

MUSICAL SETTINGS OF DONNE: THE CONTINUING CASE FOR THE AUTHORIAL FIELD

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There may be some recollection that when I gave a paper entitled "The Researcher's Problem: Routes and Rewards" at the meeting of the International Association of Music Libraries in Ottawa in 1994, I endeavoured, as I had been asked to do, to offer some constructive observations—based on the experience of over twenty years as a research bibliographer in the field of music associated with/set to literature—on the subject of access and cataloguing. Indeed, the reason for working in the area was access—or rather, lack of it—for the whole business of getting at what composer set what passage, at what time, for what resources, etc., was fraught with frustration and insecurity. I am glad to think that this situation, at least with respect to some considerable portion of English literature, has improved; however, my contention in that paper (which will be appearing in due course in *Fontes...*, by the way) that assiduous care still needs to be taken in creating and/or preserving an authorial field in cataloguing music which employs text in some way was evidently regarded in some quarters (but not all, I am assured) as challenging if not inflammatory, the counter-claim resting on the assertion that work in which I had been involved, together with the latest space-age technology and listings, had solved the problem. If I have understood my critics on that occasion, I was to believe that everything was now perfect, and that the larger garden was at last superbly ordered and trimmed, as it should be, perhaps of the manner of that at Langley in *Richard II*.

Alas, just as the Duchess of York's gardener had concerns, albeit of a much more state-related kind, I had mine, and I must tell you that they rather appear to have been more than justified. Making this abundantly clear was work which I began at the end of 1995 and continued in 1996 in preparing a plenary address for the John Donne Society of America—for its annual meeting at the University of Southern Mississippi (Gulfpark, Miss.) in February—on musical settings of John Donne, focusing largely on some seventeenth-century pieces (e.g., by Corkine, Ferrabosco, Hilton, Humfrey, and anonymous hands) but providing as well a preliminary survey of the setting pattern up to the present day, with a few observations about some of Britten's treatments.

This necessitated not just securing copies of certain early works, a task made simple because of André Souris' edition entitled *Poèmes de Donne, Herbert, et Crashaw ...* (Paris: CNRS, 1961) and the printing of Humfrey's "Wilt Thou Forgive..." in Henry Playford's *Harmonia Sacra* (London: 1688, 3d.edn.1714), but going through available catalogues to get a reasonable impression of the larger picture. It was, I related, as Yogi Berra is alleged to have said, "...déjà vu all over again." The address, in which I detailed the initial findings, will appear in the *John Donne Journal*, but it seemed to me useful—and prudent—to report here, as well, some of the problems encountered.

Obviously, one needs starting points—the plural is necessary, for long travail reveals that no source is ever complete, if only for the reasons that even bibliographies of available material can be outdated minutes after they are completed (though that is never a reason to fail to publish them), and few are really comprehensive in the music/text area. *Grove 5* at least offers brief notes (in smaller type) under author's names; however, virtually all of the 13 composers listed were writing in this century, so that list is, though useful, evidently flawed, though the overall profile, suggesting a weighting towards twentieth-century works, is absolutely on the mark in reflecting the renewed interest in Donne, spurred particularly by H.J.C. Grierson's edition of 1912 and the wave of criticism and re-editing which has followed. Alas, *New Grove* provides no authorial references, so any attempt to secure details from the literary angle is thwarted. Helen Gardner, in her more recent edition—*The Elegies and Songs and Sonnets...* in 1965 and *The Divine Poems...* in 1978--offers a brief survey, noting André Souris' work, in her Appendix B, of settings from Donne's century. Desiree de Charms and Paul F. Breed in *Songs in Collections: An Index* note only Ferrabosco's "So, so leave off..." while Noni Espina's *Repertoire for the Solo Voice* offers only 7 entries, of which three concern seventeenth-century pieces, and of the latter group one song with a text attributed them to Donne ("Sweet, Stay A While") is listed by Gardner in *Dubia* under the title "Stay, O sweet, and do not rise." But these are, at best old sources, though their

