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Music and the Arts in England, c. 1670–1750

Edited by
Ina Knoth

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JOHN BREWER

Sites and Sounds

The Cultural Topography of English Music, 1670–1750

Where to begin? A publication on music and the arts between 1670 and 1750 covers a multitude of possibilities – many musical genres, both ancient, modern and popular: masques, concerti, anthems, opera seria, comic and ballad opera, dance, oratorios, sonatas, catches, odes – the list goes on. These genres were performed at many sites, what the Newcastle composer and organist Charles Avison narrowed down to “the Church, the Theatre, or the Chamber”;¹ but should also include (an odd omission this) the court, as well as the pleasure garden, the tavern and, a different sort of site here, though a vital one, the published musical score. And of course music rubbed shoulders with the other arts – visual and literary – not only in treatises that considered their distinguishing qualities,² but in contexts where the arts were combined and competed in performance – in the royal palace, the theatre or the flamboyant mixed-media of the pleasure garden.

Music (and we might add theatre) history writing on this period is extraordinarily dense, erudite and detailed – and also overwhelmingly about London rather than the nation at large – so that it is very difficult to command a general picture of what was changing or happening. I am not a musicologist or even really a music historian, but a historian of culture, politics and society, so in addressing the topic of music and the arts I want to step back and see how we might frame it within some of the debates that have taken place over the last thirty or forty years about the history of eighteenth-century England more generally. My discussion is indicative not

1 Charles Avison, *An Essay on Musical Expression*, London 1752, p. 105.

2 Cf. Laurence Lipking, *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England*, Princeton 1970.

definitive, ruminative rather than categorical, a matter of posing questions and offering suggestions.

In the 1980s and 1990s, a number of historians developed a new picture of eighteenth-century England, one that was (a) self-consciously intersectional – by which I mean that it sought to bring together the social, political, economic and cultural – and (b) was also self-consciously opposed to the two prevailing (but actually highly compatible) views of eighteenth-century England, one of which rather approvingly saw eighteenth-century history as the history of a small elite,³ the other that, rather more censoriously, envisaged eighteenth-century England as a patrician society engaged in a complex struggle with a plebeian culture.⁴ These traditional views were opposed by a new interpretation well captured in the title of Paul Langford's New Oxford History published in 1989, *A Polite and Commercial People*.⁵

In seeking to stake out this new position, a number of major arguments were advanced against the two traditional views. First, the old interpretation was seen as largely neglecting the very large number of those who were neither patricians nor plebeians, or as treating them as essentially followers of patrician values, lacking any autonomous power because they were trapped within what has been described as a 'client economy', one of dependence on the patronage of an elite whose values they aped and largely unquestioned.⁶ The group whose identity the new interpretation was seeking to capture was comprised of members of the professions (lawyers, doctors, clerics), shopkeepers and retailers (there were more than 140,000

3 This view is now largely associated with the work of J. C. D. Clark, though it had a long prior history. Clark's seminal work is *English Society, 1660–1832. Religion, Ideology and Politics during the Ancien Regime*, Cambridge 2000, first published in 1985. For a critical overview and appraisal see Joanna Innes, "Jonathan Clark, Social History and England's 'Ancien Regime'", in *Past and Present* 115 / 1 (1987), pp. 165–200.

4 This can be entitled the vision of the great social historian E. P. Thompson. Three works are central to this view: E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, London and New York 1991; id., "Patrician Society, Plebeian People", in *Journal of Social History* 7 / 4 (1974), pp. 382–405; id., "Eighteenth-Century English Society. Class Struggle without Class?", in *Social History* 5 (1978), pp. 133–165.

5 Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People. England, 1727–1783* (The New Oxford History of England), Oxford 1989; see also his follow-up, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689–1798*, Oxford 1991.

6 Thompson 1978, "Eighteenth-Century English Society", pp. 142–143; Nicholas Rogers, "Aristocratic Clientage, Trade and Independency. Popular Politics in Pre-Radical Westminster", in *Past and Present* 61 (1973), pp. 70–106.

shops in England by the 1760s; over 21,000 in London),⁷ clerks, farmers, merchants, tradesmen, entrepreneurs and manufacturers and skilled craftsmen, as well as those who occupied the shady penumbra of minor gentility.

As critics have pointed out, the scale and number of persons involved here is very imprecise. In my view the figures are all highly suppositious, both about numbers of families and particularly those about income. But we are probably dealing with a group that may well have constituted only round about 10% of the population; at most 20%, though some have gone so far as to claim a figure of 40%.⁸ The assumption that somehow we are talking about a middle class – and here there has been a lot of such loose talk – is clearly erroneous (such language and conceptualization had to wait until the very late eighteenth century), and though the term ‘middling sort’ was frequently used, there were considerable differences (of both wealth and lifestyle), not to say political and religious affiliation, between say minor gentry and wealthy artisans.

