Background and Inspiration

I moved to the UK in 2006 to study viola da gamba and musicology at Oxford University, and my career freelancing with UK Early Music groups began in 2007 by guesting with groups like the Dunedin Consort and Fretwork. In a few years, things progressed and I became busy freelancing with many established Early Music ensembles and joined Fretwork as a permanent member in 2010. In 2011, I was invited to participate in a few contemporary music projects, and in the years following, my career started to really take off in a contemporary music direction, with neither complaint nor particular intention on my part. In early 2014, Fretwork and I had a mutual parting of ways and since then, I found myself starting to perform more as a soloist and often in a new music context.

By 2015, I was starting to somewhat drift away from the Early Music scene, not intentionally, but simply by virtue of being more often asked for other things. That summer, I was awarded a 6-month artist residency at the V&A, in connection with the opening of the new Europe 1600-1815 galleries. Although my contemporary work had certainly played a part in getting that residency, this 6 month period in the museum became an important opportunity for me to renew my creative relationship with historical repertoire. Looking back into my personal archives, I found the following text in my original residency application from November 2014, which presciently foreshadows some of the emergent issues of this PhD:

> *When preparing a piece for performance I often find myself asking 'What am I really doing here?'. Is this piece of music a vessel for displaying my technical virtuosity? If so, is that something I'll do with devilish fervour or wry wit? Or is my role in this piece to channel the spirit of the composer-genius? Or am I a narrator of sorts, communicating musical*

information to an audience with third-person omniscience? Or am I perhaps a more manipulative creature whose job is to elicit a specific emotional response from the audience?

Baroque music functions in all of these ways and many more. And as you know, baroque music was made in a very rich variety of social contexts. I want to examine the human social dynamics in these historical settings, in order to see how the answers to my questions above can play out in terms of my relationship with the public. To what extent do I admit or acknowledge what I am doing, and to what extent do I acknowledge the audience's existence and their level of knowledge about what's going on? How does this change from piece to piece and why?

I also want to understand how the practice of ornamentation fits into this dialogue. Is ornamentation as straightforward as a performer's assertion of agency on top of a composer's text? How do performer-generated ornaments relate to composer-stipulated ornaments, and how does either of these relate to the ornamentation of an embroidered wall hanging or a Limoges box? What happens when what we call ornamentation is actually functionally essential to an aesthetic?[1]

Reading this in February 2021 for the first time in more than six years, I am struck by how long these questions about what it is we fundamentally *do* when we play have been occupying my thoughts. The desire to explore nuance in relationships between performer, listener, space, and repertoire has clearly been there for longer than I realised. Luckily, the V&A provided an excellent opportunity for addressing these questions, both in my 2015 residency and in this PhD.

Musicking in the Museum

I mentioned before that the museum and its multiplicity of hearing subjects gave me the opportunity to work constructively outside the professional context of Early Music. Although there is much more to the act of music-making in the museum than it simply being "not a concert", I should start by briefly explaining *why* I wanted to look beyond concert hall performance of Baroque viol music in the first place. [2]

One of the problems I find with playing solo viol repertoire within the concert model is duration. The vast majority of our repertoire are single movements shorter than 5 minutes in length, or are suites made up by combining these short movements. A few outliers like Marais's *Labyrinthe* or *Folies d'Espagne* push 15 minutes, but with very few works of a sizeable temporal trajectory, filling two 45-minute halves of a modern classical program with solo viol music (a timeframe more comfortably filled by symphonies and longer sonatas) can get very bitty. The traditional concert formula also encourages a kind of dichotomic relationship between performer and listener, in which the audience is for the most part confined to a role of silent stillness in a large, dark group. As we will see below, apart from being anachronistic, this practice forces a rhetorical role on the performer that does not always fit with the nature of the repertoire. Finally, the spaces in which we typically perform concerts of viol music, i.e. churches and concert halls, usually encourage this strict dichotomy between performer and audience. They can also be—especially in the case of large, resonant churches—acoustically problematic for transmitting the intricacies and subtleties of the viol's resonance to a physically distanced audience.

Coming back to the museum as performance space, the V&A has a long and rich history of musical activities and collections. Since the 1920's there have been concert series both for their own sake and, for a time, as an activation of the museum's instrument collection, which was on display from 1968 until it was controversially

closed in 2010.[3] More recently, live music performance has been an important part of the Friday Lates events, as well as in concert series in the Norfolk House Music Room and the Globe in the Europe 1600-1815 galleries.

