

Researching the Choral Score

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The development of the choral program has always been of interest and concern to the choral director, but more and more the development of the program has become a key factor in audience development as well as in sustaining ensemble interest. The systematic development of the choral program begins naturally with the identification of the type of literature desired for study and performance. In order to choose choral literature that will give confidence to a developing program or ensemble, the following questions first come to mind:

- What is the desired musical period(s) of the program?
- Who is the composer of the music?
- What is the desired voicing?
- Is the piece a major work or smaller in scope?
- What is my long-term plan for this ensemble?
- What are my obligations to these performers?
- What are my obligations to our audience?

After these questions have been considered, the next set of important questions must be considered:

- How do I find ideas for this program?
- How do I know if the edition under consideration is reliable?
- Where can I find the best edition?
- Where can I find a choral piece written on a particular text?
- How can I find a complete listing of a composer's works?

- How can I best discern the musical intentions of the composer?
- How can I find if a work is still in print?

These questions reveal what type of source needs to be consulted.

Knowing the best and most appropriate source and having a research system to discover good sources enables the conductor to find answers for all of these questions.

Primary and Secondary Sources

Source materials used by the conductor are approached from two levels: primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources are original documents, and because they are firsthand information, they are considered to be most reliable sources of research information. When data is not original to the researcher they become secondary sources. Secondary sources represent varying degrees of likeness to primary sources. They also vary in degrees of reliability due to the increased level of remoteness from the original source and the various levels of the strength of scholarship used in the editing of the secondary source.

The distinctions between primary sources and secondary sources require that we consider the following questions before the search for the desired edition:

- Does the literature sought merit the study of the original source?
- If so, is it possible to view the original manuscript or a facsimile?
- If not, are scholarly secondary study editions available?
- Are reliable editions available for use in performance?

Understanding the Nature of Sources

Conductors and performers would seem to be working with the most important source, the actual musical score. However, all musical sources are not the same. The score in the hands of the conductor or performer is at least one step removed, if not many steps removed, from the primary source – the composer's original manuscript.

The information we know about music comes from four principal sources:

1. Documents of record, such as programs or newspaper accounts.
2. Essays and treatises on the theory and practice of music.
3. Composer biographies or contemporary accounts.
4. The musical score itself.

Some editions are more accurate than others. The most correct edition of a score is the one that most precisely conveys the final intentions of the composer. Friedrich Hänssler, former senior editor of the publishing firm Hänssler-Verlag of Stuttgart, Germany, states that the ideal edition is one that, "seeks to accurately present the composer's last wish for the composition". However, determining the exact intentions of the composer is not as simple as rendering an exact duplication of the original manuscript. Such a rendering would fail to convey to the modern audience matters such as the reconciliation of differences in duplicate versions of the original manuscript, differences in notational practice between the time of the original manuscript and today, and questions regarding original performance practice.

For this reason, editions are indeed critical as we seek to develop a reliable and confident choral program.

Editorial Process

Editions are only as good as the scholarship that led to their publication. The ideal that any editor is working toward is a trustworthy representation of the musical intentions of the composer. If the composer is living, the published edition has the opportunity to accurately represent the composer's musical intentions and is most often accurate. However, even under these conditions mistakes are made in the printing process. These are often corrected in a second printing, but many original printings of the incorrect score will be available and widely distributed before a publication is reprinted. If the published score is from an earlier musical period, the editorial process is essential to an accurate publication. Editorial methods vary greatly, and the importance of the editor in the process cannot be overstressed; the results are crucial. The motivation to publish historical works is to direct the attention of the musical community to worthy music. Therefore, any form of simplification that makes the music immediately accessible to the greatest number of people is desirable. However, in whatever manner information and notation may be simplified, the overriding caveat is to convey accuracy in a final edition. Therefore, the most important editorial marking is the indication that distinguishes between what is original and what has been supplied or amended by the editor. Any information provided by the editor is valid, as long as the editor demonstrates the original musical markings and explains what has happened in regard to the original. The conductor must be certain that nothing has been changed from the original without some indication in the score. The use of editorial brackets or parenthesis is the common indicator of information supplied by the editor to distinguish it from original material.

Toward Ideal Sources

The ideal for every conductor is to have scholarly scores informed by the original manuscript. The opportunity to see the exact musical markings made by the composer brings great understanding and confidence to the research, interpretation and performance process. However, original scores before 1500s are extremely rare. This is true of all early editions and in diminishing levels of rarity as the process of music printing progressed through the centuries. Therefore, conductors, like researchers of any music, must depend upon editions of the original manuscript for study and performance.

The Search for the Right Source

In order to begin the search for literature, the conductor should ask the following questions at the outset of every program choice:

1. What kind of literature do I want to study or program?
2. What is the best source for the literature identified?
3. What process do I follow in order to review the source identified?

In general, the term *historical edition* may be applied to any music publication devoted to a past repertoire. The serious investigator and/or performer is interested in investigating scholarly editions, also termed *critical editions*. Such published historical editions are based upon an editorial process that involves comparing and contrasting the composer's original manuscript or other historical editions upon the original manuscript. The alternative to the historical/critical edition is the *performance* edition. The performance edition involves an editorial process, which may – but not necessarily – use primary or scholarly secondary sources. The performance edition often does not footnote or reference its sources, and often incorporates editorial

markings designed in a modern performance.

