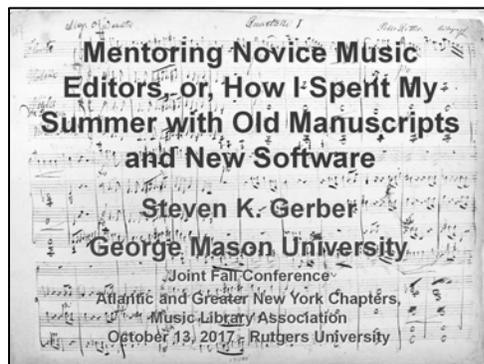


## Mentoring Novice Music Editors, or, How I Spent My Summer with Old Manuscripts and New Software

Steven K. Gerber – October 13, 2017 – Joint Conference, Atlantic and Greater New York Chapters of Music Library Association, at Rutgers University



Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for this opportunity to speak. I will report on a summer project that threw together a small team of undergraduate music students and a large cache of holograph music manuscripts dating from the 1780s through the 1810s—the work of a now-

forgotten German musician. The point was to engage in editorial work with primary sources by transcribing selections from the music, editing them for modern performance, uploading the edited scores and parts for open access, and producing a mini-concert. While the major challenges were deciphering old handwritten music and learning notational principles and notation software to transcribe it, during this process the students also investigated related biographical and historical matters, and learned something of instruments and performance practices, while gaining insight into the work of musicologists who edit music.

**Genesis of an “OSCAR” Project**

- OSCAR awards grants in support of individual undergraduate research—pays them!
- OSCAR solicited faculty proposals for special TEAM research projects to be conducted in Summer 2017
- I submitted a proposal and WON!

Peter Ritter Chamber Music Performing Edition:  
Editing an 18th/19th-Century Composer’s Music Manuscripts for Contemporary Performance and Open-Access Dissemination

George Mason University strongly encourages undergraduate research conducted with faculty mentors through its Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, and Research, familiarly known as the “OSCAR” program.

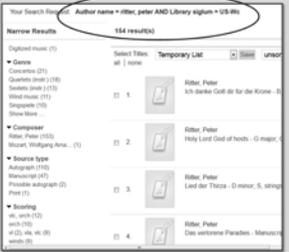
Typically, OSCAR receives competitive research proposals from individual students and makes awards that pay each winning student to conduct research for ten hours a week for one semester, under the

guidance of a faculty researcher. The majority of the individual research projects are usually in STEM fields, with a smaller percentage in social sciences and even fewer in humanities or arts.

In the fall of 2016 OSCAR expanded this research-grant program by inviting faculty to design and propose summer team projects, of ten weeks' duration, involving four to ten undergraduates and two faculty mentors. I designed such a project to transcribe and edit music holographs at the Library of Congress, disseminate them online and perform them publicly. I found a willing partner in composer and music technologist Dr. Jesse Guessford in the School of Music, submitted a four-page proposal narrative and budget, and we won an OSCAR grant of \$29,000 to hire five students and run the project over this past summer. Its long and appropriately academic official title is shown here on the screen—"Peter Ritter Chamber Music... etc." Ours was one of eight projects funded in a highly competitive field of thirty applicants.

**Finding PETER RITTER mss at LOC**

- Searching RISM for manuscripts held at US-Wc showed over 100 autograph by a certain **Peter Ritter**
- No other library has so many in one place
- Most were acquired in one lot from a dealer in Germany in 1911
- Earlier provenance is unknown
- Some are in poor condition
- Most have been microfilmed



Digitized music (1)	Select Titles	Temporary List	View	Export
1	Ritter, Peter 125 Gedichte Gott der für die Kirche...			
2	Ritter, Peter Holy Land God of hosts - G major...			
3	Ritter, Peter Land der Tränen - G minor, 3/4, string...			
4	Ritter, Peter Die weltliche Passion - Manuscript...			

Who was Peter Ritter, and why did I focus on him? I'll start with the second question... In earlier searches of RISM by siglum for manuscripts held at the Music Division of the Library of Congress, I noticed a very large number by the German musician Peter Ritter:

over one hundred, a sizable trove, more than at any other repository. LOC records indicate that most of them were acquired in a one-time purchase from a Berlin rarities dealer in 1911; how and when the dealer acquired them, and in whose care they survived as an intact collection up to that point, are unanswered questions. Most of the manuscripts are in fair to poor condition, and most, if not all, were microfilmed by the LOC some time ago.