Beyond simply putting on traditional concerts in the museum, music and sound have been central parts of many recent special exhibitions. The "Opera: Passion, Power and Politics" exhibition which opened in 2017 involved an immersive, location-controlled audio experience incorporating recorded musical performance integrated with an audio guide. There was also a specially-constructed stage in the exhibition space for live pop-up operatic performance. And 2018's "Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up" included a specially commissioned sound installation that ran throughout the exhibition, leading the visitors from room to room.[4] These approaches exemplify the contemporary concept of the multisensory museum:

> *We now understand that a museum visit is not simply an encounter between an eager visiting public who soaks up the knowledge articulated by the curatorial team. The museum experience is a multilayered journey that is proprioceptive, sensory, intellectual, aesthetic, and social. The end result might be learning, wonder, reflection and relaxation, sensory stimulation, conversation with friends, new social ties, creation of lasting memories, or recollection of past events.*[5]

Here we see the museum as intentionally offering the possibility for a multiplicity of visitor experiences, allowing the visitor to find stimulation where they will, and to shape their own journey in the museum.

> *Museum practice is shifting and changing to accommodate individuals and communities who have a variety of communication needs and learning styles. Since humans live in an increasingly sound-oriented world, thanks to the ever growing presence of portable digital means, sound is a vital part of these shifts.*[6]

The modern multisensory museum offers distinct advantages over the classical concert hall experience—for present purposes—because it creates a space with an experiential intention, but it requires or implies no specific formula for engagement, nor does it prioritise any particular narratives or outcomes. Museum visitors are more or less free to explore and shape their museum experience as they like; in comparison to traditional concert audiences, they enjoy significantly more agency.

For me, performing in the museum is not limited by expectations of duration, spatial orientation, or diametric relationship with an audience, and this gives me more freedom to experiment. But the museum also provides me with the security of a historical cultural framework that pre-emptively justifies my playing the viola da gamba in it. Indeed, my instrument is an exact copy of a 17th-century viol which lives *in* a museum, so there is nothing fundamentally shocking or subversive about my playing the viol in the V&A.[7] The museum does not attempt to re-create a historical environment, but it offers a historically charged space, in which I can fruitfully explore the relationships between a historical instrumental practice and modern listeners. The specific natures of the four museum spaces used in this experiment will be discussed in the relevant chapters.

When I interviewed for my artist residency in December 2014, I told the panel that one of the most enchanting things for me about the V&A was that it managed to display a large quantity of historical objects, while still making the general experience of visiting the museum fun, engaging, and cool. I felt like classical music had something to learn from this, and that it centred on the difference between the agencies of the museum visitor and the concert audience member.

Working in the museum has given me the opportunity to create performances that explore these agencies, as well as my own as a player. I don't mean to suggest here that playing baroque music on the viola da gamba is necessarily a work of performance art, but I am curious to see what happens when we frame it as such, and when I ask myself some of the same critical questions about my practice as if it were.

Modes of Performance

In my introduction, I referred to the “less direct and more intimate performativity of the viola da gamba’s historical repertoire” and without yet going too deeply into the Early Music question, I would like to touch on this concept because it is central to this project’s design.

The vast majority of the viol’s historical solo repertoire was written by player-composers, people who played the viol and whose principal output was viol music. This music survives in the form of manuscripts and prints, the former are by nature single exemplars copied generally for personal use, and the latter were printed in quantity to be sold. Among the printed sources are treatises on the art of playing or improvising on the viol, in addition to collections of pieces by famous player-composers. Even among prints that aren’t explicitly pedagogical, we often see introductory material aimed at amateurs. As far as I am aware, there is no historical evidence of any professional viol players who were paid for their performance but who did *not* also write viol music (which of course isn’t to say that they never played each *other’s* music). Thus, the picture painted by the sources is one of a flourishing historical amateur viol practice, and of professional player-composers earning money through publication and in the employment of nobles and royals.[8]

It is worth considering that player-composers who published their works for profit did not necessarily write those works *for* the audiences they sold them to. Publication of scores was the only mode of wide musical dissemination available at the time, with audio recording not being invented of course until the late 19th-century. In one sense, these publications can be understood as early attempts at transmitting the brilliance of solo musical performances by player-composers. In addition to saying “look at this piece I wrote”, these publications by player-composers also tell us “look how beautifully I played”. Consider for example the published *Pièces de Viole* of

Marin Marais, whose unusual level of involvement in the printing process bordered on obsessive. Marais actually owned the zinc plates on which his music was engraved, and updated them for subsequent printings. He invented a whole system of new notational techniques in order to communicate expressive details of his compositions and—by extension—his own performances.[9]

Would historical amateur viol players have purchased the prints of Schenck or Marais with the intention of actually *performing* the music themselves? Or would they have grappled with the pieces only in private? Or would they have merely opened the book and marvelled at the creative genius, sympathising with musical gestures that were beyond their own technical capabilities? With pieces in manuscript collections, on the other hand, it is somewhat easier to imagine the work being played by its copyist, because we see it written in their own hand. In this sense, manuscript collections are a more concrete record of a non-compositional musical practice, but they still tell us very little about what this actually looked like.

