



COMMUNICATION: CONFERENCE REPORT

Issues in Scholarship in Music of the 17th and 18th Centuries: Sources, Editing, Performance

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This two-day symposium was organized by Carrie Churnside under the auspices of the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire's Forum for Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Music. Delegates assembled in person and online to hear a dozen or so papers and presentations of varying types, which covered an impressive range of topics spread across both centuries.

A number of speakers set out expressly to address topics of relevance to the long eighteenth century. Adrian Powney (University of Birmingham) considered a particular idiosyncrasy in the notation of Marc-Antoine Charpentier's music whereby many pieces introduce a change of time signature right at the end, frequently as late as the penultimate bar. Local circumstances such as the prosody of literary texts, as well as performance-practice considerations (including the frequent likely implication of a slowing of tempo in such passages), often explain individual cases. However, Powney used the topic as a window onto Charpentier's wider practice in relation to metre – a topic on which he has shed considerable light in recent years, and which underlines in its complexity the importance of the composer's contact with Italian music that is also obvious in so many other ways. Martyn Wilson (Royal Birmingham Conservatoire) drew welcome attention to the Op. 7 violin concertos of Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, and in particular the problems of deriving a viable score from the engraved parts of 1782. The ostensible elegance and clarity of these mask a range of inconsistencies and errors that present a considerable obstacle to modern editors and performers. Having observed how modern players often treat parts in rehearsal, Wilson described how he was able to use such insights to explain many of the inconsistencies in these early printed parts, offering a neat demonstration of the benefits of a reciprocal (rather than more straightforwardly linear) understanding of the processes of scholarship, editing and performance. Stephen Rose (Royal Holloway, University of London) focused not on an individual composer but rather on the progress of the ongoing Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project to investigate and catalogue seventeenth- and eighteenth-century musical sources from English local archives and record offices. This work is bringing to light many previously unknown sources and drawing attention to the activities of little-known provincial musicians around the country; in the process it is also throwing up many challenges to methodologies for source evaluation that have been developed in conjunction with more familiar elite urban, court and church environments.

Several speakers used their papers to highlight the music of lesser-known composers, with the avowed aim of increasing its accessibility. Gareth James (Royal Birmingham Conservatoire) introduced his doctoral work on the large-scale sacred vocal music of Pietro Torri (c1665–1737), whose long career at the Bavarian Hofkapelle culminated in his appointment as its director in 1732. Michael Talbot (emeritus, University of Liverpool) focused on the challenges of producing modern editions that offer convenience to performers and commercial potential to publishers

while retaining sufficient scholarly credentials to qualify as ‘critical’ editions, illustrating his talk with examples from his recent work on the French composer Jean-Baptiste Quentin (c1690–c1760). Fernando Miguel Jaloto (Universidade Nova de Lisboa), meanwhile, described the complete process of taking an unpublished mid-eighteenth-century Portuguese instrumental repertory from manuscript to CD recording. This involved many of the same considerations highlighted by Wilson, James and Talbot while extending further to the necessity for extensive editorial intervention in order to complete fragmentary passages, and even in some cases to rework original chamber compositions as orchestral concertos. The latter instances in particular provide a notable illustration of the extent to which notions of historically informed performance practice can lead well beyond concepts of mere textual or idiomatic fidelity to result in genuinely creative engagement with surviving materials, producing vibrant and compelling new musical realizations. These ideas are familiar to many performers, but are brought strongly to the fore in such cases.

My own contribution (Alan Howard, University of Cambridge) took up this theme of creative engagement, especially with regard to completion of fragmentary works, drawing on my experience of working with music in varying degrees of completion for published editorial projects involving music by Jeremiah Clarke, Sampson Estwick, John Eccles and William, 4th Baron Byron, and most recently an ongoing engagement with music by William Croft. As part of an extended presentation designed to stimulate discussion of the issues that emerged, Graham Sadler (Royal Birmingham Conservatoire) contributed observations from his work with French sources, especially those from the generations of Lully and Rameau in which inner parts (*parties de remplissage*) were omitted when works were published in the type of short score known as a *partition réduite*. I then reflected on a range of editorial circumstances, from the restoration of the odd missing bars of individual parts to the putative provision of whole missing parts, and further to the speculative reconstruction of an entire movement by Croft from a single surviving treble part and possible associated literary text.