The historical or critical edition and the performance edition need not be mutually exclusive in editorial process, but the fact that they are intended for two different audiences usually determines the choices made in the editorial process. The scholar expects the historical or critical edition to indicate, through verbal description and footnotes, research relative to the understanding of the original manuscript. The performer, on the other hand, expects the performance edition to render a score that is honest to the intentions of the composer, yet easily readable in performance setting. The performance edition does not distract the performer with possibly confusing notation alternatives and descriptions printed in the musical score. The *historical* edition is found in either a collected edition that contains a composer's complete compositional output, or in an anthology that contains a variety of works of a similar genre. A facsimile in which the primary source is reproduced – with or without scholarly commentary – is considered a category of the collected edition. Collected editions, anthologies, and facsimiles are usually available in ongoing series published by musicological societies and usually found in libraries. *Performance* editions exist separately as independent publications due to their practical function as a performance copy for either conductor or performer. They are published in large quantities because of the needs of the performing ensembles for which they are intended. Performance editions are usually found by searching the catalogs of music publishers, by speaking with colleagues, or by contacting a reputable music dealer.

As stated above, the historical editions are based upon primary and secondary sources. Performance editions may also be based upon primary or secondary sources, as in the case of the *Urtext* edition. *Urtext* is a term applied to a modern printed edition of earlier music in which the aim is to

represent a literal rendering of the original score without editorial additions or alteration.

Although it is greatly preferred for editors to include references to source materials, many performance editions do not indicate sources. If sources are not referenced, the performer must either take the responsibility of comparing the performance edition to critical source materials, or trust the scholarship of the editor to be true to the original intentions of the composer.

Acquiring Sources

After determining the literature type and the source desired, the final step in the research and program development process is to acquire the edition of the musical score. In some instance, more than one source may be identified. In other instances, the desired score may not be available. When beginning the quest for the source and edition desired, it is important to note the descriptive elements regarding the composition:

1. Title of composition
2. Composer and author of text source
3. Editor
4. Setting
5. Publisher and/or distributor
6. Item number
7. Copyright date or publication date

It is the rare and privileged one who has the opportunity to view original manuscripts of early music, especially if the music score is a classic, but it is important to know that such works are indeed available and can be viewed. As you would expect, rare and important original documents are kept under lock and key and behind glass or in environmentally protected libraries or vaults. These are typically found at

the important research libraries, national libraries and national archives. However, under special conditions and with ample advance notice, interested researchers can view such material.

When the viewing of the original document is difficult or impossible, it is quite possible for the researcher to refer to a photographic *facsimile*. Manuscripts dating from as early as medieval works are available through facsimile editions. If a facsimile is not available for the desired score, the study of a primary source is still possible through specially ordered digital or film copies, or through microfilm or microfiche copies. Libraries and archives that have acquired historical manuscripts often make these resources available through copy services. Such formats are relatively inexpensive to acquire and are excellent sources of study. Their availability has made scholarship possible on a much broader scale, allowing researchers to command the resources of libraries around the world.

The next step for study beyond digital and photographed likeness of the originals comes through scholarly historical editions. Typically, such editions describe the original sources on which the modern edition is based as well as other sources for information employed. Information regarding modern scholarly editions has been consistently chronicled through journals and other periodicals dealing with historical musicology. Information about the primary sources on which modern editions are based is best obtained from the editions themselves, but this information may need to be amplified by consulting the catalogs of printed and manuscript music in a major research library. Indispensable reference books, dissertations, catalogs, and online sources exist today for locating both historical editions and performance editions of choral scores. Such reference materials are available in libraries with a focus on music research.

Due to the expense involved in preparing and publishing

historical editions, libraries are generally the only place historical collections are found. Performance editions, on the other hand, are affordable for individuals interested in collecting and studying specific compositions. Performance editions are published with the intention of making them available to conductors on a mass scale for performance. Libraries are less likely to shelve individual performing editions of small compositions. However, major works such as oratorios, cantatas, symphonies, incidental music, concertos, and operas are often found in libraries. The performer interested in locating performing editions of smaller works must contact publishers, specialized archives and libraries, rental agents, or retail music suppliers directly to secure a particular composition. Only the most popular of performing editions stay in print for extended periods.

References for Finding Sources

The most thorough and accessible English-language list of historical editions is found in A. H. Heyer's *Historical Sets, collected Editions, and Monuments of Music: A Guide to Their Contents*. The most recent edition of Heyer's monumental work includes the complete editions of the music of individual composers and the major collections of music that have been published or are in the process of publication. Each entry follows the U.S. Library of Congress format and contains the composer or compiler of the collection, the title, the place of publication, the publisher, the date of publication, the paging or number of volumes, and a brief description of illustrative material. After any special notes, a listing of the contents is given. This source can be found in most music research libraries.

