

EDITORIAL



Although musicology as a discipline has expanded enormously over the past few decades, many of its core interests remain much as they were a century ago, when the primary task facing scholars was to take stock of what had been written and by whom. We now possess good if not yet definitive catalogues of many composers' oeuvres and in some cases complete or near-complete critical editions. Less systematically organized performing editions of works by non-canonical composers have also begun to appear in increasing numbers in recent years to complement the pioneering surveys in publications like *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich* and *Musica Britannica*. Systematic studies of contemporary documents relating to individual musicians and musical establishments have proved exceptionally useful, though much of the picture remains obscure. Thus, after a century of unremitting labour, we have a musical chart that is extravagantly detailed in some areas yet frustratingly blank in others. The chance survival of documents enables us, for example, to know how many coffee spoons Leopold Hofmann owned at the time of his death, yet few if any documents survive that shed light on his personal and professional life. None the less, in spite of the incompleteness of our knowledge we possess an incomparably more detailed understanding of music in the eighteenth century than seemed possible even twenty years ago.

In spite of the quality and historical importance of the research that has been carried out on the music of major contemporaries of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, its wider impact has arguably been negligible. It seems that H. C. Robbins Landon's wry observation that 'no musicologist has ever succeeded in making any music popular' is as true today as ever it was. There has been a curious reluctance on the part of performers to embrace this newly discovered music. We who believe implicitly in its musical worth find such lack of interest disappointing if unsurprising, given the apparent tendency for the classical canon to shrink year by year. If the percentage of Haydn's output played is pathetically small, what, realistically, can we expect in the case of a Dittersdorf, Vanhal or Kraus?

The biggest single obstacle to winning acceptance for this repertory is the widespread and apparently deeply engrained prejudice against the music of composers regarded as secondary figures. Its insidious influence can be felt throughout the professional musical world. A firm belief exists that any work by a composer famous enough to have been heard of by the marketing manager must be superior in every respect to a work by any other composer. This prejudice is usually based on received opinion – opinion based more often than not on little or no knowledge of the repertory – and it is frequently reinforced at university level by the scant attention paid to non-canonical composers in music history courses. It comes perhaps as a surprise, then, that, where recordings of works by these composers have been made, they have generally sold very well and, as a consequence, have also received a good deal of airtime. The Naxos recording of two masses by Johann Baptist Vanhal, for example, sold in the region of 50,000 copies within a year of its release (*Missa Pastoralis* in G major and *Missa Solemnis* in C major, Tower Voices New Zealand and the Aradia Ensemble, conducted by Uwe Grodd, Naxos 8.555080, 2001). Recordings in the Naxos '18th-Century Symphony' and '18th-Century Concerto' series sell on average around 20,000 copies in the same period of a year, with occasional recordings doing substantially better. In the context of the classical recording industry such figures are spectacular. With such success comes a measure of recognition. The existence of commercial recordings, it seems, lends a kind of legitimacy to the composer: hearing is believing. These recordings play a critical role in winning broader acceptance for the works and undoubtedly serve as a catalyst for performances. None the less, their success, and the relative paucity of performances that follow, raise a number of very interesting questions about contemporary musical life. Are these recordings purchased by individuals who attend concerts regularly or does another group see them as a substitute for live concerts, and, if so, why? Perhaps the conservatism of concert programming, a reflection of the audiences to which the programmes themselves are often directed, has driven many to find musical satisfaction elsewhere. One might argue that the unparalleled richness of the recorded repertory offers the connoisseur or the simply curious far more than the concert hall and, that in an increasingly technological society, it is less a substitute



for live performance than a dominant culture all of its own. Two distinct yet intersecting musical worlds exist: one, dominated by recordings, is expansive, exploratory and characterized by consumer-driven freedom of choice; the other is institutionalized and resistant to change, and functions principally as the guardian of tradition. Both are consumers of musicological research but only one, it seems, exploits this knowledge to any real commercial advantage. The recording industry has not only created a vibrant alternative musical culture but it has also largely supplanted the publishing industry as the principal vehicle for promoting newly discovered works.

Over the past decade or so the music publishing industry has weathered a number of major crises. Hardest hit have been some of the oldest and most famous houses. Burdened with high overheads and millions of dollars tied up in inventory, a number of these companies have been brought to the brink of ruin. One of the most serious underlying causes – poor sales – has arisen in part from the rapid demise of the sheet-music retailing sector. As a reaction to sluggish sales and an ever-expanding number of works available, music retailers have largely abandoned purchasing anything other than standard stock items and instead content themselves with offering customers professional search services. While this approach has undoubtedly reduced their financial risk in respect of inventory, it has rebounded on them with a suddenness and completeness that few predicted. Frustrated with high prices and delays, many customers have given up dealing with retailers and instead choose to source music direct from the publishers. The impact of this trend has been strongest on small retailers, many of whom have been virtually googled out of business. Larger firms, particularly those with well developed mail-order services, have fared rather better, and in some instances have even been able to increase their overall business. The costs of doing so are high, however, and most express concern for the future.

