of the beats to have its full time. In order to keep the piece form becoming plodding at the slower tempo, the King’s Singers maintain impeccable breath control and focus that may not be possible for amateur groups. Table 1 shows the approximate tempo and recording length for a variety of respected choral groups. As one can see the differences are striking. In addition, each recording has a different amount of rubato. While some groups minimize the ebb and flow only allowing the slightest relaxation of tempo until the end, others freely add time at every

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54 See the Tallis Scholars, Pro Cantione Antiqua, and Chapelle du Roi recordings. All three groups routinely use women even on other Tallis works, but none of them use women on their recording of *If ye love me*.
55 There are only a few places that have the resources to maintain high quality choirs utilizing boys especially since young boys cannot maintain a professional touring schedule.
cadence. This greatly changes the effect of the music. The more metronomic recordings, for example Pro Cantione Antiqua, have a dance-like quality. The Tallis Scholars, on the other hand, have an extreme amount of rubato. This completely eliminates any dance-like quality of the song (even though both groups sing at about the same tempo). Considering the fact that Renaissance choirs did not have directors, is seems unlikely that they would use as much vibrato as the Tallis Scholars utilize in their recording since it would be extremely hard to coordinate.

Finally, there seems to be no real consensus among the leading early music ensembles as to the proper dynamics for *If ye love me*. Once again, the urtext does not offer any direction in regard to dynamics. While this is an issue for many Renaissance works, it is particularly noticeable with *If ye love me* since the anthem is so simple. Nearly all of the groups sing the repeat at a softer dynamic level, but some groups rebuild towards the ending while others stay
at a softer dynamic through the final note.\textsuperscript{56} In addition, the amount of dynamic contrast within each phrase differs greatly. The Tallis Scholars keep nearly the same dynamic level from the start of a phrase until the ending. This gives the recording a very smooth, constant sound. The Chapelle du Roi, on the other hand, grow and decay on nearly every phrase. As each part enters, it grows towards its individual climax and decays as it reaches the end of the phrase. This emphasizes the individual parts and polyphony whereas the Tallis Scholars’ recording presents more of a unified sound emphasizing the homophony found in the piece. Interestingly, the King’s College recording also has a lot of growth and decay on each phrase, but the choir grows together rather than independently by parts. This emphasizes Tallis’s use of homophony quite extremely. Lastly, the groups even differ on the amount of decay on each note. Many sing with a very legato connected line, but Pro Cantione Antiqua relishes the consonants and allows growth and decay on each individual note. This creates a very strong lilt within the piece as well as adding to the forward momentum, but it greatly diminishes the clarity of the beautiful harmony. The King’s Singers use a very smooth, legato in their recording that, while not as exciting, allows the harmonies to really ring and blend. Both effects, while drastically different, bring out positive aspects of the work.

In order to discuss \textit{Musica Ficta}, I must turn my attention from \textit{If ye love me} to another of Tallis’ compositions\textsuperscript{57}. Tallis wrote two settings of \textit{Lamentations of Jeremiah}. There are two main sources that are utilized when trying to create an urtext for \textit{Lamentations}. First, Christ Church has five partbooks from a set of six (the tenor is missing). John Baldwin, a singer at St. George’s Cathedral in Windsor,

\textsuperscript{56} Unlike most of the other recordings, after the repeat the King’s College recording stays at a low dynamic level for the remainder of the piece.

\textsuperscript{57} The aspects of performance practice discussed in relation to \textit{If ye love me} can also be applied to \textit{Lamentations of Jeremiah}. Rather than simply reiterating the same issues presented by pitch, voicing, dynamics, and tempo, I am focusing solely on \textit{musica ficta} in my discussion of \textit{Lamentations}. 
England, copied the partbooks around 1575-1581. In addition, the Bodleian Library has a set of partbooks copied by John Sadler dated around 1585 (slightly later than the Baldwin partbooks) containing *Lamentations of Jeremiah*. These two sources are currently considered to be the most reliable and original sources for Tallis’s *Lamentations*. Both sources can be dated to within Tallis’s lifetime (although barely), and, as it is believed that Tallis composed *Lamentations* under Queen Elizabeth, the partbooks would have been copied at the latest 30 years from the date of composition.

The differences between *If ye love me* and *Lamentations of Jeremiah* are striking. *If ye love me* uses large amounts of homophony and *Lamentations* rarely uses homophony. In addition, there is the very obvious difference in the language of the texts. Finally, while *If ye love me* was basically confined to only consonant tones, Tallis’s *Lamentations* includes a large amount of dissonance. Because of the changes in *musica ficta* scholarship over the years and the large amount of uncertainty regarding its uses, various recordings use differing amounts of *musica ficta*. For example, in *Lamentations of Jeremiah II*, Oxford Camerata⁵⁸ sings this line with C naturals on the first beat of the third measure:

![Musical notation](image)

The Hilliard Ensemble⁵⁹ on the other hand, keeps the C sharp in the highest voice and creates a very noticeable clash between the uppermost and middle voice (who is on C natural). Although

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hardly the only example of differing uses of *musica ficta*, this is perhaps one of the most noticeable examples. Overall, the Hilliard Ensemble recording is much darker and mournful in a large part because their *musica ficta* choices favor clashes. Comparatively, the Oxford Camerata recording is quite bland.