Although Laurence Dreyfus points out Christopher Simpson's use in his 1665 treatise *The Division-Viol* of the term "perform" to describe the actions of a non-composing player, Dreyfus acknowledges the word has more a sense of "doing" or "fulfilling" the musical text and that "Only when instrumental music came to spawn its own extended discourse in the eighteenth century did 'performance' enter the lexicon as a rather extravagant expression for all music-making, which over time, relaxed, as words do, into an unthinking synonym."[10]

So we appear to be left with three general historical models for the relationship between viol players and their repertoire: there is the performance of the player-composer, where the musical invention and its rendering into sound appear as one performative action (though not necessarily concurrently as improvisation). Then there is the private musical practice of the amateur player who buys a printed volume of a player-composer's work, or who copies a few pieces into their personal manuscript collection purely for their own private exploration and enjoyment. And then there is the role in-between, an amateur player learning a piece by someone else

to a level where their performance merited sharing with others, and where they may even have augmented the text with their own ornaments or alterations. What we don't see is evidence of the professional player-interpreter, and indeed as Dreyfus elucidates, that role wasn't to come into being until long after the viol fell out of common use.[11]

Each of these three relationship models has its own subsequent relationships between player and listener, but we can also look deeper to the individual pieces and attempt to ascertain rhetorical needs or tendencies suggested by the piece itself. The division viol pieces of the aforementioned Christopher Simpson, for example, are constructed as virtuosic embellishments of simple chord progressions, divisions of a ground. The music is a demonstrative commentary, a style of composition that grows directly out of an inventive improvisational practice in which the divisions entertainingly refer to the established ground. Rhetorically, it doesn't make a great deal of sense to perform this commentary without a listener, yet at the same time its constructions are often so analytical in nature that there remains something introspective about the practice. The complex engagement with the harmonic structure in viol devisions is much more intricate than simple ground bass pieces for treble instruments on a *ciaccona* or *passacaglia*, because it ornaments a functional baseline, melodic material, and quite a lot in between.

In my practice, I find that divisions like Simpson's feel most successful when performed for a small group of people; there is a certain amount of showing-off that needs to be done, which makes it lonely to do alone and awkward to do for an audience of one or two, but the subtleties distinguishing these clever divisions from a series of boring scales are so fragile that they can often get lost on even a medium-sized stage, when one is musically orating in front of 200 people. It's a bit like the difference between being an entertaining, funny conversationalist in smallish groups and being a stand-up comedian who can make large crowds of strangers laugh.

On the other hand, some of the extremely virtuosic and highly stylised pieces of Forqueray—whose music is more often compared to that of Paganini or Liszt—require an amount of showing-off that would make performing them for anything less than an audience of 20 a bit embarrassing. And on the more introverted end of the spectrum, the excruciatingly beautiful and technically demanding lyra viol pieces of Alfonso Ferrabosco II are about as performative as staring wistfully out the window (that is to say, not *not* performative, but lower on the scale). They play with the resonances of the viol on such a subtle, lute-like level that their intricacies become lost almost as soon as any listener is involved; there is very little in that music that invites a performer to *demonstrate* something.

So, as we consider that different historical repertoires had different inherent performativities, different music-making scenarios in which they might likely thrive, Laurence Dreyfus suggests a list of twenty metaphors that could characterise the musical performance of any epoch:

> *All one has to do is imagine musical performance in a variety of different guises: (1) as a game; (2) as sport; (3) as tool; (4) as magic; (5) as impersonation; (6) as mime; (7) as dance; (8) as seduction; (9) as love-making; (10) as contemplation; (11) as devotion; (12) as prophecy; (13) as Ouija board; (14) as ministry; (15) as palliative; (16) as poetry; (17) as drama; (18) as composition; (19) as creation; or (20) as mere child's play. All of these similes exist in overlapping circles of meaning even when they are contradictory, for human beings are very good indeed at juggling masses of conceptual figures, each tugging at the other's hegemony, enabling what we know and sparking how we act.*[12]

