

BOOK REVIEW

Stephen Banfield, *Music in the West Country: Social and Cultural History Across an English Region*, Music in Britain, 1600–2000 (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2018). xx + 456 pp. \$50.00

Banfield's monograph is finely written and teeming with information. Advertised as the first regional history of music in England, the book provides a wide-ranging glimpse of musical culture across the South West of England. Banfield draws on a wealth of archival research and local knowledge to guide the reader through seven hundred years of the region's diverse, dynamic musical activity, from the waits and cathedral choristers of the fourteenth century to the rise of festival culture in the twentieth. At all times, Banfield suffuses his text with a feeling for the everyday lives of the musicians he considers.

Banfield's stated goal is to offer a 'comprehensive and reasoned framework ... for understanding the forces that have operated across the entire spectrum of musical activity, active and passive, within a chosen geographical entity that is not the nation state and not a political province' (p. xiv). The sheer breadth of musical variety under consideration, what the author refers to as the 'multifariousness of "musicking" at any one time', makes a simple chronology impossible (p. xiv). Rather, the author approaches this unwieldy subject matter with a balanced, three-part framework: Chapters 2 and 3 provide the book's main chronological thrust, with the former exploring the history of the region's organs, and the latter its bands and choirs. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on practicalities of being a musician in the West Country, providing detailed information on how they functioned socially and economically. Chapters 6 and 7 investigate the region's events and institutions, its cultural constructs, while taking its historical and geographical circumstances into account. That leaves only Chapter 1, which functions generally as an introduction, laying the theoretical groundwork upon which the subsequent chapters are based.

Within each chapter, Banfield's mastery of the subject matter comes to the fore. The particularity of the information he offers – the names of local and long-forgotten musicians, historical financial records from small parish churches, and the like – makes it obvious he spent countless hours engaged in archival research, and indeed he praises the value of small, local libraries and the wealth of local knowledge they offer (p. xii). The reader can consult the extensive list of archives, collections, and regional newspapers and periodicals provided in the Bibliography (pp. 379–81).

For some readers, the image of this mastery, however, may be undercut to some degree by the author's not infrequent use of Wikipedia as a source. He cites from the online encyclopedia 15 times throughout the text, with the majority of instances falling in the second half of the book. For obvious reasons (Wikipedia's anonymous authorship and lack of peer review, among others) Banfield's use of this source may be viewed as questionable.¹ It should be noted that Banfield uses

¹ Notably, Wikipedia itself says 'Wikipedia is not a reliable source' and includes the warning 'While some articles are of the highest quality of scholarship, others are admittedly complete rubbish'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Ten_things_you_may_not_know_about_Wikipedia. (accessed 28 January 2019).

Wikipedia solely for instances of what could best be described as supplementary or ancillary information. Additionally, while admitting the site's flaws, Darren Mueller's recent Wikipedia review article in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* makes a compelling case for a collaboration between scholars and Wikipedia, noting that 'Casual dismissals of Wikipedia often fail to acknowledge the site's highly developed markup language, style guide, classifications system, and governance'.² As internet sources become more prevalent and as Wikipedia's entries become more standardized, as Mueller suggests, the issue of Wikipedia use in scholarly material is sure to persist. Intentionally or not, Banfield could be on the cusp of a shift in scholarly writing.

In Chapter 1, 'Landscapes and Soundscapes', Banfield identifies the English West Country and its geographical limits, with Bristol and Salisbury functioning as gateway cities to the region. He states that other than a mention of the 'west-cuntre' by Anonymous IV in the thirteenth century and the rise of the Glastonbury Festival in the twentieth, the West Country has not merited much musical notice (pp. 1–2). Various reasons are given for this relative musical obscurity. Perhaps the Puritanism of the Jacobean period, with its animosity toward public music-making left a residual distaste for music in the region's inhabitants, or perhaps the region's vernacular music simply did not leave enough written evidence to provide any real insight into its styles and practices (pp. 2–3).

Banfield also introduces the soundscape methodology, particularly as presented by R. Murray Schafer, that will be used throughout the remainder of the text.³ He cites Reinhard Strohm's *Music in Late Medieval Bruges*, with its opening chapter entitled 'Townscape-soundscape', as the source that has the most direct relevance and inspiration for his own methodology in studying the music of the West Country.⁴ Of particular importance is Strohm's practice of associating different musical sounds in the city with different spaces to create an inclusive musical geography. To Banfield's knowledge, no town in England, let alone an entire region, has been explored the same way as Strohm's Bruges. Banfield concludes the chapter by posing the crucial question that sits at the heart of his text, 'How does one *value* (emphasis Banfield's) all this wealth and diversity of sound across the region and across the ages?' (p. 19). His response to this query is to investigate how musical sound has operated and still operates in the daily lives of the West Country inhabitants – how the sounds reflect ideas or structures of authority, who participated in the making of musical sounds, how musicians earned a living, and what structures and events shaped West Country musical culture.