Clearly there is a very large difference between the various professional recordings of Tallis’s works. This discrepancy should encourage teachers to try various ‘styles’ of performance practice with their ensembles. As long as the teacher is aware of the scholarship supporting their performance practice decisions, they can defend whatever decision they make. Experimenting with performance practice will help both the educator and the students to have a greater understanding of performance practice and their personal beliefs regarding what early music might have sounded like.
Chapter 4: Applying Performance Practice to an Educational Setting

While it may seem unnecessary to present an apology for the use of performance practice in the classroom, with the many stresses and time constraints thrust upon modern music educators, the extra time required to prepare a work utilizing researched performance practice must be defended. Perhaps the most obvious defense of early music and performance practice is stated quite eloquently by Gloria Kiester. She writes, “Every student has the right to know the cultural heritage. Implicit in this is the right to understand the arts, including music . . . and their significance in expressing the basic tenets of the heritage.”\(^60\)

Whether students come from European heritage or not, modern American music has been greatly influenced by the European musical tradition. As Kiester states, “Every student has the right to understand the development of Western arts through their major periods and forms.”\(^61\)

Students deserve to be exposed to all the major periods of Western music since it is part of their cultural heritage as listeners of modern music. As Richard Taruskin states, “Only when we know something about the sources of our contemporary practices and beliefs, when we know something about the reasons why we do as we do and think as we think, and when we are aware of alternatives, can we in any sense claim to be free in our choice of action and creed, and responsible for it.”\(^62\) If students are to truly be exposed to Renaissance music, then they must be exposed to performance practice. Although there is no definitive style of performance practice.


\(^{61}\) Ibid.

practice, that does not excuse a music educator from ignoring the research. Conversely it makes it even more important that educators introduce their students to the basics of performance practice. Despite a healthy amount of uncertainty in Renaissance performance practice, the distinct ‘style’ of Renaissance music greatly changes the experience for students.

In addition to performance practice’s importance in understanding the history of music, it is an essential part of any evaluation of early music performances. Students who have never encountered the concept of performance practice cannot make informed decisions as to the quality and ‘authenticity’ of other performers. As the point of high school music education is not to create professional musicians but to teach music literacy and competence to a wide range of students, a major goal of music education is to give students a well-rounded general knowledge of music in order that they may discuss and appreciate it fully. In its declaration of values, MENC states, “We believe that music education must provide opportunities for students to develop not only their music-making skills, but their abilities to create and to respond to music as well.”63 A student cannot learn to respond to and fully appreciate Renaissance music unless they have some basic understanding of performance practice. 64

A final argument for the use of performance practice in the classroom is presented by Richard Taruskin. Although Taruskin is arguing about the purely professional merits of performance practice, his argument can be applied to music education as well:

63 http://www.menc.org/documents/temp/menc_values.pdf
64 Obviously, high school students would not be expected to have a comprehensive understanding of performance practice. Regardless, even very generalized ideas about performance practice can improve a student’s understanding of music. Just as the average person cannot discriminate between a Van Gogh and a quality reproduction, the music student is not expected to be able to critic the ‘authenticity’ of two quality recordings. Similarly, just as the average person can recognize the difference between a Van Gogh and the velvet reproduction sold on the street, the properly educated music student can discriminate between an ‘authentic’ performance and one that ignores performance practice.
The object is not to duplicate the sounds of the past, for if that were our aim we would never know whether we had succeeded. What we are aiming at, rather, is the startling shock of newness, of immediacy, the sense of rightness that occurs when after countless frustrating experiments we feel as though we have achieved the identification of performance style with the demands of the music mentioned above as the hallmark of a living tradition.\footnote{Taruskin, Richard. Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance. New York: Oxford UP, 1995. Print. 79}

Regardless of whether you believe in the historical value of performance practice, Taruskin makes a compelling argument for the inclusion of performance practice for the sole reason that it allows students to explore a different form of music making. As Taruskin notes, utilizing the performance practice techniques of Renaissance music allows a musician to escape some of the habits and preconceptions formed by the current musical culture.\footnote{In addition to the personal growth this experience can produce, this property of early music can be utilized to facilitate teaching moments. Rather than trying to correct culturally ingrained habits (like tone quality) through familiar music that contributed to the habit, utilizing less familiar music will help students to create a new, better habit that can later be translated to the more familiar works.} Therefore, according to Taruskin, performance practice should be viewed as a new creative outlet rather than a restriction placed on performance.