Second, though socially heterogeneous, this group was seen as united by shared values that have been broadly characterized as ‘polite’ or ‘politeness’. Though in its origin the notion was aristocratic – the earl of Shaftesbury was no plebe – and though its origins lay in an attempt to move beyond or away from the religious and political contentiousness of the seventeenth century, its extraordinarily wide dissemination through a (relatively) free press, the world of periodical, pamphlet, book and graphic print, and through the practices and norms of social institutions, voluntary associations such as book clubs and debating societies, assemblies and coffee houses created a systemic culture of politeness, or what was often referred to as ‘gentility’.⁹ I say

7 These figures are from a survey by the Commissioners of Excise in 1759. See The National Archives, Kew, Customs 48/16, fols. 19–20. More generally see Hoh-Cheung Mui and Lorna H. Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth-Century England*, London 1989.

8 The most judicious discussion of these figures and the issues they raise is in Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort. Commerce, Gender and the Family in England, 1680–1780*, Berkeley 1996, pp. 1–21. For one of the most recent attempts to unravel the figures see Robert C. Allen, “Class Structure and Income Inequality during the Industrial Revolution. Lessons from English Social Tables, 1688–1867”, in *Economic History Review* 72 / 1 (2019), pp. 88–125.

9 The foundational analysis here is Lawrence Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness. Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England*, Cambridge 1994, as well as a number of his articles, including “Gender and the Public / Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century. Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure”, in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 / 1 (1995), pp. 97–109; “Politeness for Plebes. Consumption and Social Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century England”, in *The Consumption of Culture 1600–1800. Image, Object, Text*, eds. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, London and New York 1995,

systemic because the technologies of reproduction – the printing press and, to a lesser extent, the reproductive image – whether wood cut or engraving – both disseminated and interconnected the different sites and practices of politeness. The magazine, newspaper and periodical brought together within their pages discrete cultural activities, linking literature, music, painting and theatrical performance in the minds of their readers. They did not create a hierarchy of the arts but mixed them together in the fashion of a medley or magazine. Such a system was not built overnight and certainly was far more elaborated by the 1760s than in the late seventeenth century. Indeed, it was largely non-existent before the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695.¹⁰

It was important to this analysis that, as Richard Steele made clear in the *Spectator*, politeness / gentility was not attached to a particular class of people but was performative, attached to particular values and specific modes of conduct. It was not so much a platform for action – though it did connect to certain sorts of philanthropic reform, an area closely linked to musical performance¹¹ – as a way of being and self-presentation. Activities helped create communities, as much as they were a reflection of certain shared values. But as with all sorts of performance, there were right and wrong, upright and misleading, harmonious or discordant ways of acting. There was always a potential – indeed, even a high probability – that the culture of politeness, in its pursuit of virtue, might be corrupted into vice.¹²

Third, this body both constituted and instructed a public that made claims to be arbiters of taste, morality and policy.¹³ Of course, these claims to be of or speak for a public were in most cases controversial and contested but there was a broad understanding that public scrutiny was the

pp. 362–382; “Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century”, in *Historical Journal* 45 / 4 (2002), pp. 869–898.

10 John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination. English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, Chicago 1997, esp. pp. 125–197, 427–489.

11 Cf. Donald Burrows, “Handel and the Foundling Hospital”, in *Music and Letters* 58 (1977), pp. 269–284.

12 John Brewer, “‘The Most Polite Age and the Most Vicious’. Attitudes towards Culture as a Commodity, 1660–1800”, in Bermingham and Brewer (eds.) 1995, *The Consumption of Culture*, pp. 341–361.

13 I do not want here to say very much about its relation to Jürgen Habermas’s “bourgeois public sphere”, though it’s my sense that Habermas was retrospectively imported into British history in order to bolster an argument that was already being made, and that now notions of civil society or public sphere, though widely used by historians of Britain, reject as much as they embrace of Habermas’s model. For a general discussion see Dario Castiglione and Lesley Sharpe (eds.), *Shifting the Boundaries. Transformation of the Languages of Public and Private in the Eighteenth Century*, Exeter 1995.

right road to good judgment. This applied to the peculiar political culture of eighteenth-century England but was especially true in matters of taste, the topic on which I will focus here. As Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury put it:

Without a public voice, knowingly guided and directed [the qualification is important, J. B.], there is nothing which can raise a true ambition in the artist; nothing which can exalt the genius of the workman, or make him emulous of fame, and of the approbation of his country, and of posterity [...] When the free spirit of a nation turns itself this way, judgments are formed; critics arise; the public eye and ear improve; a right taste prevails, and in a manner forces its way.¹⁴

Avison concurs in his *Essay on Musical Expression*:

the public Ear should be always consulted; and of which, I have so good an Opinion, that, were this Difference between a just, or false Taste, but fairly submitted to its Decision, I should not dispute, but the Composition which was most natural and pleasing, would bid fairest for the general Approbation.¹⁵

These remarks both use the term ‘public’ in only one of the several ways in which it was deployed in the period. Here, the concept of ‘public’ has to do with a qualitative judgment pertaining to a general good, what Samuel Johnson called “regarding the good of the community”.¹⁶ Public in this sense is an abstraction, not given a location. But, of course, as Johnson also pointed out, in addition public has a spatial sense as, in his words, “open to many”.¹⁷ The term therefore encapsulates the paradox or tension between a notion, to use Shaftesbury’s term, of ‘disinterestedness’ and the interests of those who wished to promote a public for culture by playing on and profiting from its appeal to the passions. Or, to put it another way, a tension between a relatively coherent public of shared values and tastes, and a heterogeneous body of disparate paying punters. This is an issue to which I will return.