continued presence on reference shelves—for the information they do offer—I would not dispute, though users should be cautioned about their incompleteness, even up to their publication dates. However, the British Library's *Catalogue of Printed Music*, like the wonderful old internal folio catalogue with its glued (and sometimes un-glued) printed slips and hand-written entries, which one had to see only in the Library, simply does not list, in a consistent way, authors and librettists with the necessary cross-references, necessitating once again a laborious though intriguing search by title, first line, and or key word. Of course, *CPM* is an enormously valuable tool; so much of the basic bibliographic foot-slogging can be done at one's own institution before making a trip to London to see material, but the work is composer-based again, and hence presents problems when one is trying to work out inter-disciplinary connections. As I go through *CPM*, I keep wishing that the textual field had been consistently covered when the work was in preparation, given that the score was on hand, to be viewed, in every case. And a search of the CD-ROM version yields only a handful of works, 5 at the last count, all from the 1980s, and fails to list vocal and instrumental details. Why? The music catalogue of the Library of Congress on CD-ROM does better, with 15 pieces, and OCLC Worldcat offers an encouraging total of 133 compositions related to Donne, with vocal and instrumental specifications, though even here, because of the information base, the list is obviously short of the mark. What about material in all the non-reporting libraries? What about manuscript material and works housed, for example, under the aegis of the Library of Congress Copyright Office (in itself, given recent experience with music involving the work of Shakespeare, something of a bibliographic gold mine)? It is abundantly clear that Worldcat is, even now, a splendid resource, a significant advance over anything which users in my field have had before, and I would be the last to deny it the applause it deserves. However, I am forced—reluctantly—to the conclusion that in order to get the picture clear what is required is another catalogue of musical settings of—and music influenced by—British authors running from the end of the sixteenth-century (we can exclude Shakespeare now, obviously) up to the end of the eighteenth-century (excluding Burns and Blake, already treated in the early 1980s). The extent of the influence of texts—and use of texts—by composers is undeniable, just as, I fear, is the inability at present

for scholars to study, with any consistent ease, those interdisciplinary connections within that 200 year period, at least with respect to British literature. And the problems which create this necessity are, on the one hand, the very real inadequacy of existing points of access and the apparent continuing unwillingness, in some situations, to allow for an authorial field; and if, with respect to the latter, the response is that it's too expensive in terms of time (a view actually offered to me on one occasion when such references to authors' names in a particular set of catalogue entries were potential candidates for omission), I would argue that the initial exertion is ultimately far less expensive and far easier than leaving it to users—individually—to try to put the pieces together at other points and in various ways. Perhaps, in my Utopia, we could have, as Tim Neighbour so delightfully put it, "universal bibliographic control."

As to the wealth of material which such a catalogue would reveal there can be no doubt. My initial probings confirmed the expected profile with respect to Donne: most of the musical material has emerged in the present century. And along the way I was turning up material related to Jonson, Herbert, Crashaw, Milton, Dryden and later writers. Just on the Donnian side there is a significant body of work by major composers, e.g., Adams, Berkeley, Brian, Britten, Burgeon, Davies, Finney, Fricker, Heiden, Krenek, Milford, Poston, Presser, Rubbra, Stevens, and Wordsworth, among others, as well as pieces by less well-known writers. This brief list alone reflects the degree of musical response, in a wide variety of styles, just across this century, which, from a literary and musicological standpoint, offers a wealth of opportunity for study and comparison. And it is wise to go beyond a consideration of what individual composers did with any one text (or set of texts) to ascertain, if possible, what other kinds of influences, even residual, may have affected their work in various ways. What were musicians reading and absorbing at various points in their careers? What has been Donne's currency in the musical world? Or that of Jonson or Herbert or Milton? Surely those considerations are as relevant in an overall assessment of composers' outlooks as their connections with painting, architecture, patrons, friends, associates, or even politicians. Alexander Pope's "Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux" (*The Rape of the Lock*, I, 138) are all part of the picture: in that respect, what was true for Belinda is true for us all.

The aim, ultimately, is to get a sense of the whole picture for writers and for musicians, but that can never be realised until we know what the details are. To miss the opportunity to clear away the mists cannot continue to be justified, and I would commend to all members of this Association a position of energetic advocacy for the authorial field for the best of scholarly and broadly cultural reasons.

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