Before introducing performance practice into the classroom, an educator must first determine their personal performance practice beliefs and how that can be applied to their particular group on a particular piece. As the previous two chapters demonstrated there is a very wide range of possible performance practice styles or a large ‘window of appropriateness.’ An educator should first perform the necessary research to make an informed decision on what
they believe to be proper performance practice.\textsuperscript{67} Once they have established their personal beliefs, they can adjust within the ‘window of appropriateness’ for the specific needs of the choir. Because the ‘window of appropriateness’ is so large for Renaissance music, educators should utilize the corresponding freedom to adjust to the choir’s needs. If the educator finds that the choir cannot perform the piece without significantly leaving the ‘window of appropriateness,’ then a different and more suitable piece should be chosen.

Despite the importance of performance practice there are valid reasons to leave the ‘window of appropriateness.’ First, performing a modern interpretation of an older piece can be an excellent exercise as long as it is not paraded as a historically accurate interpretation. As Taruskin notes, “They [modern performers] are reinterpreting Bach for their own time – that is, for our time – the way all deathless texts must be reinterpreted if they are in fact to remain deathless and exempt from what familiarity breeds.”\textsuperscript{68} A modern interpretation can help students to bridge the gap between the past and the present, but educators need to be particularly aware that students do not associate the modern performance practices with the older literature. In addition, an educator may leave the ‘window of appropriateness’ if a very small aspect of performance practice is lowering the overall quality of the performance.\textsuperscript{69} Lastly, it is justified to leave the ‘window of appropriateness’ when the logistics of performance

\textsuperscript{67} Some aspects of performance practice may come down to personal preferences. For example, no one really knows what 16\textsuperscript{th} century boys sounded like. Our best guesses are based on personal aesthetics combined with knowledge of the spaces in which these works were performed. Consequently, the amount of vibrato as well as tone quality used by various early music choirs varies with the personal aesthetics of the various conductors.


\textsuperscript{69} For example, often a piece may sit in a key that is troublesome for the students. While lowering the piece by a half step would only minimally change the sound the audience hears, it may drastically improve the singers ability to perform well. In this case the benefits of leaving the window of appropriateness may outweigh the slight loss of authenticity.
practice become impractical. It is much better to expose students to quality music of various time periods than excluding large chunks of music because of logistical issues. High school choirs will never have the correct voicings to perform most Renaissance music. In addition, an auditorium is an extremely historically inaccurate location for Tallis works to be performed, but this concession must be made if these works are to be available to students. As long as students are aware of the break with historical accuracy, these changes minimally affect a student’s appreciation for the music.

In order to incorporate performance practice effectively into one’s regular rehearsals, three things must happen. First, you must explain your decisions about performance practice to the students. While this explanation does not have to be overly technical, students need to understand that your choice is not arbitrary. The majority of students do not consider the reasons behind aesthetic decisions such as tempo and dynamics. In addition, most students would not realize that there may be multiple keys and voicings in which to perform a Renaissance piece. Without guidance from their educator, many students would not become conscious of the fact that there could be a right or wrong way in which to perform a piece.

When presenting performance practice to a choir, an educator must be sure to explain why scholars support certain viewpoints. Once again, the educator does not need to go into explicit detail, but a simple explanation (‘scholars found artifacts’, ‘period books refer to this phenomena’, etc.) helps students to understand the critical thinking involved in music scholarship. Students will be much more inclined to follow performance practice decisions if they know where they are coming from. In addition, most high schools do not have music
history courses, so ensemble courses are the only place where students can learn this information.

Finally, it is important to allow your students to hear multiple ‘authentic’ recordings that take opposite and yet valid approaches to performance practice. By allowing students to hear the differences between each recording, they are able to practice their critical listening skills while aurally demonstrating the inherent variability of performance practice. If students are presented with these three concepts throughout the rehearsal process of a piece, then they should come away from the experience aware of the basics of performance practice as well as uncertainty of the field.

While there is no single correct answer regarding the proper performance practice of any work, especially older works like Tallis’s, performance practice is still an important part of music education. As English teachers are fond of saying, “There are no right answers to the question, but there are certainly wrong ones.” Although the definitive correct interpretation of Tallis’s works will always elude us, the major aspects of performance practice can and should still be taught. In addition, educators should always be seeking to expand their knowledge of performance practice as performance practice ideals have and will continue to change over time as scholars continue their research.

Performance practice is a particularly useful educational tool since it can be incorporated to fit the needs of the choir. As performance practice differs even between major respected performers of early music, educators should utilize the flexibility of performance

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70 While it may not be best to play recordings of the particular piece you are learning, it is fairly easy to find recordings of a comparable piece (same time period, same genre, etc.). In this way, students can be exposed to the style of performance practice without predisposing them to a single interpretation of the piece.
practice to allow their choirs the best chance to succeed. In addition, major periods of music need not be excluded from a student’s education based on performance practice reasons. An educator can and should chose to follow all aspects of performance practice that are practical and consciously decide to ignore those aspects of performance practice that would eliminate a student’s ability to be exposed to a genre of music. Lastly, particularly in an educational setting, the needs of the students should trump any philosophy of performance practice.
Works Cited