14 Anthony Ashley Cooper, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3 vols., ed. Douglas den Uyl, Indianapolis 2001, vol. 3, p. 403.

15 Avison 1752, *Essay on Musical Expression*, p. 73.

16 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, London 1755.

17 Cited in John Brewer, “This, that and the other. Public, Social and Private in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries”, in Castiglione and Sharpe (eds.) 1995, *Shifting the Boundaries*, pp. 1–21, pp. 8–10.

Both Shaftesbury and Avison speak of taste – “a right taste”, a “just Taste”. Taste is, of course, the key term here: it is applied to all the arts – literature, music, painting, architecture and sculpture. It does the ideological work of distinguishing the right sort of response to works that are all understood to excite feelings and the passions, to play upon the imagination. Taste as a correct emotional response to art and music is often described, as in Avison, as the result of “a peculiar and internal Sense; but of a much more refined Nature than the external Senses”, those external senses rather associated with grosser passions.¹⁸ Literary, art and musical works should be mindful to address that interior sense, and doing so conferred on them a certain legitimacy.¹⁹

Tracts and writings that considered music and the arts as objects of taste tended to draw attention to the similarities as well as the differences between them. Avison, for instance, drew analogies between music and visual art because the latter was, in his view, better known than music. He often alludes to terms more usually associated with the visual arts, such as design, colouring and expression. Discord in music, he compares to shades in painting, the composer to the poet.²⁰

Of course, practitioners of one sort of art often claimed its superiority over the others – John Dryden’s comments on the superiority of poetry over painting and music are a case in point – and different arts had different problems of legitimation. Instrumental music, for instance, was always open to the accusation that it lacked ‘sense’, that it appealed only to the ear, in Dryden’s words pleasing “the Hearing, rather than gratifying the mind”,²¹ just as painting could be accused of appealing only to the eye. But what really mattered, for all apologists of the arts, was the ability to draw a distinction between the sensual and the tasteful. Thus Thomas Bisse, in his *Rationale on Cathedral Worship or Choir Service* (1720) contrasts “pleasures that are calculated for carnal sensual men” with church music that “raises the mind and its desires above their low level, drives out carnal thoughts and inclina-

18 Avison 1752, *Essay on Musical Expression*, p. 2. The terminology comes from Francis Hutcheson’s *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, London 1725.

19 Brewer 1997, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 87–91.

20 Avison 1752, *Essay on Musical Expression*, pp. 61, 74, 127. See Ina Knauth’s contribution in this publication.

21 John Dryden, “Preface to Albion and Albanus”, in *Essays of John Dryden*, 2 vols., ed. W. P. Ker, Oxford 1900, vol. 1, p. 271.

tions as dross, and leave it like pure Gold”.²² As Edmund Burke explained in his *Philosophical Inquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), aesthetic appreciation should be distinguished from “desire or lust; which is an energy of the mind, that hurries us on to the possession of certain objects.”²³ Oddly, good taste has a rather passive inflection.

Such distinctions, though they often took the form of philosophical reflections, were largely a response to the puritanical and ascetic criticisms of a culture of refined pleasure, an attack on what critics saw as ‘luxury’. Being one of these critics, Jeremy Collier in his famous attack on the stage published in 1698, *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, feared the seductive power of music that “charms and transports, ruffles and becalms, and governs with an almost arbitrary authority”.²⁴ Speaking of theatre music, Collier described its tunes as:

generally Airy and Galliardizing [...] contriv’d on purpose to excite a sportive Humour, and spread a Gaity upon the Spirits. To banish all Gravity and Scruple, and lay Thinking and Reflection a sleep. This sort of Musick warms the Passions, and unlocks the Fancy, and makes it open to Pleasure like a Flower to the Sun. It helps a Luscious Sentence to slide, [...].²⁵

A generation later, the dissenting minister and teacher, James Burgh, in his best-selling *Britain’s Remembrancer*, written in the aftermath of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, condemned “Plays, Musick-Gardens, Balls, Assemblies, Operas, Concerts, Masquerades, Breakfasting-houses, Ridottos and Fire-works.”²⁶ All these were, in his words, “tumultuous Scenes of Pleasure”, creating a “Ferment of irregular and exorbitant desires”. “[T]he hearing of the most melting Strains of Music, and the most rapturous and passionate Flights of Poetry [...] fill your Fancies with a thousand romantic Wishes and Desires altogether inconsistent with your Station and above your Rank in Life [...].”²⁷

22 Thomas Bisse, *A Rationale on Cathedral Worship or Choir-Service. A Sermon Preach’d in the Cathedral Church of Hereford, at the Anniversary Meeting of the Choirs of Worcester, Gloucester, and Hereford, Sept. 7. 1720*, London ²1721, p. 17.

23 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. James T. Bolton, London 1958, p. 91.

24 James Collier, *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage, together with the Sense of Antiquity of this Argument*, London ²1698, p. 278.

25 Ibid.

26 [James Burgh], *Britain’s Remembrancer. Or, the Danger not over*, London 1746, p. 16.

