

Music Publishing

By Ivana Bilić

Publishing is the process of PRODUCTION and DISSEMINATION of literature, music or info – the activity of making information AVAILABLE to the general public.

In this short definition borrowed from Wikipedia I found three words that could easily work as guidelines for my topic.

The art of music making, or production of music, has expanded significantly in the 20th and 21st centuries, and musicians have gained recognition and status in the society. We have seen the birth of a new kind of artist—the interpreter or the virtuoso musician who is interpreting music created by others.

In addition, the art of composing has gone in many abstract directions. New and different media, tapes, electronics, new instruments, body music, multimedia, etc. ask for innovative methods of music writing, and the percussion music scene is a particularly dynamic area both in creation and interpretation of new pieces.

Today, the author has the possibility to decide among a publishing deal, a distribution deal, or self-publishing (through personal websites or collective websites). The music can be offered as a hard copy or a digital download. And yet, publishing a piece is just one of the steps along the way. A piece finds its life through distribution and finally reproduction.

Due to the rapid development of new technologies and new media for storage and sharing of information, innovations in the process of publishing and distribution happen almost on a daily basis.

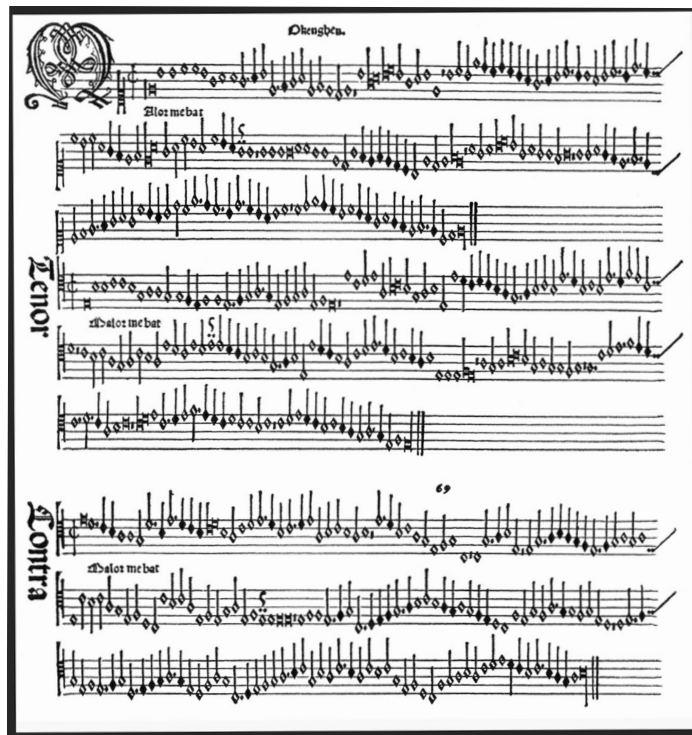
THE ERA OF AFFORDABLE INFORMATION

Along with my own experiences, I wanted to relate various perspectives from composers and publishers. It was impossible, of course, to speak with everyone involved in the process or everyone in the business. My idea was to cover different practices through examples. And I am most grateful to Gene Koshinski, Dave Black (Vice President/Editor-in-Chief for Alfred Music Publications) and Johan Svitzer (from Edition Svitzer) for sharing their thoughts with me.

During these conversations I learned how important it is to follow this simple piece of advice: If you want your piece published, you should get as much information about the whole process before deciding which path to take. Publishing is an art in itself.

There are clearly pros and cons for any option you might choose, but you have to be aware that your piece will be appreciated through its tangible form. The sheet music of your work should clearly relate its musical content. In my case I was looking for a publisher with a personalized approach and an eye for the detail. Such philosophy can be recognized in the following words of Johan Svitzer: “We believe that the feeling of holding sheet music in your hand printed on high-quality paper and looking at a multi-color cover that conveys the spirit of the composition and tells you just a little about the music is something that everybody would appreciate and value.” On the other hand, if you are publishing a method book, a set of exercises, or a collection of pop songs, an informative and durable cover with simple and clear engraving will successfully communicate with the user.

