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Bach Rewrite – Marcin Masecki, Wurlitzer Piano and Ontology of Bach’s Music

The way of performing Bach’s music may be considered as the touchstone of early music reception across the centuries. Nowadays, when the HIP movement is the leading style of playing repertoire from the Middle Ages to the early 19th century, it seems natural to judge performances of Bach’s music in light of finding the best way to balance a performer’s creativity and historical knowledge. One of the most important issues of the HIP movement is choosing the appropriate instrument to play a particular piece. Polish pianist, Marcin Masecki puts that question into consideration by thought-provoking recordings of Bach’s music using „not historically appropriate” instruments with the accompaniment of a HIP string ensemble. That is how his album "Bach Rewrite" was invented: Masecki and the second pianist, Piotr Orzechowski, play Bach’s harpsichord concertos on Wurlitzer and Rhodes pianos – electronic pianos, which today also seem „historical”. This specific transcription puts the listener's attention on the source of sound, which is neither modern nor historical in its primary sense.

Another of Masecki’s albums, "Die Kunst der Fuge Bach/Masecki" is recorded using voice recorder while the pianist plays the Steinway piano. Both albums point to the problem of how the recording industry influences our mode of listening, especially in cases of such well-known compositions. Both of them put our attention on the ontological issues as well. It is notable, in light of "The Art of Fugue" interpretation, as the composer did not indicate a particular instrument for the piece.

The case study of Masecki’s recordings will be the starting point of my consideration about the influence of the HIP movement and its close relationship with the recording industry on modern listeners’ auidal perception and aesthetic value hierarchy. I will also speculate on the problem of the unresisted need of preparing new recordings of canonical repertoire (of which Bach’s music is the most spectacular example).