Chapter 2, 'Musical Authority: Organs', provides an abundance of information on the building and development of parish and cathedral organs across the West Country, the economic realities of being a professional organist, and the use of organ in religious and secular culture. As Banfield describes it, organ use persevered through the economic and ecclesiastical shifts of English history, from the Civil War in the seventeenth century to the rise of Anglican ritualism in the nineteenth. Indeed, the instrument's status as an audible signifier of authority held true into the twentieth century. Organs were considered community possessions and as

² Darren Mueller, 'Reviews: Digital and Multimedia Scholarship', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72/1 (Spring 2019): 284. DOI: 10.1525/jams.2019.72.1.279

³ See R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977). Schafer popularized soundscape studies and the idea that one's acoustic environment could be mapped in a similar manner as one's physical landscape.

⁴ Reinhard Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

visible representations of the community's prosperity and were esteemed as local points of pride. Banfield provides detailed accounts of individual organs and organists in parishes across the region. Here and throughout the book, he excels at providing information so specific and local in its context that it would be invaluable to specialists but may perhaps be overwhelming to more general readers.

Banfield also explores the organ's role in contributing to the region's secular music culture, particularly in the cities of Plymouth and Bournemouth. The latter city, a holiday destination, erected an organ pavilion dedicated to luxury, leisure and tourism. These secular organs were often used to accompany large-scale orchestral or choral repertoire, or to entertain audiences with 'pops' concerts in areas where it was financially or geographically unfeasible for a full orchestra or opera to perform.

While many of the religious and secular developments described in this chapter occurred nationwide, not only in the South West, Banfield sees reason for regional distinction in the area's notable organ builders and workshops that continue to successfully operate what could be described as a 'West Country School' of builders (p. 59). Furthermore, while organ may not still be a required adjunct to religious practice or to the tourism industry, the author sees a targeted future for the organ's cultural relevance 'where style, money, will, and sense of artistic community are happy enough to coincide' (p. 63).

Chapter 3, 'Musical Incorporation: Bands and Choirs' is the most substantive chapter of the book. At over 80 pages, the chapter is divided into nine subsections, the more prominent of which are 'Bands of Music After the Restoration', 'Parish Psalmody and Carols', and 'Not Psalmody: Other Singing Groups'. Banfield's admirable impulse to convey as much information as possible risks flooding the reader with a deluge of waits, psalmidists and brass bands. Through the mass of information, however, Banfield provides a comprehensive history of the various kinds of bands and choirs found in the West Country, taking into account the social and economic factors that were constantly at play.

Banfield begins the chapter by citing the many local celebrations held in June 1838 to mark Queen Victoria's coronation. The number of small towns throughout the area of Devon that could boast of an active band or choir is astonishing. By Banfield's estimate, in the early nineteenth century, more than one in one hundred males could be called upon to play an instrument in public (p. 65). The story described by Banfield in the remainder of the chapter is one of gradual musical consolidation, as an era of active popular musical engagement, whether in civic or military form, gradually acceded to the economic and cultural forces of development and technological change. Music, once a communal activity, became a solitary occupation. Participation in glee clubs, town choirs, and civic bands gave way to way to a flowering of individual pursuits. By the twentieth century, with younger generations wielding more expendable income and cultural influence, music venues (folk clubs, rock clubs, gay clubs, etc.), restaurants, and urban ghettos established themselves as the 'sounds, tastes, and topographies of democracy' (p. 143).

Chapter 4, 'Musical Livings I: The Prosopography' begins with a discussion of the difficulty of assembling a complete picture of the lives and careers of early musicians. While Banfield notes that the region's informal musical culture has left scattered biographical, economic and administrative traces, he maintains that the problem has been a lack of dedicated scholarship, not a lack of data. He specifically takes Frank Harrison and his *Music in Medieval Britain* to task for promoting

the idea that 'actual music' was limited only to notated music (p. 152).⁵ Banfield then confidently asserts that 'Today's music historian barks up a different tree, however, and can hope to dislodge a number of squirrels' (p. 152).

Banfield leads by example in exploring the kinds of careers available to secular musicians, how lucrative they could be, and how sustainable they were. He identifies six strategies that early musicians followed in establishing a career, many of which remain practical today: 1) seek permanent patronage from nobility or civic authorities; 2) take a career path of qualification – apprenticing oneself to a master; 3) build up a freelance portfolio and practice as broadly as possible, for example, by combining performing, teaching and composition; 4) make music only part of one's livelihood; 5) consolidate a family business; and 6) move or migrate to a location with steady demand. Each of these strategies are thoughtfully considered in their own subsection of the chapter. The result is a well-rounded prosopographical study of England's West Country and an example to scholars of the kind of research and data that can be examined without the existence of 'actual music'.