**Peter Ritter, 1763-1846**

- Cellist, composer, and conductor in Mannheim
- Associated with Mannheim National Theater as cellist, concertmaster, comic opera conductor, and finally artistic director
- Composed works ranging from early sinfonias, chamber music, and Lieder to operas, Singspiel, and choral works
- Musical form and style illustrates transition from classical to early Romantic



Christoph Hechel: Biograph portrait of Peter Ritter, n.d. Source: Mannheim, Germany; Reiss-Engelhorn-Museums, Inv. Nr. G Ed 121.k; photo reproduction by Jean Christen

Now, about Peter Ritter himself... Preliminary searching in New Grove and in MGG indicated that he lived from 1763 to 1846 in Mannheim as part of the generation AFTER Mannheim's Golden Age as an influential music center. He studied theory and composition with the Abbe

Vogler and became a virtuoso cellist at a young age, traveling to play in courts in various German cities while in his late teens and early twenties. On one such trip to Berlin he was even given a new cello and a gold watch by an admiring Frederick the Great. He rose through the ranks in the orchestra of the Mannheim National Theater, starting as a section cellist, becoming concertmaster, then conductor of Singspiel, and finally Kapellmeister (music director, top musical job in town). He retired in 1823, after which he founded a municipal arts society. Although few of the manuscripts are dated, it seems that he composed most of his instrumental music, including teen-age sinfonias, chamber music, and several concertos, during earlier years as an orchestral musician, and turned increasingly to opera and choral music later as his professional responsibilities changed. One of Ritter's very short and simple compositions has withstood the test of time – some hymnals still include his hymn “Grosser Gott, wir loben dich” set to various English-language texts including “Holy God, we praise Thy name” or “Sun of my soul, Thou Savior dear.”

As a younger contemporary of Haydn and somewhat older contemporary of Beethoven, his music illustrates the transition from the classical era to the early Romantic style in Germany and Austria. Like Goldilocks and her Three Bears, I found this common-practice style “not too early,” “not too late,” but “just right” for

music students who may or not have completed intermediate theory courses or even a music history survey.



Here is a facsimile of a flyer with which we advertised our “summer jobs.” OSCAR insisted that we strive for diversity and multi-disciplinarity in the makeup of teams, so we made the minimum qualifications so bare-bones that a musically-literate non-major could apply:

these requirements were ability to read and write music, and basic knowledge of scales, keys, chords, and cadences. There was interest from graduating seniors, not eligible, and from at least two grad students, also not eligible. Out of fourteen job applicants, most of whom were well qualified, we chose five and informed them by mid-April.

**“Boot Camp” week – and beyond**  
All research team projects began on May 30<sup>th</sup> with a more-or-less intensive four-day introduction to the work ahead: in our case, the composer, RISM, the Albrecht *Census* of mss, inspecting/describing a manuscript, Sibelius notation software, critical vs. performing editions, IMSLP,

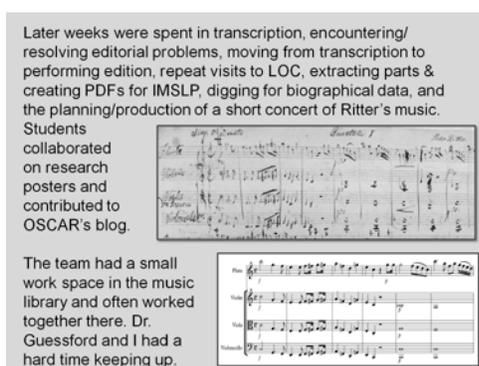


and a “big picture” of how a composer’s complete-works set comes about. The climax of the week was a site visit to LOC for source inspection and photography.

