

'Numerous Little Songs in My Drawer'
Editing and Publishing the Music of Henry Handel Richardson

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Introduction

Most Australian readers know Henry Handel Richardson (the pen name of Ethel Richardson, later Mrs Ethel Robertson) as a novelist. Many admit to having studied *The Getting of Wisdom* at school or university, or having read the great trilogy of novels published as *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. Even her first novel *Maurice Guest* (her so-called 'musical' novel) has an enthusiastic though less widespread following. Few, a very few, know that her last novel *The Young Cosima*, first published in 1939, was based on the early life of Cosima Liszt, her divorce from Hans von Bülow and marriage to Richard Wagner. In the wake of the publicity the Monash Richardson Project has attracted, people from all over the country have contacted us claiming Richardson or one or more of her books as their 'great favourites' and interested to know more about her and her work. This army of usually covert admirers runs oddly counter to what a recent academic reviewer has called Richardson's 'half-mouldered reputation'. But the best kept secret has been the fact that she composed music, mostly songs to other people's words.

In fact, Richardson began musical composition to public acclaim while at Melbourne's Presbyterian Ladies' College in the 1880s; she continued while a piano student at the Leipzig Conservatorium (1889-91), and went on composing from time to time almost to the end of her life. Her own verdict on her music: 'Quite modest small things they are; but still music'¹—may now be in need of revision. At the recent launch of the edition of Richardson's letters², a recital of a mere handful of these songs almost upstaged the main event. Such an enthusiastic reception suggests that, unlike, say, D.H. Lawrence's paintings, there is more to be gained from Richardson's music than just the curiosity value of their having been composed by a great novelist. Yet even towards the end of her life, cracks began to show in her facade of modesty. While not actually courting publication—only one of her songs was published in her lifetime, and that in a limited facsimile edition³—she decided in the end that her songs should be preserved. She asked that her secretary and companion, Olga Roncoroni, collect her manuscripts and even have them bound together. As it happened, even this was not achieved, mainly because of Miss Roncoroni's precarious state of health and her determination to spend all her energies on the necessary business of the literary executorship with which she had been entrusted. So that in 1996, 50 years

1. Letter to Mary Kernot, 10 December 1935.

2. Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele, *Henry Handel Richardson: The Letters*, Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2000.

3. *Christkindleins Wiegenlied*, London: Ulysses Press, 1931.

after Richardson's death, when I attempted to collect and edit all her music I was faced with an extraordinary muddle of manuscripts and photocopies in some four locations and in two countries. The purpose of this paper is to tell the story briefly of how this muddle was reduced to order and the process by which Richardson's surviving music finally reached publication early in 2000.

My title comes from Richardson's reply to a correspondent who wanted to know whether the novelist had ever written poems. She replied: 'No, I do *not* write poetry ... Of recent years, when I have felt "lyrically" inclined, I have turned to music, which has always contested the literary interest in my mind—or at least has never died. And so I have numerous little songs in my drawer; but no poems.'⁴ But it is not Richardson specifically as composer that is my concern today; I have discussed Richardson the musician in some detail elsewhere. My task, in keeping with the theme of this conference, is to trace the progress of those numerous little songs from Richardson's drawer to their publication. I will do this under three heads: manuscripts and copies; editorial problems; publication.

Manuscripts and Copies

First, then, a few words about the source materials, their locations and status. Early in 1994, when we were setting up the Monash Richardson Project, the task of including Richardson's music in our plans seemed in prospect to be straightforward. It was on the public record, if only a few had availed themselves of the knowledge, that photocopies of Richardson's music manuscripts were located in the National Library of Australia in Canberra. This had come about because, on the publication in 1973 of *Ulysses Bound*, Dorothy Green's great study of Richardson⁵, a correspondence had begun between Mrs Green and Richardson's executrix Olga Roncoroni. It resulted, among other things, in Miss Roncoroni having 38 of Richardson's songs photocopied in London and the copies sent to the NLA for Mrs Green's use. When I came to examine the situation in 1995, the problem was that the Library had copies of only 19 songs in its Manuscripts Section and, curiously only 14 in its Music Collection. Since 8 of the latter were duplicates of songs in the Manuscripts Section, this amounted only to a further 6. Well and good; but 19+6 equals only 25. Where were the other 13? Furthermore, the 19 copies in the Manuscripts Section were very poor copies, and clearly not the kind of copies one would expect even from the 1970s. They were clearly not the Roncoroni copies. Those in the Music Collection, on the other hand, were excellent, although they did not carry the Library's cataloguing numbers.

I next discovered that, after Dorothy Green's death in 1991, apart from a relatively few folders, the bulk of her papers and many of her books had been

4. Letter to Mary Frances McHugh, 6 February 1936.

5. Dorothy Green, *Ulysses Bound: Henry Handel Richardson and Her Fiction*, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1973.

lodged not in the NLA but in the Special Collections section of the Australian Defence Forces Academy Library, and were closed to public access. An enquiry to the Special Collections Librarian established that among these papers were three folders of Richardson music, and they too were included in the general restriction. This embargo on the Green papers had quite inadvertently covered the Richardson folders as well. Fortunately an explanation of the situation and a request for access to the Green family soon produced the necessary permission. My examinations of these folders on two separate occasions showed a further proliferation of photocopies but, of course, no manuscripts. After painstaking sorting and comparisons, I was able to show that the 38 copies sent to Mrs Green in 1973 were indeed still in her collection, even if in the 'wrong' library, and muddled in with numerous recopies. It was quite clear also that the NLA copies had been made from these 'originals'. (In the interests of clarity here, I am simplifying the actual circumstances.)