27 Ibid., p. 43–44.

Collier and Burgh, like many other commentators, were particularly concerned with two intertwined issues in this debate about luxury: patriotism and manliness. Both writing at moments of national political crisis, they were concerned at how new-fangled cultural imports – most famously of course Italian opera – were distracting and corrupting English men, who were being led by foreigners, unpatriotic worshippers of foreign fashion and by women, who had a special place in the culture of ‘shew’, into a state of moral laxity. (This was of course an analysis that chimed in well with the critics of the monarchy and the current political regime.) Thus James Miller, the clergyman, playwright and librettist of George Frideric Handel’s *Joseph and his Brethren* (1743), in his satirical poem of *Harlequin Horace* (1731), dedicated to the theatre proprietor, impresario and dancer, John Rich:

In Days of Old when *Englishmen* were Men,
 Their Musick, like themselves [sic], was grave, and plain;
 The manly Trumpet, and the simple Reed,
 Alike with *Citizen*, and *Swain* agreed,
 Whose Songs in lofty Sense, and humble Verse,
 Their Loves, and Wars alternately rehearse;
 Sung by themselves, their homely Cheer to crown,
 In Tunes from Sire to Son deliver’d down.
 But now, since *Brittains* are become polite,
 Since some have learnt to *read*, and some to *write*;
 Since Trav’ling has so much improv’d our *Beaux*,
 That each brings home a foreign *Tongue*, or *Nose*,
 And Ladies paint with that amazing Grace,
 That their best *Vizard* is their natural *Face*;
 [...]

Since *Masquerades* and *Opera*’s made their Entry,
 And *Heydegger* and *Handell* rul’d our Gentry;
 A hundred different Instruments combine,
 And foreign *Songsters* in the Concert join:
 The *Gallick Horn*, whose winding Tube, in vain
 Pretends to emulate the *Trumpet*’s Strain;
 The *shrill-ton’d Fiddle*, and the *warbling Fluit*,
 The *grave Bassoon*, *deep Base*, and *tinkling Lute*,
 The *jingling Spinnet*, and the *full-mouth’d Drum*,
 A *Roman Weather* and *Venetian Strum*,

All league, melodious Nonsense to dispense,
 And give us *Sound*, and *Show*, instead of *Sense*;
 In unknown Tongues mysterious Dullness chant,
 Make Love in *Tune*, or *thro' the Gamut rant*.²⁸

As Ruth Smith argues in her study of the English oratorio, Miller's rant is about an imagined harmonious (English) past and a confused, disordered (and largely foreign) present – the former crucially is masculine, a time when music was imbued with a collectively shared sense. The latter is the wrong sort of politeness: effeminate – with painted women and eunuch singers. As his fellow satirists, Edward Young and Aaron Hill, made clear the anxiety was about “emasculating present Taste”, a situation where in Young's satire *Love of Fame, the Universal Passion* (1728) Apollo (the god of poetry and music, the embodiment of masculine beauty) is chained down and reduced to impotence by a sexually provocative young woman “[w]ith legs toss'd high on her sophee she sits”.²⁹

It is important to bear in mind, I think, that these sorts of criticism were, more often than not, *not* claims for a wholesale rejection of music and the arts, but rather a call for their reform. And they came from within the musical and artistic community, not just from outsiders. Of course, many of the criticisms were *parti pris* – playwrights and authors attacking instrumental and foreign language music, or musicians or actors attacking ‘spectacle men’, like Rich. Behind the quarrels over the merits of opera (in English or Italian), the relative virtues of spoken drama and music, of foreign and native art and the talents of individual creators and performers lay an absolutely ruthless competition over exiguous resources and tiny profits all subject to the whims of audiences. This led to constant shifts of perspective and allegiance. Miller is a case in point, who at times satirized the oratorio and at others praised it. David Garrick may have attacked tumblers and the like, but this did not stop him using them.

But many proponents of musical and public performance were deeply vexed by their poor reputation and worked tirelessly – and not just in pur-

28 James Miller, *Harlequin Horace. Or, the Art of Modern Poetry*, London 1731, pp.16–17 (original emphasis), partially reprinted and discussed in Ruth Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought*, Cambridge 1995, pp.50, 75.

29 Edward Young, *Love of Fame, the Universal Passion*. In *Seven Characteristical Satires*, London 1728, p.91.

suit of profit – to render them polite and respectable. To cite just one well-known example, Jonathan Tyers, the proprietor of Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens, a place accused of being “[o]ne of the great Instruments of Luxury, (the Extremes whereof are very fatal to a Nation, and which makes too rapid a Progress among us),”³⁰ devoted himself to both practical measures (policing and lighting) and publicity – both textual and graphic – to ensure that the gardens retained a modicum of respectability.³¹

Part of the problem for such apologists was the very obvious way in which the venues of musical performance and theatre were evidently (and attractively) highly sexualized sites of spectacle, surface, fashion and show. The key terms in Miller’s satire are “Sound”, that is not music, and “Show”, that is lacking the other key term “Sense”. Peter de Bolla has shown how central a certain sort of educated visuality was to eighteenth-century aesthetic experience one that looked as much at and to the viewer / spectator as to the activity viewed.³² Typically, one visitor to the London opera in 1733 commented: “The Company sit for the most part in the Pit, where the ladies form semi-circles, so that their faces are seen, which makes a very good effect”.³³ Or, think of the way in which looking at the paintings in the pleasure garden supper-boxes were described in an article in the 1739 *Scots Magazine* as a means of covertly observing the ‘beauties’ in the gardens.³⁴ John Lockman, who wrote a famous apologetic for the gardens, also wrote many songs for performance there which were full of romance and sexual innuendo. The

30 [John Lockman], *A Sketch of Spring-Gardens, Vaux-Hall, in a Letter to a Noble Lord*, London 1750, p. 28.

