

The Joys of Editing

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In the old days, publishers were expected to make sure the composer's manuscript was properly edited and presented. Now, in the days of self-publishing, and indeed, the expectation by some publishers that you will provide a print-ready product, editing and proofreading take up a substantial part of the time of producing a finished work.

Having just spent some weeks preparing performance material for "The Undone Years", and before that, my Master of Music folio, I appreciate the work others put in to their publications. And have become critical of others, particularly of some U.S. publishers of wind band music, for their poor editing, especially in respect of page turns and courtesy accidentals. In one chart, I had a page turn in the middle of a tied long note! Not much fun when you need two hands to play.

This led me to think about how people expect a level of correctness in music, perhaps more than in any other endeavour.

Let's say I write a march of about 200 bars for brass band. That's between 17-20 separate lines. Let's say, very conservatively there are on average 2 notes per bar on each line, each with an articulation, and an expressive mark every 4 notes. That's (200×2) notes per line, plus (200×2) articulations (800 symbols so far), plus $(200 \times 2) / 4$ expressive marks (= 100). Ok - that's 900 symbols. For 17 lines that's about 15000 symbols.

If I get (let's say) 10 things wrong, players at least (and listeners if they are errors in pitch or rhythm) will not be happy. But 10/15000 is a 99.93 accuracy (near enough) and if we saw that in sport, for example, we'd be amazed to the extent that we'd suspect illegal substances were involved.