So far so good. But in 1994 Miss Margaret Capon, Richardson's present executrix, presented a folder to the NLA—this time of Richardson music manuscripts. I believe this gift was in order to assist the research of Jodi Clark, an undergraduate student at the Australian Catholic University, who was writing a short thesis on Richardson's music and compiling a catalogue of it. Clark's was the first attempt since Mrs Green's to examine Richardson's music systematically and the first actual catalogue. The folder in question consisted primarily of several versions of Richardson's most ambitious work, a setting of Nietzsche's poem *Der Herbst* (Autumn) for Voice, Violin and Viola and the beginnings of a reworking for Voice and String Ensemble. It also included other songs (a few of which turned out to be the originals of Roncoroni/Green photocopies) together with some unfinished sketches.

Then in 1996 the situation changed dramatically once more. Miss Capon had already given the Monash Project exclusive unlimited access to all Richardson's unpublished correspondence, which had been under a 50-year embargo. These letters revealed new information about her songs. While we were assimilating this information, Miss Capon upstaged us all in June 1996 by presenting a further folder of music manuscripts to the Monash Project. This contained more originals of the 1973 photocopies as well as some songs completely unknown to us.

The immediate task was to reduce all this widespread and unorganised material to some kind of order. This involved making meticulous comparisons between manuscript material in two (or in this case three) locations, even down to matching rust marks from old staples. A number of working visits to the Canberra libraries were necessary before I was happy with my results. Two papers emerged from this. First, an eleven page survey of the materials in the form of an unpublished report to the libraries (ADFA and NLA). This set out my findings so that they could correct their inadequate and misleading catalogues and reader-guides. The second was an article on Richardson as a musician together

with a comprehensive check-list of all her known music.⁶ The Monash Project, in research for the new editions of *Maurice Guest, The Getting of Wisdom*, and the *Letters*, had uncovered documentary material relating to Richardson's music at school, in Leipzig and later in her life so that this article and the accompanying check-list, published in 1999, now purports to be as complete an account as the present state of knowledge permits.

I identified some 67 compositions. There were undoubtedly more, but it now seems very unlikely that these will come to light. Of the 67, nine are recorded only as titles in the documentary evidence. Thus there are 58 works actually extant either as complete songs or as fragments. Of these 58, 43 are manuscripts either by Richardson herself or by a copier; 15 songs are known only from photocopies. The location of the remaining manuscripts from which these copies were made is unknown even to Miss Capon.

The next step was editorial.

Editorial Problems

In keeping with the aims of the Monash Project, the aim was to publish an edition of all the Richardson music. But from a performance point of view, were all the songs suitable for commercial publication? The first job, however, was to edit the manuscripts and photocopies on to computer. After seeking advice, we decided on the software program Finale and went ahead. At this point a fortunate meeting with Richard Divall led not only to his editorial advice and indeed his collaboration, but also to a publishing solution.

Most songs were in a state that made editing largely a matter of transferring the information to computer files. There was no attempt to conceal Richardson's inconsistencies or what Richard Vella has described as her 'quirky-ness'. There was, at most, some standardisation of notation, dynamics, correction of obvious errors, and so on. But two groups of songs were problematic.

1. Some were incomplete in various ways: either without an accompaniment or with an incomplete accompaniment; in a couple of cases there is a missing page. Others existed in two versions so that a decision had to be made as to which was the 'finished' version or the so-called 'final intention' of the composer. Where an accompaniment was incomplete or barely sketched in, it was not too difficult to complete it in the required style. In the case of no accompaniment, the question was whether to print only the vocal line or to attempt to provide one editorially. We decided on the latter course. The fragment entitled 'Tuscan Lullaby' is a case in point. This survives on a fragment of manuscript paper in tiny pencilled notation with the words—evidently in two attempts, one being fairly clearly complete. Olga Roncoroni

6. 'Henry Handel Richardson: Musician and Composer', *Australasian Music Research* 2-3, 1999, pp.39-63.

noted that Richardson did not live to write the accompaniment to this little sketch, but clearly intended to do so. While one might have thought from the manuscript that it was to be simply a song for voice only, from Roncoroni's account, the vocal line was complete as it stood and was to have had an accompaniment. Of its origins we know nothing, except that it is a lullaby carol in Tuscan dialect.