As with any other service, if you are looking for a publisher, it is important to check if that company’s products and market fit your profile. Here are some interesting facts from the perspective of Dave Black, who is responsible for the choice of manuscripts at Alfred Music Publications. I was surprised to hear that less than one percent of all unsolicited manuscripts submitted to his publishing company are accepted for publishing. A smaller publisher might accept up to ten percent of material from



First published music book

Ottaviano Petrucci - *Harmonice Musices Odhecaton A* (1501)

newcomers. Often, they will both go for authors they already know or appreciate. It sounds harsh, but the decision on what should be published has to take into consideration not only the quality but also the potential market; it is a balancing act. Bigger publishers have branches in different corners of the world, and they rely on the local professionals to work with the affinities of local markets, be it the choice of manuscripts or adjustments in already existing publications.

Nevertheless, if your manuscript gets rejected, you might try to make a name for yourself (personal website, blog, self-publishing) and approach the publisher from a more established position. The publishing business has to observe the dynamic changes and competitiveness of the market (huge offer and availability of publications, aggressive marketing) and the ever-more demanding customers.

After a successful start with a method book, you will often see volume two sell 25 percent less and volume three have even fewer sales. A printed book or piece of music is often not enough, as these publications are expected to include additional materials like play-along tracks, samples, or recordings.

New technologies like digital printing have made it possible for more “esoteric” materials to find its way to the publisher. E-books represent around two percent of the market, but this ratio will likely increase, and publishers are preparing for it through the digitalization of their archives. The inventory problem is solved with smaller editions (the cost-effectiveness of the traditional printing used to depend on a high number of copies), and engraving mistakes are easily and quickly corrected now.

Smaller publishers are printing on demand, and they need almost no storage space. The modern printing facilities can also take care of final distribution, packaging, and shipping. It enables the publisher to save on storage expenses and benefits the customer who pays less for the sheet

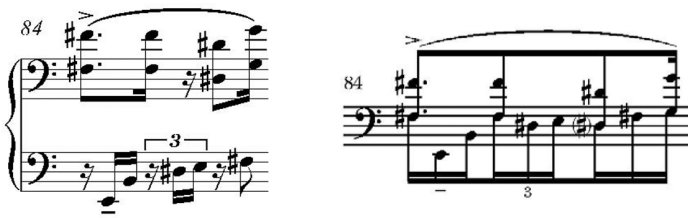
music. Compared to the past when information was precious and expensive, we live in an era of affordable information.

ENGRAVING AND NOTATION STANDARDS

Speaking from the perspective of the authors, they want their piece published as soon as possible. Big publishers might take too much time to get the piece out. The piece has to be adapted to certain standards of engraving and cover design, and some composers can be quite fussy about their style of music writing. Moreover, one of the important features of percussion music is its characteristic notation. There have been attempts at standardization, but with limited success. When it comes to the art of engraving in general, there are rules to observe, as with the written word.

This was one of my main concerns when I decided to publish my piece. I am a little split hearted when it comes to modern notation software. A good manuscript might speak more to the musician than even the best engraved sheet music could. Still, a precise system of music notation and a high standard of engraving assure the clarity of the musical language and the level of professionalism in our trade. I asked Johan Svitzer, who also happens to be a fantastic engraver and someone who is very passionate about his work, to comment on the topic:

“The history of composing for percussion is still very young... Engraving is definitely one of the most challenging issues, especially for percussion instruments. Publishers need to collaborate with composers during the publishing process in order to very carefully guide and improve notation issues (these can sometimes be very frustrating for the performers). Here is an example: We were selected to publish the set piece for an international competition... It was a big responsibility to make sure the musical content of the score was clear to everybody. We collaborated closely with the composer to make improvements.



“At first sight this rhythm was extremely difficult to understand and to play because of the triplet in the left hand between the first and second beat. We felt it was better visually to notate everything on one staff, adding a beam at the top. Notational improvements such as these are not something one can look up in a dictionary for correctness. They should be considered as personal choices. But, we feel it is important for the publisher’s reputation and identity to have their own strict set of engraving rules. The person doing this kind of job needs to have a background as a percussionist and knowledge of the instruments. Our main goal here is to make a layout functional as well as visually appealing, saving the performer preparation time and preventing misunderstanding the composer’s wishes.”

DISTRIBUTION

Distribution and visibility are keys to a successful publishing business, and there are many tools that help publishers present themselves and reach the customer: websites, web shops, catalogs, a network of dealers or branches around the world, exhibition at specialized events, in-booth presentations, etc.