This multiplicity of performance modes offers a richly layered approach to musical activity, and it echoes the broad variety of experiences to be had in the multisensory museum mentioned above. This welcome departure from the hegemonic one-way street between performer and audience in music has been a developing part of

musical culture since the late 20th century. In his 1998 monograph *Musicking*, Christopher Small draws our attention to the multitude of activities and actions that fall under the umbrella of "musicking", which he describes as:

> *...an activity in which all those present are involved and for whose nature and quality, success or failure, everyone present bears some responsibility. It is not just a matter of composers, or even performers, actively doing something to, or for, passive listeners. Whatever it is we are doing, we are doing it together—performers, listeners (should there be any apart from the performers), composer (should there be one apart from the performers), dancers, ticket collectors, piano movers, roadies, cleaners and all.*[13]

This resonates with the question I put to myself in the V&A residency application from 2014: "What am I really *doing* here?" What are the roles, patterns, and relationships involved in my musicking? Although our Western historiography of music is one centred on notated musical texts, the activity of musicking and its history go far beyond the page. Christopher Small asserts that "The fundamental nature and meaning of music lie not in objects, not in musical works, but in action, in what people do."[14]

This understanding of music as a practice rather than an object is fundamental to my work, not least because it bridges a historical way of thinking about music with a very modern one.

In designing my performance research at the museum, I wanted to explore the process of musicking in terms of the relationships between everyone involved in its production. As Eugene Narmour writes:

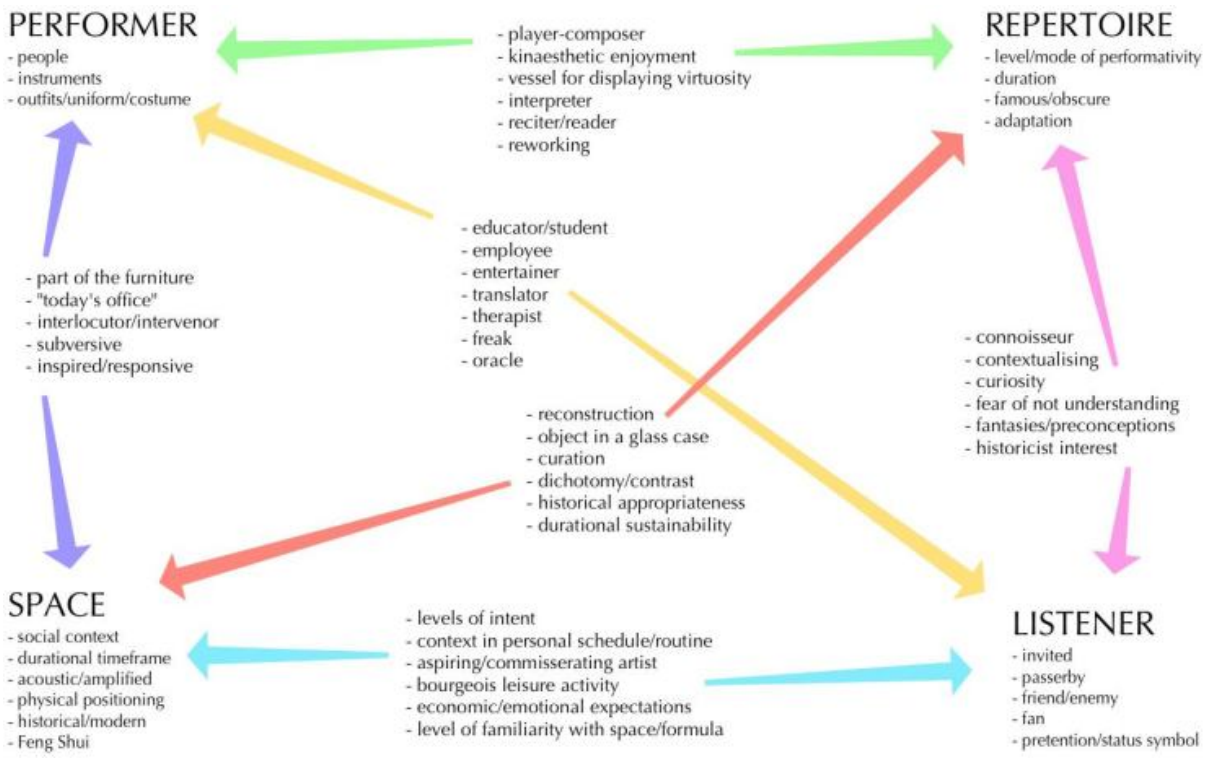
> *For as cognitive psychology has taught us, the temporal materialization of a musical artwork emanates not from the composer alone or from the performer alone but from a triarchical interrelationship among composer,*

> *performer, and listener. …It is the fusion of these three active mind-forces—composer, performer, listener—that literally creates the musical artwork out of the thin air through which sound waves travel. Consequently, for performers to discharge faithfully their aesthetic responsibilities, they must give considerable attention not only to their understanding of the composer's demands and desires but also to the sensibilities of the audience for whom they make music.*[15]

And indeed it is the listener who is often shortchanged in classical music environments. As I said previously, my initial motivation for the performance experiments that make up this research project was to give members of the public an opportunity to experience Baroque music in ways they had not before. It was in many ways the increased agency of the listener in these various contexts that unlocked opportunities for learning and discovery in each of the performances.