31 The literature on Vauxhall is enormous. See among others David Coke and Alan Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens. A History*, New Haven 2011; Miles Ogborn, “The Pleasure Garden”, in his *Spaces of Modernity. London’s Geographies 1680–1780*, New York 1998, chapter 4; Jonathan Conlin (ed.), *The Pleasure Garden from Vauxhall to Coney Island*, Philadelphia 2013, esp. pp. 100–126; David Solkin, *Painting for Money. The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England*, New Haven and London 1993, pp. 106–156; Teri Edelstein, *Vauxhall Gardens. A Catalogue*, New Haven 1983; Brian Allen, *Francis Hayman*, New Haven and London 1987, pp. 62–70, 107–09; Brian Allen, “Francis Hayman and the Supper Box Paintings at Vauxhall Gardens”, in *The Rococo in England: a Symposium*, ed. Charles Hind, London 1986, pp. 113–133 and Peter de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye. Painting, Landscape and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Stanford 2003, pp. 72–103.

32 de Bolla 2003, *Education of the Eye*, passim.

33 Karl Ludwig Pollnitz, *The Memoirs of Charles-Lewis, Baron de Pollnitz*, 2 vols., London 1737, vol. 2, p. 466. On the importance of being seen see Michael Burden, “Opera in Eighteenth-Century England. English Opera, Masques, Ballad Operas”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Opera*, eds. Anthony R. DelDonna and Pierpaolo Polzonetti, Cambridge 2009, p. 203.

34 *The Scots Magazine* 1 (1739), pp. 322–324, 363–364, 409–410, esp. 363.

venues, whether highly select, like the opera, or much more open, like the pleasure gardens, were attractive as spectacular, erotic spaces. The impresarios who ran them knew this. As Berta Joncus has argued, an emphasis on the attempts of people like Tyers to ensure respectability overlooks the fact that he and figures like Lockman were in the business of constructing a space and experience that was a sort of pastoral reverie – an arcadian escape from order – whose erotic enchantment was generated in music and song. As she puts it, creating a space where “the boundaries between innocence and concupiscence faded”.³⁵

Desire, lust, possession: these terms used by Burke bring me to a further feature of the period highlighted by historians and also found in Langford’s title, commercialization. What does this mean in the cultural sphere? That cultural goods – music instruments, books and scores – and cultural practices – concerts and balls – are available as commodities for sale; that the pursuit of profit became a motive for cultural provision, as in the case of the cultural impresarios in a variety of fields: John Jacob Heidegger in the opera, Jonathan Tyers at the pleasure garden; John Rich in the theatre; Andrew Hay, the art dealer; a whole raft of booksellers and publishers, like Jacob Tonson. It also means that cultural producers of all kinds – composers, performers, painters, poets and playwrights, even the publishers of music – operated in a marketplace. This entailed the designation of cultural spaces – galleries, theatres, pleasure gardens, assembly rooms, concert halls, coffee houses, tavern rooms etc. which were, as we shall see, to a greater or lesser degree open to a paying public. And just as this phenomenon produced impresarios and public spaces, it also created the enterprising cultural worker, one who improvised a living – or at least hoped to do so – in a variety of ways. Such men and women, though they relied on patronage among other means to make a living, aspired to a certain level of independence and recognition but only later in the century began to define themselves as professionals. A typical example would be Lockman. A man of humble origins, a self-taught translator of the published works of Voltaire, Alain René Le Sage and Pierre Carlet de Marivaux, he was also a compiler of *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical*,³⁶ a writer of histories and a regular contributor to the *Gentle-*

35 Berta Joncus, “‘His Spirit is in Action Seen’: Milton, Mrs. Clive and the Simulacra of the Pastoral Comus”, in *Eighteenth-Century Music* 2 / 1 (2005), pp. 7–40, p. 33.

36 10 vols., London 1734–1741.

man's Magazine. He published many verses and also wrote many songs for the pleasure garden and theatre and the libretti of a musical drama, *Rosalinda* (1740), performed at Hickford's Great Room, and of an oratorio, *David's Lamentation* (1736). He contributed to the debate on the comparative virtues of Italian and English opera and, as I have mentioned, published *A Sketch of the Spring Gardens at Vauxhall* (c. 1750), a promotional account that shaped contemporary perceptions of the gardens as a respectable venue.³⁷ This sort of career was not confined to the literary and musical arts. Arthur Pond, to give another example, worked as a copyist, restorer, teacher, dealer, importer, factotum of the aristocracy as well as artist in his own right.³⁸ How extensive commercialization was and how it might have differed in extent among the different arts is a subject to which I will return.