A large company like Alfred Music is also offering distribution deals. Dave Black explained how such an agreement differs from the usual publishing deal:

“A publishing deal usually implies that the company will own the copyright and pay the author/composer ten percent of the retail price. In this case, the company pays for all the printing, marketing, and production

costs. On the other hand, a distribution deal is usually structured so the author/composer retains the rights to his material, but we distribute it and take 30 percent of net sales. In this case, the author/composer is responsible for the production and printing costs. Technically, the author/composer would supply us with a finished product. However, the publisher can handle some of the production work, etc. and bill the author for the time and resources. We can also print the book and deduct the cost from the author’s royalties.”

SELF-PUBLISHING

Do you think you can do better than a publisher with years of experience and professionals in the staff?

With all the tools out there, free or cheap Internet services, etc., artists are tempted to carry out their careers—recordings, publishing and authors’ rights—by themselves. For many, self-publishing means that you keep all your rights and all the income. Can it pay off for the publishing and distribution work? Can you promote your music and access the user better than a publisher with an already developed network? Can you fight the illegal market of downloading, copying, pirating, when even the strong players in the game are always one step behind?

Downloadable pdfs have made music very accessible, and for those who decide to self-publish, specialized websites can help with the promotion (some info can be found at compositiontoday.com/blog/175.asp; for a website specializing in percussion, you can check percussionmusiconline.com).

There are many variations, legal and technical possibilities; Boosey & Hawkes has devoted many pages on their website to such topics as *self-publish, find an alternative, what is copyright, distribute my recording, or earning money from music* (www.boosey.com/pages/publishyourself).

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

I also had the opportunity to speak with Gene Koshinski. He is an author with many interests; his pieces cover different stylistic expressions and instrumentation. Gene is acting on a very practical basis, using the advantages of the modern media and publishing market with the imperative of making his music as available as possible. He has experiences in self-publishing but has also worked with various publishers. His personal website is highly informative and user friendly, with links and audio examples.

In many ways, Gene is the embodiment of the modern percussionist, a creative and dynamic musician with much knowledge of modern technologies and a strong commitment and enthusiasm for percussion music. My own experience/choice was influenced by my life experience of growing up in a family of musicians with a composer father. Since childhood I was involved in copying and preparing the parts for the performances (my father was often late with the deadlines).

In Europe, each country has a very strong sense of cultural and national identity with large subsidies for cultural institutions. (Unfortunately, with the economic crisis, the support has dropped significantly.) Composers are considered to be the cultural elite of a country and they are quite influential. The composers’ societies and music information centers sometimes function as publishers and promoters of their members. One of the main roles of the national radio and TV stations is to promote national culture. In the past this meant that most of what was composed got performed and recorded. The radio would pay for the engraving, thus obtaining the ownership of the material (the author was keeping all of his or her rights), and the composer was getting the performance and the recording. The network of cultural exchange between countries guarantees a certain distribution and circulation of pieces out of national borders. This system existed and still exists along with private publishers. Exchanges and production of written and aural culture are also stimulated through European funds.

With the creation of the global market, the system of self-sufficient national music scenes had to change, but it is still keeping some very fine composers in the state of general oblivion.

CONCLUSION

One of the battles yet to be won is the one regarding the illegal usage/ market of music. Some users might not be aware of the copyright laws. Because of the multitude of free information on the Internet, people tend not to appreciate intellectual property. The availability can be a double-edged sword. There are many agencies that specialize in detecting the offenders of authors' and publishers' rights. For the moment, they have limited success. Like with any other crime/offence, as soon as you solve one, another is being committed.

It was interesting for me to learn about the common traits between a big company like Alfred Music and a small company like Edition Svitzer. They have both been founded by musicians and are family run. They were both created out of passion for music and are driven by the idea that music is probably the strongest communication channel between people from different corners of the world.

Despite the gloomy prophecies about the future of performing arts and music publishing that often circulate on various forum threads, I believe that the future is what we make of it, and music has certainly proved to be one of the most vital forces of humankind.

Ivana Bilić is an international marimba soloist and percussion artist based in Croatia. Known for her versatility, she regularly appears as soloist with European orchestras and participates in chamber, crossover, and stage productions. She has been a guest artist at numerous festivals, gives master classes, participates in marimba festivals in Europe, South America, and the USA, and serves as a jury member at marimba and percussion competitions. She is also in high demand as solo timpanist. In 2008 Bilić founded the Ivana Bilić Marimba Week, hosted by the Samobor Music Festival. She is the recipient of all major Croatian performers' and discography awards. Ivana is the author of several percussion pieces published by Edition Svitzer, Malletworks, and Cantus. A pupil of Igor Lešnik, she teaches at the Zagreb Conservatory of Music. **PN**