

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Glasgow
Unit of Assessment: 35 – Music
Title of case study: Original performances of Bach and Handel recreated for global contemporary audiences
1. Summary of the impact

John Butt's research has played a leading role in bringing historically informed music performance to professional and public audiences across the world. His recording of *Messiah* (2006) achieved critical acclaim and was presented with the Classic FM/Gramophone Baroque Vocal Album and the Marché International du Disque et de l'Edition Musicale Award. The recording also achieved commercial success for independent record producer, Linn Records with sales of over 20,000, and had a significant impact on Scotland's leading baroque ensemble, the Dunedin Consort, with seven more recordings of works by Bach and Handel, substantial royalty income, increased funding (including new subsidies) and new touring opportunities. This success has also enabled an active education outreach programme to develop both professional training and broader public interest.

2. Underpinning research

Intellectual background

In 2002 John Butt (University of Glasgow Gardiner Chair of Music, 2001-present) published a major monograph on the culture of historically informed performance. *Playing with History* (Cambridge University Press) established many of the primary questions regarding the role of historically informed performance in contemporary culture – such as how it ties into other historical conditions and its potential to refresh many aspects of classical music culture. One of the most significant conclusions was identifying the need to use historical knowledge and experience to encourage new creative possibilities in contemporary performance, even if adopting historical parameters might suggest a restriction of performative possibilities. A further monograph in 2010, *Bach's Dialogue with Modernity: Perspectives on the Passions*. (Cambridge University Press) – opened up new ways to read and hear Bach's *Passions*, presenting studies of listening, experiencing music over time and subject formation during performance which were seminal in influencing the interpretation of both live and recorded works. Further publications such as a theory of listening practice in western art music (2009), an article concerning emotions in the German Baroque (2011) and a study of theology, counterpoint and narrative of Handel's *Messiah* (2010), all reflect much of the groundwork for the recordings, which form another major part of Butt's research activities.

Performance and recording preparation

Each recording required different degrees of scholarly engagement and research. The three Handel recordings (*Messiah* 2006, *Acis and Galatea* 2008 and *Esther* 2012) involved considerable communication with other scholars to establish the current state of knowledge of the original performances; these were integrated into fresh study of the primary sources and preparation of new performing editions. The musical texts for the Bach works (*Matthew Passion* 2008, *Mass in B Minor* 2010 and *John Passion* 2012) were more securely available in modern editions, but required revisiting the sources to establish the texts for the specific performances to be reconstructed (the *Mass* recording used the first edition to present the work as Bach left it in 1750). Work on the musical text was undertaken in tandem with work on the original forces, most importantly the type of vocal scoring, the number and placing of forces and the type of performers required. All the vocal recordings reflect work on the constitution of choruses and their relation to the individual

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soloists; these recordings have been seminal in developing the concept of ‘soloist led’ performance. Musicological research has also informed the pacing of these performances – most notably the dramatic flow and division of scenes or individual numbers and possible tempo relationships between these.

Performance and recording process

When it came to the performance and recording process, all elements of historical knowledge (whether relating to forces, style, articulation or ornamentation), required considerable experimentation, even with very experienced performers. The interaction between scholarly ideas and performance was not necessarily symmetrical or predictable. For instance, the notion of ‘soloist-led’ choral performance required establishing a soloist’s putative approach, which was then reinforced by doubling singers. This introduced questions of spontaneity and uniformity of ornamentation, much of which could only be solved by attention to the emerging results of the performance. In other words, by setting new parameters of performing engagement new creative possibilities emerged. Other specific issues of musical interpretation included the notion of attempting to make this music ‘new’, as if heard for the very first time, together with issues of affective embodiment and dialogue between performers. Each recording also required Butt to produce extensive sleeve notes, designed to be relevant for both scholarly readership and the general public.

3. References to the research

- Butt, J. (Conductor), and Handel, G.F. (Composer) (2006) *Messiah* (Dublin, 1742). [Audio] [AVAILABLE FROM HEI]
- (2008-2013): Bach's Complete Passions: Butt, J. (Conductor), J.S. Bach, Matthew Passion BWV 244: Bach's last performing version, c.1742 [Audio] [AVAILABLE FROM HEI]; Butt, J. (Conductor), J.S. Bach, John Passion BWV 245: Reconstruction of Bach's Passion Liturgy, c. 1739 [Audio] [REF2]
- (2008-2012): Handel's Complete Dramatic Works for Cannons: Butt, J. (Conductor), and Handel, G.F. (Composer) *Acis and Galatea, HWV 49a*: Original Cannons Performing Version (1718) [Audio] [REF2]; Butt, J. (Conductor), Handel, *Esther* (first reconstructable version 1720) [Audio] [AVAILABLE FROM HEI]
- Butt, J. (Conductor), and Bach, J.S. (Composer) (2010) *Mass in B Minor*. [Audio] [AVAILABLE FROM HEI]
- Butt, J. (2002) *Playing with history: the historical approach to musical performance*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. ISBN 0521813522 [AVAILABLE FROM HEI]
- Butt, J. (2010) *Bach's Dialogue with Modernity: Perspectives on the Passions*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK. ISBN 9780521883566 [REF2]