One very important aspect of this model of commercialization is that it has been accompanied by a focus on consumption as well as production, on audiences, auditors, viewers and readers, as well as those who create cultural artefacts. It considers the development of markets, commodification and consumption not just as engines of economic growth but as forces of societal transformation, creating different sorts of culture. Most importantly in my view, it has encouraged us, when applied to music and the arts, to think of them in a particular way – one that raises questions about the shifting circumstances of their creation, performance, audience and reception. Inevitably this destabilizes the creative work, making it the potential bearer of a variety of meanings, feelings and responses, over and beyond its status as the product of the creativity of its author. It is also sometimes seen as the impetus behind (relatively) new cultural forms, what Miller disparaged as making “surprising Novelties your Aim”³⁹ – ballad operas, comic history painting, the modern pantomime, the conversation piece, the combination of low and high art forms and a whole variety of pastiche. Perusing the four incredibly rich Cambridge University Press volumes, *George Frideric Handel, Collected Documents*, enables us to see how his work was embedded within a complex system of reproduction and representation that extended far

37 On Lockman generally see James Sambrook, “Lockman, John”, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16912> (last access 1 April 2020).

38 Louise Lippincott, *Selling Art in Georgian London. The Rise of Arthur Pond*, New Haven and London 1983.

39 Miller 1731, *Harlequin Horace*, p. 5.

beyond the works that he wrote, performed and controlled himself.⁴⁰ Thus his works – especially minuets and airs – were used in comic theatrical afterpieces in the London theatre as well as in the pleasure gardens. This meant that they reached the most demotic audiences (afterpieces could be enjoyed at half-price). Perhaps the best and best-known example of this recycling was John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (which, of course, included Handel's music) and which was taken apart and reinterpreted in myriad ways.⁴¹

Critics saw such disaggregation and heterogeneity – “[a] thousand jarring Things together yoke [...] / Consult no Order, but for ever steer / From grave to gay, from florid to severe”⁴² – as also paralleled by the audience itself.

Though the emergence of the English language sacred oratorio was the result of a complex set of circumstances – did Handel jump or was he pushed? – and though their staging in theatres raised boundary issues of some complexity – did piety belong in the theatre? – and was in no way a guaranteed success, the English oratorio largely solved the problems raised in their most acute form by Italian opera. As Handel put it in his famous letter to the *Daily Advertiser* in 1745 – an obvious ex post facto rationalization made in a public forum: “As I perceived, that joining good Sense and significant Words to Musick, was the best Method of recommending *this* to an English Audience; I have directed my Studies that way, and endeavour’d to shew, that the English Language, which is so expressive of the sublimest Sentiments, is the best adapted of any to the full and solemn Kind of Musick.”⁴³ The oratorio offered “Sense”, emphasized the shared uplifting chorus of many voices rather than the single voice of an opera star, took its themes from religious and patriotic texts and introduced order and decorum into the theatre, promoting an aesthetic of the sublime. Positive (unlike the ballad opera which satirized Italian stars), patriotic and pious (indeed resolutely Anglican), it was also ‘manly’ in a very English way.

I want finally to turn to a set of questions that arise out of one of the claims of historians about English culture in the eighteenth century, that which

40 Donald Burrows et al. (eds.), *George Frideric Handel. Collected Documents*, 4 vols., Cambridge 2014–2020.

41 Berta Joncus, “Handel at Drury Lane. Ballad Opera and the Production of Kitty Clive”, in *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 131 / 2 (2006), pp. 179–226, pp. 179–195. For the *Beggar's Opera's* later iterations see Brewer 1997, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 440–449.

42 Miller, “Harlequin Horace” (1731), quoted from Smith 1995, *Handel's Oratorios*, p. 50.

43 *Daily Advertiser*, 17 January 1745 (original emphasis).

maintains that its singular development, another version of the peculiarities of the English – its commercialization, the creation of a public culture – arose out of the political and religious circumstances of the seventeenth century. This claim sees the seventeenth-century civil wars and their aftermath as severely diminishing the power of the court (and monarchy) as a cultural institution – certainly when compared to the French court or the courts of the many German states – as well as depleting the influence of the Church in which both visual art and musical expression was often controversial.⁴⁴

I want to look at the case of music to see to what extent it conforms to this view and to look at what was ‘public’ and what sorts of publics there were. We are dealing here with the tricky relations between the court and the town, between the public and private and the relations between patronage and markets. Let me begin with a couple of remarks about the slippery term ‘public’. As late as the 1740s, the royal court could be described as a public place but it was also described in contemporary guidebooks as one of the capital’s diversions, a site on a tourist itinerary. The court was usually thought of as part of a larger audience in the town. When Rich’s pantomime *The Necromancer or Harlequin Doctor Faustus*, put on in the Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre in 1723, drew away audiences from the other theatres, the protagonists of Drury Lane lamented that “[b]oth the Courts have forsaken us”.⁴⁵ This points to a rather loose line between court and town, but an incident in George II’s reign which pertains to spaces rather than people reveals a rather clearer distinction. When George visited the theatre, he liked to insist that, as a court, attendees should remove their hats in the presence of the monarch. But the tory MP Francis Seymour refused to do so. He said, “he should have thought it very wrong to have done anything of that sort in the King’s Palaces, but there were no kings at operas and playhouses where everybody might sit as they pleased”.⁴⁶ This, no doubt, was a calculated insult, but one that could hardly be more anti-absolutist or more conscious of how site-specific behaviour could be.