Chapter 5, 'Musical Livings II: Individual Case Studies' is exactly what the title implies. Banfield builds on the previous chapter and explores the lives and careers of several local musicians, delving into the social and economic circumstances that helped shape their careers. He begins with three Bristol musicians: Joseph Leopold Roeckel (1838–1923), Jane Jackson (1834–1907), and Frederick Charles Maker (1844–1927). Roeckel and Jackson were married, and both composed under pen names. Roeckel wrote under Edouard Dorn and Jackson under Jules de Sivrai. Embodying the third career strategy discussed in the Chapter 4, all three earned part of their living performing and teaching, but what makes them notable is their incredible output as composers and arrangers. Between the three of them, they published more than 1,000 pieces of music, made possible by the advent of cheap printing.

Not all successful musicians chose to stay in the West Country. In the subsection entitled 'Metropolitan Distinction', Banfield admits that 'escape from the region has been the perennial concomitant of talent, ambition and opportunity' (p. 225). Other composers, as Banfield shows, chose to leave adventure behind them, and to settle into the quiet, domestic life offered by the West Country. One such musician was Joseph Emidy (c. 1775–1835) a black violin player in Cornwall, who left service as a ship's fiddler for the Royal Navy to establish a career leading orchestras and chamber groups, teaching privately and composing, thus setting himself up as Cornwall's leading literate musician of secular music.

Chapter 6, 'Musical Capitalisation: Events and Inventions', examines the cultural constructs, the myths, which make the West Country feel different or special. Using the example of Thomas Hardy's poem 'Her song' and John Ireland's musical setting of the same text, Banfield invites the reader to consider three different ways of theorizing music in the West Country. First, music is something that one does, or 'musicking', the performance and interaction of music by everyone involved – performers, listeners, patrons, impresarios, composers, publishers, etc. Second, music can be thought of as symbolic or cultural capital. It becomes a possession invested with value, something to be guarded. Third, music can form a sound object in the listener's memory. This memory of a soundscape, much like the memory of a landscape, can form an association or a 'pull' to a place, time or event

⁵ Frank Harrison, *Music in Medieval Britain* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1958).

(pp. 253–4). Banfield identifies these three modes – musicking, capitalization and memorialization – as the identifiable ways of myth-making pertaining to events and institutions of the West Country.

As Banfield notes, ‘the most powerful myth has been the invention of the West Country itself’ (p. 254). At first considered a wild country in need of taming, with the advent of improved transportation the region established a new identity as a health and leisure destination thanks to the favourable climate, plentiful coastline and not-too-inconvenient remoteness. The idea of the West Country as a place of good living, traditional values, and beautiful landscape quickly followed, an idea that was emphasized through songs such as ‘Pearl of the West’ (pp. 260–61).

Another invented myth of the West Country described the area as a remote and backward region where traditions, especially folk music, had survived untouched by the modernizing influences of the urban centres. The two myths are linked, because it was as a man on vacation that Cecil Sharp first discovered and collected thousands of songs from this area, particularly Somerset. Sharp’s efforts helped establish the region’s reputation for folk song.

Banfield concludes the chapter by reconciling these two myths with the economic and social realities of life in the West Country. As outsiders and festival-goers impose their visions of West Country ‘authenticity’, the residents grapple with surviving in a low-wage economy and economic unsustainability.

The final chapter, ‘Music Capitalisation II: Institutions’, extends the ideas of Chapter 6 with an exploration of the cultural machinery that constitutes the West Country’s musical culture. The institutions that regulate the interactions between performer and audience have historically been the Church, military and civil authorities, the educational establishment, and the entertainment industry. Banfield thoroughly reviews all these areas. Notably, he asserts that one of the factors that have prevented the West Country from establishing its own distinctive musical identity is the fact that it could not produce a stable, nationally recognized conservatory (p. 336). As in many other regional music cultures, not just in England, musical institutions in the West Country now rely on the variety principle to survive – using a variety of concert programming and administrative arrangements – to appeal to the widest possible audience and make the best use of any venue (p. 366).

The text concludes with a brief Epilogue titled ‘The Measure of a Region’ in which Banfield proposes that the sum total of all musical production and consumption in a region could in theory be calculated in similar ways to GDP, and for similar purposes (p. 368). The difficulty would be in finding ways to put a figure on qualities not usually turned into quantities. He also suggests that the simplest way of measuring a work’s sonic distinction would be to estimate how much the work cost to produce. He then provides a table that samples the cost of musical sounds across a spectrum of time, place, and function within a general period, in this case 1366–1602 (pp. 372–3).

Stephen Banfield’s *Music in the West Country: Social and Cultural History Across and English Region* is an expansive, thought-provoking, deeply researched consideration of the varieties of musicking in the West Country from the fourteenth century to the present day. Given the mass of information presented, Banfield’s thematically organized chapters ably guide the reader from the first page to the last. The particularity of the information Banfield provides makes this book perfectly suited for scholars of English music and culture but could also make it challenging for a general reader. Importantly, he has provided the framework

for an ethnographic approach to studying an area's music history. One hopes it will become a framework that future scholars will build upon.

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