Key grants

- 2006-2008: Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship (c. £77K). For monograph on Bach’s Passions, Bach’s Dialogue with Modernity – Perspectives on the Passions (CUP, 2010).

4. Details of the impact

Critical acclaim for historically informed performances

Between 2008-2013 Butt and the Dunedin Consort produced eight historically informed musical interpretations of Bach and Handel on CD. In 2008 their recording of Handel’s *Messiah* was awarded the Classic FM/Gramophone Baroque Vocal Album award and the Marché International

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du Disque et de l'Édition Musicale Award (Cannes) for a Baroque Album, giving it immediate worldwide renown in the classical arena. On the release of *Messiah*, *Gramophone Magazine* stated 'Butt and the Dunedin Consort marry astute scholarship to sincere artistic expression and the result is comfortably the freshest, most natural, revelatory and transparently joyful *Messiah* I have heard for a very long time.' Further accolades have included the nomination of the 2009 recording of *Acis and Galatea* for a ClassicFM/Gramophone Award; together with Bach's *Matthew Passion* they were named the 'recordings of choice' in BBC Radio 3's 'Building a Library', greatly enhancing their sales. In 2011, *Gramophone Magazine* listed the Dunedin Consort at no11 in the World's Greatest Choirs.

Butt's research was key in understanding what was possible when recreating original performances of well-known pieces, considering the size, balance and stylistic parameters of the original forces and imagining them as they may have been when 'new' and unknown. The blending of historical performance knowledge and musical expertise brought audiences the freshness and originality that would have been conveyed when the pieces were originally performed (listening practice also being a crucial consideration in Butt's approach). Taking this approach with such familiar pieces as *Messiah*, Bach's *Passions* and *Mass*, and Handel's *Cannons* has enriched the classical music culture for both audiences and critics.

Commercial success of recordings and performances

The recordings have been released by Linn Records, an independent record producer based in Scotland. Originally established as a manufacturer of high-performance music systems, Linn began producing records 30 years ago because its founders felt that there were too few that were of a high enough standard to be played on their systems (all recordings can be purchased in studio master quality). Linn Records has a reputation as a high-quality niche producer with a modest but stable turnover until the release of the Dunedin Consort's historically informed version of *Messiah*, which became the highest profile, best-selling production at that point in their history, including sales of over £144K (20,000 copies). *Messiah* was chosen by Linn to feature in high quality LP format, something which is particularly favoured by the Japanese market.

The success of the Dunedin Consort's recordings has meant that royalty income can be reinvested in future recordings; funds have also been raised through public subscription, generous private donations and schemes such as the 'Big Give' (2010 for *Esther* and 2011 for *Brandenburg Concertos*). This stronger income stream has also helped seed public funding, with support from Creative Scotland rising in recent years (unlike most other organisations), reaching £90K in 2013. All this funding has enabled an expansion of performing activity and outreach.

Further to this expansion in funding is the growing number of international touring opportunities, including performances of *Acis and Galatea* in Tel Aviv (Israel) and Chaise Dieu (France); *Mass in B Minor* in Torroella de Montgri (Spain); *Matthew Passion* at Bach's church in Eisenach (Germany) and *Messiah* in Handel's church in Halle (Germany), Noirlac and the Chapelle Royale of Versailles (France). The Dunedin Consort also broadcast Bach cantatas live in the [Lufthansa Festival](#) on BBC Radio 3 (22 May 2013) to an average listener audience of more than 2 million.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Evidencing critical acclaim

- Complete reviews available on Linn website, 143 reviews at time of writing ([link](#)) (list of extracts available from HEI)
- Gramophone Review (available from HEI)
- BBC Radio 3, 'Building a Library' ([link](#))

Evidencing commercial success

- BBC Radio 3, Lufthansa Festival ([link](#))
- Testimonial from the Chief Producer, Linn Records Ltd (sales and income) (available from HEI)
- Testimonial from the Chief Executive Officer, Dunedin Consort (creative impact, funding, annual turnover and tours/outreach) (available from HEI)