

Introduction

Yes, but...why Ahle?!

In 2010, the music library at the University of British Columbia was a separate entity from the main library. Located on the fourth floor of the music building (built in the late 1960's), the library was divided into two sections - a main room with study tables and all the circulating books and music, and in a secret room behind the desk, which was technically open stacks, filled with all the collected works, and a long dated copy of Heyer's *Historical Sets, Collected Editions, and Monuments of Music* screwed into the wall. It was dark, dusty, and largely deserted; certainly no singers dared enter.

I however, did. I had discovered a love for early music, and had also discovered that this room held a wealth of music long forgotten, so in searching for repertoire to sing, I found myself paging through volumes of *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst* (DDT). Completely unaware of what a critical commentary was, let alone knowing how to evaluate it, I photocopied a small sacred concerto for bass and two violins from the collection, and performed it in my third year recital. As it happened, I had found the fifth volume of DDT; the one devoted to the works of Johann Rudolph Ahle, edited in 1901 by Johannes Wolf. I thought it was a fantastic piece. The next year, I went back to the same volume, but I found that the majority of pieces were in clefs I didn't know how to read, so I started looking harder for more Ahle. I was able to track down an edition of a small sacred concerto for bass and four trombones, edited by Howard Wiener. The edition was well-edited, clear, included facsimiles and parts - I successfully performed the piece on my senior recital in 2012.

The more time I spent in the world of Early Music, however, the more I

learned about editions, and how rare good editions such as Wiener's were. As I explored more music from the German baroque, I continued to come up against poor editions— either recently published but badly edited, or archaic editions of the same generation as DDT. I also discovered that I was able to find precious little on Ahle, and very few editions of his music. I tracked down a copy of Markus Rathey's 1999 tome on Ahle - *Johann Rudolph Ahle, 1625-1673: Lebensweg und Schaffen* - which contains a catalog of Ahle's works.¹ I discovered that both of the pieces I've performed came from his *Neugepflanzter thüringischer Lustgarten, ander theil* (Lustgarten II, 1658), one of four volumes which Ahle published between 1657 and 1665. Rathey also catalogued all the edited editions of Ahle's works (as of 1999), and while I could see there were several more works that would suit my voice and be interesting to perform, they weren't edited, or accessible.

After a few years being distracted by other projects, I came back to Ahle in 2015. I was able to get a facsimile edition of all the partbooks to Ahle's 1658 collection through inter-library loans, and I began to edit pieces from the collection. The wonderful thing about working with Ahle, I found, was that I had a totally clean slate to work with. Most of the works had never been edited, and most editions of his works that do exist were not worth emulating. I did a final edition of one of his solo pieces for voice and continuo, and sang it for my master's entrance exam at the Royal Conservatoire, and I proposed that my master's research be based on the editing of the entire collection. My stated objective, in addition to simply learning more about the music, was to find a way

¹ Markus Rathey, *Johann Rudolph Ahle, 1625-1673: Lebensweg und Schaffen* (Eisenach: Verlag der Musikalienhandlung Karl Dieter Wagner, 1999).

to create a critical edition that would satisfy both scholars and performers.

So I began to transcribe. Philip Brett writes: “editing has been regarded in some academic circles as a marginal activity, requiring ingenuity and patience but rarely engaging the full force of the intellect.”² I think in the beginning, I agreed with the members of the circles to which Brett referred. I had Sibelius, late seventeenth century moveable-type prints aren’t so hard to read, how hard can this be? In the summer of 2016, I used five of my editions of his larger scale pieces for a church service – directing a twenty-five member semi-professional church choir, professional soloists, and six professional instrumentalists, including trombonists. Perhaps the deck was stacked against me from the beginning – how do you prepare editions for a group of people with such diverse backgrounds?³ Fortunately for me, everyone was very patient, and I got feedback, particularly from those with a background in early music, on how to improve.

I began to establish my editorial parameters – trying to make my editions serviceable to as many constituencies as possible. Once the first drafts were done, it became clear that I would need to examine more sources – thus far I had relied on a facsimile edition of prints in the collection of the Biblioteka Jagiellońska in Kraków. In the spring of 2017, I visited two archives in Thuringia – the Marienbibliothek in Halle, and the Stadtarchiv in Mühlhausen. I studied the prints of Ahle’s collections, and saw the spaces that Ahle worked in and

² Philip Brett, “Text, Context, and the Early Music Editor” in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 83.

³ This particular choir held singers ranging from people who only learned to read music from hymnals, to a member who studied singing with Max van Egmond, to a member who did a master’s degree in musicology on the works of Dufay in Bologna Q15.

presumably where the works were performed. Concurrently, I continued to explore Ahle's music as deeply as I could – investigating his use of texts, chorales, instruments, and discovering as much as I could about the musical climate he lived in. With more information, more sources, and more experience, I continued to adapt my editions, and prepared them for performances in Vancouver and Utrecht in the summer of 2017.

The results of these performances are far superior to the previous summers, and the feedback on the editions was much better as well. In that respect, I met my end goal. My editions were serviceable, and pleasing to a group of people ranging from some singers who had never sung early music before, to trombonists who studied with Bruce Dickey and Charles Toet – and one trombonist who is, in fact, a musicologist with scores published by A-R Editions.

But where did this get me? There were two questions to answer: firstly, did I arrive at Austrian editor Rudolf von Ficker's ideal place, "an edition that satisfies both needs, namely to be as close to possible to the objective realities of the original notation while retaining immediate legibility?"⁴ Secondly, what had I learned in the process, and how had my performance changed?

⁴ Rudolf von Ficker, "Probleme der Editionstechnik", cited in Andrea Lindmayr-Brandl, "Early Editions of Early Music," in *Early Music Editing*, ed. Theodor Dumitrescu et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 98.