

## Appendix 2

### Evaluating Musical Editions

When you study or perform a work of music, which edition should you use? If only one is available, the question is easy to answer. But often, particularly in the case of major composers, we have many editions from which to choose. If you're using the library, you might be tempted to use the first edition you find, but then you'd be relying on luck, because the quality of musical editions varies greatly.

A good edition of music conveys as closely as possible the composer's intentions. Editors sift through a variety of musical sources and other evidence to determine those intentions. In the edition they identify their sources and make clear their reasons for choosing a particular reading in cases where the correct reading is in dispute. Ideally, they also include a **critical report** that establishes the relationship among those sources and the basis for their editorial choices. Critical reports are either appended to the back of a volume or issued as a separate volume.

The original manuscript score of a work in the composer's own hand—known as the **holograph**, **autograph score**, or simply **autograph**—is usually the most reliable guide to a composer's intentions. The autograph score of many works, however, has not survived. And even when it is available, it is by no means infallible. Composers, after all, make mistakes. Considering how complicated and intricate a four-movement symphony is, for example, it shouldn't be surprising that the composer of one might occasionally write, say, a natural sign where a sharp sign was clearly intended. Editors would not be doing their job simply to perpetuate such mistakes. Composers also take shortcuts, such as marking the phrasing of a frequently repeated figure only the first two or three times it occurs. Editors then must decide whether or not to apply that same phrasing to all subsequent occurrences. Composers also change their minds. The autograph score and the first edition of Mozart's six string quartets dedicated to Haydn are significantly different. Mozart was almost certainly involved with the production of this first edition, and in the process of seeing it into print, he appears to have had second thoughts about certain details of tempo, articulation, and other matters. Mozart's participation in the publication process makes the first edition an authoritative source, in this case one that is arguably more important than the autograph.

Yet even an authoritative first edition is not necessarily the last word. Hector Berlioz, for instance, tinkered with matters of orchestration repeatedly after hearing his works in performance, even after a work had been published, and he wrote about these changes in some of his letters. Anton Bruckner, in turn, undertook massive revisions of many of his symphonies. Which version represents a composer's final thoughts on any given passage? Conscientious editors have to identify and evaluate carefully all relevant sources of a particular work—autograph, early copies, first editions, later editions, comments in the composer's correspondence—to make a **critical edition** of that work. What is critical about these editions is the editor's attitude toward all the sources. Editors do not merely accept, uncritically, whatever sources happen to be the earliest or most widely disseminated, but rather subject each source to careful scrutiny.

For an example of what can result from uncritical editing, consider the case of the six string quartets by Joseph Haydn now known as Opus 33. The autograph score of these quartets no longer exists. Haydn probably gave it to his Viennese publisher, Artaria, who used it to engrave the first edition in 1782. This edition consisted of a set of parts; no full score of the work was issued until the early 19th century. The publisher then probably either threw the manuscript away or reused it for packaging. (Composer's autographs were not perceived as valuable until a decade or so later, and even then publishers continued to be astonishingly cavalier with them.) Artaria's first



edition, then, is the most reliable source we have for Opus 33. We know through Haydn's correspondence that he worked with Artaria in producing this edition, and for this reason we can call it an authoritative source. Surviving copies of this edition, however, are exceedingly rare, probably because few were printed and because people would have used them mostly at home the way we use sheet music today.

Another edition, published a few years later by Hummel of Amsterdam, in contrast, seems to have been widely available. This edition was the first to designate the quartets as Opus 33. It is, however, thoroughly unreliable, beginning with the opus number, which is different from the one that appears on Artaria's authoritative edition. Haydn had nothing to do with the Hummel edition; he received no payment for it and would certainly have been outraged to have his work pirated. Although it was considered unethical in Haydn's time for a publisher to print a living composer's music without any payment, the practice was nonetheless common until the emergence of effective copyright laws in the late 19th century.

What, then, was the source for Hummel's edition? We cannot know for sure, but it was clearly corrupt, both ethically and textually. One possible scenario is that these corruptions originated with one of Haydn's copyists, who in an attempt to earn some extra money made an unauthorized additional copy, which he then sold to any unscrupulous publisher, like Hummel, who was willing to pay the right price. Haydn was aware of this practice and complained about it on more than one occasion, but he could do little to stop it. Because these unauthorized copies had to be made quickly and surreptitiously, they were likely to contain errors. Another possible scenario is that the corruption came from Hummel himself or someone working for him. Troubled by the strange opening in the first movement of op. 33, no. 1 (Example A2-1), Hummel may have "corrected" it by filling in what he thought were missing harmonies (Example A2-2). The result is musically disastrous.

**Example A2-1** The opening of the first movement of Haydn's String Quartet op. 33, no. 1, as it appears in Artaria's authoritative first edition

**Allegro moderato**

Violino I  
*p*

Violino II  
*p*

Viola

Violoncello  
*p*

**Example A2-2** The opening of the first movement of Haydn's String Quartet op. 33, no. 1, as it appears in Hummel's edition

**Allegro moderato**

Violino I  
*p*

Violino II  
*p*

Viola

Violoncello  
*p*

Unfortunately, bad editions have a way of perpetuating themselves. The least expensive and most widely available edition of the Opus 33 quartets today is a reprint, an exact photographic reproduction, of an edition of these works published in the late 19th century, prepared by a German scholar named Wilhelm Altmann. This is an uncritical edition: Altmann provides no indication of his sources. It is, however, clearly based on Hummel's unreliable early-19th-century edition. And because it is considerably less expensive, musicians are more likely to buy Altmann's edition than a critical edition of the quartets published as part of Haydn's complete works by the Haydn-Institut in Cologne, Germany. Thus Hummel's corrupt edition remains with us even today.

A note of caution: Many editions of music proclaim themselves as "Urtext" editions. *Urtext* is a German word that means "original text." Some of these self-proclaimed Urtext editions are in fact very carefully prepared critical editions, but others are not. The word itself has been used so indiscriminately that it is difficult to know when it really means something and when it is being used as a label to sell an item. Be critical in choosing an edition.