Over the course of this project, I conducted three separate experiments, each of which was repeated several times. The first was *Inside Voices*, a series of one-to-one performances inside Trajan's Column in the Cast Courts. The second was *One Piece*, a repetition-based installation in The Globe and Ceramics room 136. The third was *In Front of a Live Studio Audience*, an edited live recording session for invited guests in the Norfolk House Music Room.[16]

Building on Narmour's trio of "active mind-forces", the experiments focussed on the connections and interrelationships between *four* entities: performer, listener, repertoire, and space. The basic principle was that each experiment activated or encouraged particular vectors of interrelationship between these four elements, and the research objective was to analyse emergent issues, themes, or questions in each experiment. The following vector diagram contains a few examples of possible interrelationships between the four entities.



> *Things do not just exist; if they did, then they would indeed be but objects. The thing about things, however, is that they occur – that is, they carry on along their lines. This is to admit them into the world not as nouns but as verbs, as goings-on. It is to bring them to life.*[17]

The web of ideas above is by no means meant to be an exhaustive list of possibilities, but a framework of vectors of communication and goings-on that can serve as a point of departure for considering how these four elements might actively interrelate in practice. This is not representative, but suggestive. In the chapters that follow, we will return to and update this vector diagram to clarify emergent issues in each of the experiments. But first, it is time to address the issue of Early Music.

References

↑1	Emphasis added by me in 2021. I would ask the reader to remember that these are words I wrote 7 years ago in a residency application, and not part of my intentions for this dissertation. Here and throughout this thesis, I quote my own past words in the light of autoethnographic analysis.
↑2	I must also clarify that I do not advocate the abolishment of the concert tradition. I actually thoroughly enjoy playing concerts of solo viol music. I love modern concert halls and I recognise concerts as an important and ingrained part of our musical culture. But I think we can *also* move beyond concerts as the only context for sharing the practice of music-making.
↑3	Bailey, K., Broackes, V. and Visscher, E. de (2019) '"The longer we heard, the more we looked" Music at the Victoria and Albert Museum', *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 62(3), pp. 327–341.
↑4	It is not my aim in this project to *critique* the museum's practices regarding music, but it is worth noting that the V&A web pages devoted to these exhibitions make no mention of any of this, apart from calling the opera exhibit "immersive".
↑5	Levent, N. and Pascual-Leone, A. (2014) *The Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory, and Space*. xiii.
↑6	Wiens, K. and Visscher, E. de (2019) 'How Do We Listen To Museums?', *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 62(3), p. 279.

↑7	The instrument I play throughout this project is a 1982 copy by John Pringle of a ca. 1680 viol by English maker Edward Lewis, built originally with 6 strings. The original instrument is housed in the collection of the Muziekinstrumentenmuseum in Brussels and has an anonymous French 7-string neck on it from the early 18th century. The importance of the viola da gamba as object will be explored further in the following chapter.
↑8	Marin Marais and Antoine Forqueray were employed at the court of Louis XIV, John Jenkins by the families Derham, L'Estrange, and North, and the court of Charles I employed William Lawes, Alfonoso Ferrabosco II, and John Coprario, to name just a very few examples.
↑9	Marais, M. (1980) *The instrumental works*. Ed. John Hsu.
↑10	Dreyfus, L. (2007) 'Beyond the Interpretation of Music', *Dutch Journal of Music Theory*, 12(3), p. 256.
↑11	Dreyfus (2007), p. 257.
↑12	Dreyfus (2007), p. 272.
↑13	Small, C. (1998) *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. p. 19.
↑14	Small (1998), p. 17.
↑15	Meyer, L.B., Narmour, E. and Solie, R.A. (1988) 'On the Relationship of Analytical Theory to Performance and Interpretation', in *Explorations in Music, the Arts, and Ideas: Essays in Honor of Leonard B. Meyer*. p. 318.

↑16	This is the order in which we will discuss the experiments, not the order in which they happened.
↑17	Ingold, T. (2015) *The Life of Lines*. p. 38.