Small specialist publishers have a much looser association with retailers than do the large publishing houses and accordingly feel a certain ambivalence about their future. Although most enjoy very good relations with their clients, all encounter retailers who invest nothing in the promotion of their catalogues yet demand substantial discounts for sales generated by the publishers' own promotional efforts. These same retailers are the first to throw up their hands in horror at the thought of publishers bypassing them and dealing direct with the public, but in reality they do little to develop the industry of which they are a part, and their demise is regretted by few. In the circumstances it is hardly surprising that publishers, like the public, have embraced internet-based sales with a vengeance. None the less, the uncertainty these changes in retail patterns have brought to the market has made the publication of highly specialized repertory very risky. Outside the supply of titles to clients holding standing orders, the sale of new-issue stock is very uncertain. Few not directly involved in the publishing industry have an inkling of how small sales volumes can be, and publishers themselves are understandably reluctant to draw attention to this, except of course when fending off enquiries from anxious authors about royalty payments. Even music by major composers sells in comparatively small numbers; contemporary music and historical rarities sell in even lesser quantities. A new issue of specialist repertory might sell as few as one hundred copies in the United States upon release. Some titles, of course, defy this pessimistic picture, but others do not fare even this well. Whether these low sales are indicative of low interest or simply a lack of market penetration is unclear, but the result is the same: much of the music that has been recovered, edited and published in recent years remains unknown to the vast majority of performers.

While technological changes have enabled the reduction of development costs for new editions, these advantages are all but lost in the higher unit costs associated with small print runs. Larger print runs, while attractive because of their economy of scale, are often deemed too risky in the uncertain sales environment. Assuming the publications themselves are realistically priced, margins are often slight and distribution through the traditional channels of wholesaler–retailer barely viable. The solution for most publishers has been to gain greater control over their own distribution through direct internet-based sales.

With the industry in its current state, one might well take a pessimistic view of the future of academic music publishing. Yet one can also argue that we are better placed today to issue editions of music than ever before. The challenge lies not in their production but in their distribution and, above all else, in the



stimulation of interest in their very existence. One of the sources of this optimism can be found in the rapid expansion of digital online music printing. For the publisher, this system allows music to be sold without the raft of costs commonly associated with printing, warehousing and distribution. Money is invested solely in the development of intellectual property and income is derived from the sale of licences. With greatly reduced cost structures the publisher can sell editions at a fraction of his usual price and dramatically increase the profit margin. This in turn allows the output of new publications to be increased, among them some high-risk projects. There are of course drawbacks to this manner of delivery, and the aesthetic appeal of the publications themselves is not high. Most houses view it as a secondary platform of limited utility, one that complements more traditional means of publishing music. It can be used for small-scale chamber works, keyboard music and the provision of perusal scores. It is not a suitable means of supplying orchestral parts, nor is it seen as being attractive to the library market. Although the current volume of trade in this area is small, it is clear that digital publishing will play an increasingly important role in the future, and many publications will be offered only in this format. Within a decade it may stand in the same relation to conventionally printed music as engraving did to manuscript copies in the eighteenth century – in certain types of repertory at least.

This means of transmission represents the tip of the iceberg as far as technology goes. A number of companies and research teams around the world are working on e-stands – electronic music stands – that not only replace printed music with a screen but also have some interactive capability. Utilizing a universal music notation translation system, these e-stands are able to read scores prepared using all of the major proprietary notation programmes, thus enabling them to access a potentially vast musical archive. They have their limitations, as do all examples of pioneering technology, but there is little doubt that this technology will develop with great rapidity and offer performers extraordinary flexibility in terms of the way music is displayed on the screen as well as a sophisticated editorial capability. It is also probable that e-stands will be able to talk to each other as well as to a central ‘master’ stand. The most exciting potential, however, lies in their memory. The e-stand will be able access entire libraries of scores and parts stored either in its memory or on memory sticks. Many of the scores will be purchased as electronic files via the internet, although most publishers will doubtless offer standard-repertory memory sticks for sale in the manner of CD-R editions currently in use.

To take advantage of the opportunities afforded by this technology, it is necessary to understand fully its capabilities and anticipate what the next generation of systems will be able to do. There is already a wide recognition of the utility of CD-R publications and multi-media e-books, yet academic music publishing has not adopted these new formats to any significant extent. Our traditional preoccupation with source descriptions and critical reports has perhaps blinded us to the limitless potential of the electronic media. Provided copyright issues can be dealt with in a relatively simple fashion, it is conceivable that editions will contain not only the musical text and commentary but also illustrations, soundbites and links to relevant sources of information. This type of publication and the ease with which it can be disseminated via the internet promises to provide us with the means to create better and more usable editions. If there is a catch, it may be that the very flexibility of the system and its inexpensive delivery will encourage editorial overkill, already one of the besetting sins of modern musicology. Far from considering the level of editorial commentary appropriate for the edition’s projected use – one of the defining differences between the critical edition and the scholarly performing edition – some musicologists may choose to overload their editions with unnecessary editorial and contextual clutter. Irrespective of the medium, it will remain the province of the publisher to develop style guidelines suitable for his target market. But as technologies develop, it will become increasingly important for the scholar to think about not only which projects are of the greatest historical and musical interest but what medium is the most effective for their publication – how, in a more general sense, the fruits of our collective research can enrich contemporary musical life.

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