Each project’s ten-week span started on the Memorial Day holiday—thus we all got paid for not working on Day 1! The first week in all summer projects is designated “boot camp week” in recognition of the background information, project orientation, technical skills, and

expectations to be drummed into the students. We met alternately in the music technology lab or in the library instruction room to explain Peter Ritter, to demonstrate RISM, to pass out relevant pages from *Albrecht’s Census of Music Manuscripts*, to get started on learning notation software (by buying each student a copy of Sibelius), to discuss “critical” vs. “performing” editions, to look at the International Music Score Library Project (or IMSLP) guidelines for contributors,

and to think about the bigger picture of how our small work could fit into some purely hypothetical Peter Ritter Gesamtausgabe. Boot camp culminated in a team visit to the Music Division at LOC for a first look at several manuscripts and an orientation to policy and procedure. In the photo here we see two members of the team with librarian and musicologist Dr. Caitlin Miller of the Music Division, without whose assistance and mediation the project might have floundered.



Later weeks usually included a long Thursday morning team meeting for progress reports, information sharing, lecture/demonstrations, and discussion. Much of the individual work proceeded independently. I set aside a discussion room in the music library near my office for their

exclusive use, and they did use this space frequently. We used a “Slack” channel for communication. They deciphered, transcribed, and edited self-selected works, made occasional repeat visits to LOC as needed, discovered transposing instruments(!), figured out what IMSLP needed and how to supply it, and searched for traces of biographical information on the composer. Although this was a full-time job for them, it was NOT a full-time job for Dr. Guessford and me, and we sometimes found it difficult to keep up with what they were doing (or wanted to do). For example, we fell behind in checking their work; also, none of the students knew German, but had no trouble finding things for ME to translate.

By the time of a midsummer “reality check” – or “grim reality check” – the practical focus of work became the planning and production of a short recital in which every student’s work would be represented. This was a challenge in itself, inasmuch as many of their peer music majors were not available to perform—this was summer vacation, after all. The grand finale for all projects will be a

celebratory exhibition and food-fueled schmooze featuring display of about fiftyen research posters detailing all of the summer projects. Our mini-recital would be the centerpiece of the afternoon. Thus, the team’s final two weeks approached frenzy as they completed editing tasks, uploaded PDF conversions, selected and adapted the recital music, engaged performers, coached rehearsals, created three explanatory research posters, and contributed to OSCAR’s blog.

The closing celebration of scholarship arrived on August 4 and they were ready! Our ten hired student performers played five selections from the chamber music of Peter Ritter, representing the work of each of our five student editors. The concert was received very enthusiastically—

nothing “artsy” like this live performance of classical music had apparently occurred before at previous OSCAR festivals.

In my optimistic proposal for the project I speculated that each student could complete at least two, preferably three, substantial chamber works such as quartets for open-access dissemination on IMSLP—this proved unrealistic for a few reasons, not least of which was that

some of them had insisted on inspecting “big” pieces like symphonies and concertos and operas—thus the need for the afore-mentioned reality check about practical performance considerations within a tight time frame. Each student did get at least one score and parts set into IMSLP. The ten-week project came to an end with unfinished editions that may, or may not, ever be completed and

uploaded—the paid gig is over and thus there is no external incentive! On the other hand, our two internally-motivated string players continue to work on a Ritter cello concerto and a Ritter violin concerto and, I believe, are writing proposals for individual OSCAR grants to complete them. I hope they succeed!

Whether our novice editors continue along this path or not, they certainly developed an appreciation for the work of critical editors—and, with genuine enthusiasm, they enabled the music of a forgotten composer to sound again.



To sum up: Sophomore and junior music majors, some with limited background and experience, learned to use notation software, decipher musical handwriting and shorthand from an earlier period, investigate relevant biographical and historical matters, learn about performance

practices, plan a short concert and coach the performers, exhibit personal research findings as infographics, and make meaningful contributions to a major digital repository of past repertoire. The team and its work are now a fond memory, and Jesse Guessford and I have no immediate plans to replicate this experience with new students. Whether they continue personal work with primary source music manuscripts or not, our five novice editors now have a better understanding, practical and theoretical, of the route from manuscript to printed edition. They also experienced the excitement of facilitating the live performance of Ritter's music after a silence of two hundred years—making the compositions of a musician, significant in his time but forgotten in ours, to sound again.

On that note I thank you for your kind attention to my report! I'll be happy to take a few questions.