Richardson's only song with Danish words was a special problem. Only one page of manuscript survives and it has the middle portion of the song fully scored. Neither the beginning nor the end of the music survives but we have the full text of the (quite short) poem. How did she begin and end the song? I am responsible for the solution to this problem and you can see it in the published text.⁷

In these cases, it could well be argued that we had no right to do this. But there are excellent precedents for completing composers' sketches, and it seemed to us that here were two potentially beautiful settings asking to be heard. Ours is a critical edition, so that what is authorial and what is editorial are clearly signalled and the purist has access to all that survives of Richardson's own work.

2. After our restoration/reconstruction work, the second problematic group in the end consisted of only two items. These were two German poems each of which had several stanzas. In each case, the musical setting consisted of two very brief and fragmentary sketches only. For one poem there were two attempts apparently at setting the same words. The easy solution was simply to leave them alone, but the poems seemed significant to Richardson: she had even begun translations of them. After some trial runs we reached a completed version of each song, but, since there was so much 'reconstruction', we placed them in an appendix to the edition.⁸ Richardson's material, however, is again clearly indicated.

Publication

Which brings me at last to the theme of this seminar—publication. And here I feel even more of an interloper in this gathering, since this was my first excursion into music editing and even computer music writing. As I mentioned earlier, my co-editor of the Richardson music, Richard Divall, was also the Chairman of the Advisory Board of the Marshall-Hall Trust. The aim of the Trust—named after the first Ormond Professor of Music at Melbourne University, Prof. G.W.L. Marshall-Hall—is to publish and distribute in limited editions, music

7. *Henry Handel Richardson: The Music Part Two*, Melbourne: Marshall Hall Trust *Musica Australis* vol.4, 1999, pp.61-63; *Songs by Henry Handel Richardson*, Sydney: Currency Press, 2000, pp.58-60.

8. *Henry Handel Richardson: The Music Part Two*, pp. 68-75.

composed in Australia prior to 1939. *Musica Australis*, the series title, began publishing in 1996, its first volume being a selection of ten songs by the Melbourne composer Fritz Hart (1874–1949). Although some of Henry Handel Richardson's scores post-date 1939, the majority of them had been completed well before that date. The Advisory Board of the Trust, in 1996, accepted our proposal to publish her surviving songs complete as Volume 4 of the series, *Musica Australis*. With the spring-bound format of the series, the body of material actually necessitated two books, so that Volume 4 is published in two parts: Part One consisting of the songs in English and Part Two, the songs in German and other languages.

The volumes in this series are printed by the Melbourne University printery and material is provided to them on A4 sheets. In effect all but the volume printing and binding is done desktop by the editors to a standard page-specification. In this case, all our editing was done directly with the program Finale 2000, making one file for each item. We could thus edit, print and check as many times as was necessary. This of course gives the editors complete control over the printed music. The finally corrected pages are proof-read again before they go to the volume co-ordinator and thence to the printer. This would appear to be an ideal situation for an editor/author. But is it so ideal? Not being able to see finally printed page-proofs, as in other publishing, is a serious drawback. To our chagrin, on receipt of the printed volumes, and before distribution, we were obliged to issue errata slips. In one of the volumes, for instance, there were errors of notation (fortunately only two in 70 pages!); but when viewed in final volume form, a few details in the lay-out could have been clearer.

The *Musica Australis* publication, however, is an academic production for limited circulation and not for commercial sale. However, we were asked to make a selection of the songs for commercial publication. In 1997, the Currency Press Music division, a relative newcomer to Australian music publishing, but an important one, expressed interest. After hearing a performance tape and seeing some early edited specimens, Currency Press offered us a contract for 20 songs. The publishing procedure was much the same as for the *Musica Australis* version, except that the page-specifications (and of course pagination) were quite different. As the Finale program was progressively updated and improved, this task became easier to achieve. The main difference in this publication was working with an in-house editor and this involved, in the end, page by page monitoring of hard copy along with the electronic form. From time to time page layout was changed at the Currency editor's request to make the text easier to read or page-turns better placed. This additional check, while at times irritating, was generally welcome, and one would have thought, a guarantee that errors and faults (such as those mentioned in the other publication) would be eliminated. This was almost true, except that at the last minute a superceded earlier version of one page (with 3 systems rather than the revised 4) was substituted and therefore wrongly printed. The missing system (in slightly reduced size) had to be pasted into some 500 copies (fortunately there was space) before the books were distributed!

So I cannot say that my first experience in music publishing was either entirely successful or altogether pleasant. On the other hand, it does seem to me that, with the latest computer programs which produce virtually the finished product musically speaking, the publishers have got it easy. Once given the page specifications in each case, I should say that I did 95% of the work. Probably with additional skills and software, one could even design covers and prelims, and so cut out another middle-person entirely. Self-publication of music is a very attractive proposition. I am certainly glad we had a designer for the Currency edition; the cover and title pages are very handsome. One last general observation is by no means limited to music publication in Australia. In all our editing of Henry Handel Richardson's works and letters, we have in each case been really delighted with the published product. The biggest problem (and perhaps some publishers might agree) is in distributing and marketing the finished work. Music may fare better than books because it is largely sold in limited and specialist outlets.⁹

9. In June 2001 Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele presented the Richardson music manuscripts, formerly in their possession at Monash University, to the National Library of Australia where they are now held in the Manuscripts Collection.