44 See, inter alia, R. O. Bucholz, *The Augustan Court. Queen Anne and the Decline of Court Culture*, Stanford 1993; Brewer 1997, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 3–55. For a re-evaluation see Hannah Smith, “The Court in England, 1714–1760. A Declining Political Institution?” in *History* 90 / 1 (2005), pp. 23–41.

45 Letter Robert Wilks, Barton Booth and Colley Cibber to Richard Steele, 12 December 1724, quoted from *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Sir Richard Steele*, 2 vols., ed. Henry R. Montgomery, Edinburgh 1865, reprint New York 1971, vol. 2, p. 283.

46 Quoted and discussed in Hannah Smith, *Georgian Monarchy. Politics and Culture, 1714–1760*, Cambridge 2006, p. 235.

In practice music often moved between the court and the town and at no time more often than in the reign of Queen Anne, a great musical enthusiast but one whose ailments made it difficult for her to appear in public. Thus Giovanni Bononcini's *Camilla*, first performed in Italy in the 1690s, was put on at Drury Lane Theatre late in 1706 and then performed at court for Anne's birthday in 1707. New Year's and birthday songs for Anne in 1703 were published and performed in a public theatre.

Though unquestionably the court was a great centre of music, its importance varied according to the monarch and his / her circumstance. It peaked under Charles II and hit its nadir between 1674 and 1702, especially when William III demonstrated his philistine qualities. Few commercial operations or companies had the resources to mount a production like that of the court masque of 1675, *Calisto, or the Chaste Nymph*, with a libretto by John Crowne and music by Nicholas Staggins. All the spoken parts were by courtiers and it consisted of five acts in verse and six musical performances, employing 90 musicians and costing over £5,000. It took nearly six months of preparation.⁴⁷ Yet it was precisely this sort of extravagance that drove the monarchy into debt, leading ill-paid or unpaid royal musicians, including members of the famous band of 24 violins, to set up schools and, in the case of John Banister, start a concert series. Court musicians were driven out into the town, as in Henry Purcell's move after 1688 from court composer to composer for the theatre.

Court ceremonial remained central to the musical life of London, for example the celebration of royal birthdays and accession days. Commercial performance drew on the singers from the Chapel Royal, St Pauls and Westminster Abbey and royal authority over music and theatre remained powerful – though again fluctuating –, institutionalized both in the licensing of the theatre, the granting of patents or warrants to companies and musical publishers and the role of the Lord Chamberlain as censor. But this was the scaffolding within which a commercial edifice was built. The monarch had tremendous powers – to grant pensions and posts in the royal household, or indeed elsewhere – but in practice he or she was, as in politics, *primus inter pares*. In 1719, George I may have invested £1,000 in the Royal Academy of Music to promote opera and have granted it a charter, but he was only

47 Cf. Andrew R. Walkling, "The Masque and Politics at the Restoration Court. John Crowne's 'Calisto'", in *Early Music* 24 / 1 (1996), pp. 27–62 and James Winn, *Queen Anne. Patron of the Arts*, Oxford 2014, pp. 1–10.

one of the investors in what was a joint stock company that raised £15,000.⁴⁸ And whether the joint-stock company paid dividends was a matter of hard economics – the salaries of performers; the receipts of subscribers and audiences.

Many sorts of music of course were expensive and their audiences were exclusive. As Robert Hume and David Hunter have been at pains to show, opera subscriptions and tickets, even those of the oratorios, were beyond the purse of all but a tiny elite.⁴⁹ Music clubs and bands of amateurs who gathered together to make music and organize concerts, like the Castle Society at the Castle tavern on Paternoster Row (the centre of the London publishing industry), excluded “vintners, victuallers, keepers of coffee houses, tailors, peruke makers, barbers, journeymen and apprentices”.⁵⁰ Access to and exclusion from genteel music defined communities, both in London and especially in the provinces. This has led some to argue that we should think of more than one audience for music: on the one hand, a body of frequent attenders and practitioners, bound together by social and musical interests, and on the other, those who could only afford the occasional concert or visit to the pleasure garden.⁵¹ This of course fits well with the notion that most auditors were ill-informed or (by implication) wanted to hear better-known or more accessible music. However, it overlooks the abundant evidence that many members of the beau monde were far more interested in exclusive sociability than in the performances on offer. For every person – usually a woman – poring over a playbook or score there were others preening themselves before their audience. But more than this, detailed calculations about who had access to a particular performance or concert,

48 Judith Milhaus and Robert D. Hume, “The Charter for the Royal Academy of Music”, in *Music and Letters* 61 / 1 (1986), pp. 50–58.

49 Robert D. Hume, “The Economics of Culture in London, 1660–1740”, in *Huntington Library Quarterly* 69 / 4 (2006), pp. 487–533; David Hunter, “Patronizing Handel, Inventing Audiences. The Intersections of Class, Money, Music and History”, in *Early Music* 28 / 1 (2000), pp. 32–36, 38–49; id., “Rode the 12,000? Counting Coaches, People and Errors En Route to the Rehearsal of Handel’s *Music for the Royal Fireworks* at Spring Gardens, Vauxhall in 1749”, in *London Journal* 37 / 1 (2012), pp. 13–26.