While the details of such ‘re-creations’ can often prove musically stimulating or even controversial in themselves, the broader questions they raise are in many ways just as interesting. This applies in particular to the way that they place in such tension the traditional demands of critical editing – textual fidelity and source primacy – on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the need for the sort of creative engagement more commonly associated with performance. Historically informed approaches to the music of this period – with their increasing promotion of extempore and ephemeral modes of performance – are an especially good example of that creative engagement. Ultimately the reconstruction of incomplete works can contribute to wider scholarly engagement with this repertory and potentially enrich the range of music available to performers, as well as increasing the utility of sources that otherwise remain obscure because of their fragmentary status. At the same time, there are clear issues concerning the ontological statuses of the resulting texts: for all that we can use the full range of our knowledge of historical sources and styles to make such ‘re-creations’ as compelling and musically persuasive as possible, they remain contingent, forever awaiting a more persuasive solution or the discovery of a more complete source. Viewed from this perspective, the activity of completing fragmentary works arguably becomes an extreme case of the kind of reframing of critical editing that has been argued for by James Grier and others, and indeed subject to many of the same concerns of wider research in the last half-century: how do we maintain high standards of scholarship (and indeed musical performance) as our recognition of the contingency, ephemerality and subjectivity of our efforts forces us to move beyond long-cherished ideals such as the notion of striving towards an ideal text or truth?

Such scholarly tensions could be seen in operation in many of the other papers that were presented, bringing together otherwise disparate topics such as the reconstruction of the broader Venetian repertory that gave birth to Leonardo Simonetti’s 1625 *Ghirlanda sacra* (John Wenham, emeritus, University of Birmingham); the preparation of a concert reenactment of Marie de’ Medici’s 1600 entry into Avignon (Alex Robinson, University of Oxford); and the use

of digital acoustic simulations to reconstruct lost performing spaces from early seventeenth-century Coventry (Jamie Savan and Helen Roberts, both Royal Birmingham Conservatoire). All of these took us some way away from the eighteenth century.

Martin Perkins (Royal Birmingham Conservatoire) considered a somewhat later repertory: French *airs sérieux* in the period 1660–1720. Much uncertainty surrounds the question of how best to realize the heavily ornamented melodic lines of such pieces. Perkins focused on the highly variable notation of ornaments in successive printed sources of this repertory, arguing that while some changes may reflect changing fashions of performance, the overwhelming cause of variation was the use of different printing technologies, and in particular the printing of derivative editions from less versatile block type rather than the more flexible engraving used by Michel Lambert in 1660. The question of how to represent such ornaments in modern editions and realize them in performance again leads back to many of the issues raised above. Another paper to consider repertory on the cusp of the early eighteenth century was an enjoyable lecture-recital given by Hazel Brooks (University of Leeds) on violin and Federico Lanzellotti (Universität Basel) on harpsichord. Drawing on a collection of late seventeenth-century violin music now at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, this presentation examined uncertainties relating not so much to musical content or detail, but to origins and attribution. The latter situation is almost as uncomfortable as the former in a culture in which the idea of musical works as artefacts of the personal expression of a named individual has been so central since the late eighteenth century (and arguably long before).

A paper on Wang Duanshu's *Collection of Elegance* (1667) by Yuemin He (Alan Turing Institute, London) offered a welcome counterpoint to what was otherwise very much a male-dominated and Europe-focused collection of papers. This collection of arias by female musicians was compiled by its (female) author as a comprehensive collection of women's music of the late Ming dynasty, undertaken from the perspective of the early Qing era that immediately followed it. Apart from the obvious comparative interest of such an example with the similar activities of publishers and anthologists in an early-modern European context, He's concentration on the care with which Wang Duanshu curated her collection – here through the use of paratexts incorporating critical engagement with the contents – reminds us of the importance of historicizing the act of editing, whether by earlier musicians or as undertaken today. The textual contents of older editions are all too readily dismissed as corruptions, and their editors assumed not to have lived up to modern editorial standards. Even where this is true, though, it is increasingly clear that many historical editions nevertheless preserve evidence of sources and traditions that have since been lost to scholarship, and whose insights can sometimes be recovered – even if only in part – through carefully contextualized readings of the later editions in question.

Two specially arranged concerts and a great deal of stimulating discussion within and between sessions rounded out what was a very enjoyable conference, with well-chosen papers, strong organization and excellent facilities. The organizers will form the core of a larger committee that will host the Twenty-First Biennial International Conference on Baroque Music at the same venue on 16–20 July 2025. On the strength of these two days there will be much to look forward to in the coming event.

Alan Howard is Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in Music at Selwyn College Cambridge, and an Affiliated Lecturer in the Cambridge Faculty of Music; he is also co-editor of *Early Music*. His critical editions of theatre music by John Eccles (A-R Editions) and odes by William Croft (*Musica Britannica*, Stainer & Bell) both appeared in 2023. He is currently finishing work on volume 30 of the revised *Purcell Society Edition* (also Stainer & Bell), 'Devotional Songs and Partsongs'.