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Reflecting on the Research Process

Towards the end of the 2015 Fall Semester, I was given the task of writing a final paper about Restoration England for Professor Steven Plank's Introduction to Music Research and Writing. Like most research, my project evolved from just a few sources of evidence (musical scores and a secondary source) into a discovery of diverse primary sources, all of which strengthened my argument with historical depth. I enjoyed reading Christopher Marsh's *Music and Society in Early Modern England* during the semester and was intrigued by the way in which Marsh traces cultural trends in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century music. Bell-ringing was particularly interesting; the thought of a seemingly inconspicuous instrument shaping the life of a community inspired me to uncover this topic in a later time frame: c. 1660-1700.

Browsing through complete works editions in the Conservatory library further supported my topic. I discovered pieces by contemporary composers (i.e. Henry Purcell and John Jenkins) in which bell references are explicit. The fact that my selected works cover a variety of media (vocal, instrumental, choral) and social use reveals bells' pervasive influence in English culture. Marsh's inquiry about social context was a springboard for shaping my topic, and so my research sought to answer: What did the sound of bells mean to a musician in Restoration England? What would an audience think of when hearing a piece with bell peals? Would this meaning(s) be different among works written for a church service, monarchical celebration, or domestic use?

With only a few scores and Marsh's book, I began to find diverse sources with which to strengthen my argument. Searching key phrases such as "English bell ringing" and "English Restoration music" on OBIS resulted in secondary sources from both the Conservatory and Main libraries. David Cressy's *Bonfires and Bells* not only revealed bells' historical significance in

Restoration England, but pointed me to the original sources with which Cressy worked. Leafing through footnotes in Cressy's book and other secondary sources was perhaps the most rewarding part of this project. I discovered primary sources (ringing treatises, personal diaries, musical texts) that gave my project historical depth. In order to find these sources, I searched on OBIS, which took me to an electronic version on EEBO (Early English Books Online). I discovered that bell-ringing was not only well-documented as its own art form, but was a popular topic in personal diaries, eye-witness news, and domestic manuals. With a new understanding of bells' social impact, I was able to connect my research to specific musical pieces.

The Conservatory library offered a number of valuable print materials for researching these works. Research companions such as *The Ashgate Companion to Henry Purcell* were helpful because they pointed me to other books and periodicals. Scholarly prefaces to critical editions were also integral. These texts clarified the historical contexts behind the pieces I analyzed and introduced me to other primary sources found through OBIS. One particular challenge of this project was that several sources were not available in Oberlin, so Interlibrary Loan was especially helpful in allowing me to complete my project with the books I needed.

One success of my project is the variety of sources that bolster my argument. Although written for a music class, I used both libraries to find treatises, diaries, and other historical texts that give my paper substantial context. I was also able to discover a wide variety of musical genres that reflect the influence of bells in English cultural life. The strength of my research is further prevalent in my footnotes, which not only provide proper citation, but allow me to discuss pieces of evidence in greater detail. One shortcoming of this project is that while primary sources are fascinating, my reliance on them left less room for me to develop my thoughts more extensively. I also imagine that with fewer musical works, I could have discussed

the music in greater detail so as to complement the amount of historical research I conducted.

Despite these shortcomings, I am grateful to have utilized Oberlin College's resources to the best of my ability. This project has given me valuable experience in compiling evidence, analyzing music, and summarizing my findings like a professional musicologist.