50 For the range and price of concerts see Catherine Harbor, “Marketing of Concerts in London, 1672–1749”, in *Proceedings of the 19th Biennial Conference on Historical Analysis and Research in Marketing*, ed. Val Larsen, 2019, <https://ojs.library.carleton.ca/index.php/pcharm/issue/view/122> (last access 20 March 2020), pp. 2–26.

51 Cf. esp. Hannah Greig, “‘Altogether and All Distinct’. Social Exclusivity and the Pleasure Gardens of Eighteenth-Century London”, in *Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012), pp. 50–75 and Roz Southey, *Music-Making in North-East England during the Eighteenth Century*, Aldershot 2006, p. 4.

though they encourage us to treat with scepticism the eighteenth-century critics who inveighed against promiscuous social mixing and probably exaggerated the demotic presence in the audience, rather miss the point. Where you have the sort of system that prevailed in eighteenth-century England, in which high and low cultures were mixed promiscuously, were reproduced and available in many forms to be experienced vicariously and were repeatedly moved from one context to another, you have to treat text, score and performance as multivalent and protean. Crucially, access to polite print culture, including ways that did not involve purchase, was far easier as well as cheaper than access to polite music.⁵²

A similar sort of problem arises when you think in terms of ‘patronage’ as personal dependence and as antithetically opposed to ‘independence’ in an open market. Most artists, writers, painters, composers and musicians cobbled together a more or less (usually less but, in the case of someone like Handel, a great deal more) of a living by combining a variety of money-making activities. At times this might entail a high level of dependence, tantamount to service (as it did for Handel when he lived in the households of Richard Boyle, Third Earl of Burlington and the egregiously corrupt James Brydges, First Duke of Chandos). But for many, especially those less immediately attractive to the very rich, they made their way by making do. Avison, for example, held a position as the organist of the finest church in Newcastle, St. Nicholas’s, but he also ran subscription concert series in Newcastle and Durham, gave lessons, composed music, published books and, though claiming to be a gentleman, worked throughout his life. At one point his wife supplemented their income by giving sewing lessons.⁵³ Posts, teaching, performance at concerts, assemblies, balls and dances, concert promotion / impresario, composition / publication, usually by subscription, was a common experience throughout provincial Britain.⁵⁴ For most cultural practitioners in literature, the visual arts as well as music, it was a question of making do.

52 For an overview see John Brewer and Iain McCalman, “Publishing”, in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, ed. Iain McClaman, Oxford 1999, pp. 197–206.

53 Roz Southey and Eric Cross (eds.), *Charles Avison in Context. National and International Musical Links in Eighteenth-Century North-East England*, Didcot 2017, esp. chapter 7: Roz Southey, “Managing a Musical Career in the Eighteenth Century. The Interweaving of Patronage and Commercialisation in the Careers of Charles Avison and Edward Meredith”, pp. 179–213.

54 Brewer 1997, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 531–572.

What then do we conclude? How useful has the politeness / commercialization model been in understanding eighteenth-century English society or the relations of music and the arts? The focus on politeness has been essentially discursive, constructed through textual analysis. It sidesteps the sociological question, except where it seeks to address practices and even here it too often reverts to literary accounts and to didactic or prescriptive literature. It offers one overarching reading / interpretation of social and cultural activity and is weak when dealing with anything that falls outside its immediate purview. So politeness as a discourse is largely immaterial for the poor, the majority of the population, unless it is seen simply as a disciplinary mechanism. And it is important to see the contradictions within politeness, which often only become apparent when one looks at specific cultural practices. Take the question of gender. On the one hand, as Richard Leppert notoriously argued long ago, music was often seen as feminine and effeminate, in tension with a notion of politeness as manly and male.⁵⁵ Yet, on the other hand, in general women were often seen as having a special polishing and polite influence on men, through acts of social intercourse, like playing music or engaging in certain sorts of conversation. And, yet again, as I have tried to show, this also produced a deep masculine anxiety about female power. This cannot be dismissed as a sort of discursive construct. If one looks at the power exercised by performers – actresses and singers, for example⁵⁶ – we can see how they shaped both the music and themselves in ways that gave them a certain power and independence.

This point can be made more generally. Both the models of politeness and of commercialization have made us (and I think rightly so) very conscious of audiences, readers and all forms of reception, have made us realize that different arts may be enmeshed in shared, similar processes which may be external to specific cultural forms, and have asked us to think about change. As I have said, they encourage us to see the meaning in cultural performance as situated – both in a particular physical space – and in the context of a certain type of audience and its presumed perceptions. This tends to put the creator / generator of music and other arts in a box, sometimes at the expense of the creator or performer. Like studies of consumption,

55 Richard Leppert, *Music and Image. Domesticity, Ideology and Socio-Cultural Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*, Cambridge 1988.

56 I am thinking of someone like Kitty Clive for whom see Berta Joncus, *Kitty Clive, or the Fair Songster*, Woodbridge 2019.

such an approach downplays the role of the maker. But this is not a plea to go back to what some, disparagingly, have called genius studies, the love-child of Romanticism in which all that matters is the relation of the creator to the score, the image or the text. Whatever the art form, the creativity of the creator / performer must be both analyzed and respected, their agency within a system of restraints acknowledged and reconstructed. The difficulty of course is to connect in a meaningful way what are often referred to as either 'internalist / formalist' or 'externalist / contextual' studies. But the most productive space in the history of music and the arts lies precisely at their conjunction.