Three other English-language works are also very helpful for identifying historical editions:

- *Historical Musicology*, by L. B. Spiess
- The list of historical editions published in Willi Apel's *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, under the entry "Editions, historical,"
- "Editions, historical," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Stanley Sadie

The German musical encyclopedia *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* is another standard reference for scholars seeking historical editions. Collected editions and their contents are listed in this German-language reference under the heading *Denkmaler*, or *monuments*. (*Appendix E lists other resources for researching credible sources*).

Digital technology is being used today for viewing printed editions through images delivered electronically and viewed online. In this process, printed editions are scanned and transferred into digital format. Images stored digitally can be viewed on screen or printed in hard copy. This process is in full commercial use with popular performing editions and with some historical editions. This technology can be used to store a full library of scholarly and performing editions to be made available to the widest possible audience through the Internet. Laser technology allows the transference of more than eight thousand pages of information to a compact disc. When this process becomes completely economical for all users, the printing of editions as we know them may become irrelevant.

Elements Contributing to an Excellent Edition

It is entirely possible to edit a historical manuscript oneself. In fact, the best way to understand the process that contributes to an edition is to work through the various steps necessary for producing an accurate historical edition.

The *first step* in creating your own edition is to seek out the

best sources for the work to be edited. This step requires securing primary or secondary sources and assessing the accuracy and reliability of these sources; it is less difficult if there is only a single source for the desired composition. The *second step* in the process is to compare and take into account versions deemed reliable for the desired work. If there are several sources for the desired composition, the editor must compare and contrast these sources, always keeping in mind that the intent is to discover, as best as one can, how carefully the source mirrors the composer's final intention for the work. The *next step* in the editorial process is to consider the notational devices used in the original work, and then make decisions how best to convey the original markings into notation that has meaning to the modern reader. For early music, this is a particularly difficult task. Even as late as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, notation markings conveyed meanings that are interpreted differently today. The modern editor must decide whether to keep the original markings and explain the modern difference for interpretation in footnotes, or change the markings to convey modern meaning, again noting the editorial change by way of footnotes. The fourth step in the editorial process is to factor in the performance practice. The editor must consider how the work was intended to sound during the period in which it was written. What implications do these facts have upon a modern performing edition? Composers in earlier times often left some notation or interpretive markings off their manuscript, leaving some decisions to the performer. This meant that there was a difference between how the manuscript looked and how it actually sounded. For example, in the Baroque period composers used figured bass to indicate the harmony desired for a composition. The informed keyboard player knew to render the indicated figured bass into a correct performance. However, what does the modern editor do with such markings? This is one example of the performance practice consideration every historical editor must face.

Finally, the editor must decide who the intended audience is for the edition chosen. In other words, is the edition intended to be a performing edition, or is the final work a historical/critical edition intended for scholarly study? Or, is the final edition intended to satisfy both performance and scholarly study? The Urtext edition attempts to convey the original composer's composition without editorial markings. Such an edition translates into modern notation all the notes and details of the original manuscript. At the other extreme is a heavily edited performance edition. Characteristics of the pragmatic performance edition are exact markings for various interpretive characteristics. Such an edition makes the work immediately available for a wide group of performers. These two extremes in types of editions do not need to be mutually exclusive. If the editor is careful to clearly indicate editorial additions and interpretations from what was in the original manuscript, an edition can be both a scholarly and performance edition.

Creating your own Choral Edition

Following the directions outlined below, create your own researched edition of a work for study or performance, and consider making your edition and scholarship available to others. Here are the steps:

1. Identify the best primary source or reliable secondary source(s):

a. If an original source is available, consult this as a primary source.

b. If more than one original source is available (copy, revision, etc.), consult each copy and compare the sources.

c. If reliable secondary sources are available, consult and compare all secondary sources.

2. Take into account all versions deemed reliable for the desired edition:

a. The intent is to discover, as best as one can, how carefully the source mirrors the composer's final intentions for the work.

3. Consider the notation devices used during the period of the original work:

a. Make editorial decisions on how best to convey these notes to a modern performer.

b. Note changes made to the score by way of footnotes and parenthesis.

4. Consider the performance factor for the era the work was composed, and consider the issue of performance in a modern setting:

a. How was the work intended to sound when it was originally written?

b. How can the original intentions be conveyed to a modern performer?

c. What did performers know to do during the era this piece was written that is not indicated in the score (and that modern performers would not necessarily know to do today)?

d. How can such performance practices be conveyed to a modern performer?

5. Decide who is the intended audience for the edition you are creating:

a. Is this a historical edition for study only?

b. Is this a performing edition for ease of performance only?

c. Is this a historical/performance edition, which shows historical editorial changes, but in the context of a practical, performable score?

6. Indicate decisions made in the final edition:

a. Either by footnotes or parenthesis, show what decisions were made that varies from the original

b. Provide a cover page that indicates editorial decisions.

Conclusion

For the conductor, the ethics of conveying the intentions of the composer should weigh heavily in the building of a program. The choice of the right choral score and edition, and confidence in the editorial practices that went into the creation of that score, are the foundation for the creation of a confident choral program.

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