



COMMUNICATION: CONFERENCE REPORT

The Salon and the Senses in the Long Eighteenth Century: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

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This conference was originally programmed to take place at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, in April 2020. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the conference was postponed until March 2021, with the intention of holding it in person at that time. This hope was dashed, however, when the pandemic showed no sign of abating almost a year later. The conference was moved online, with presenters giving their papers live via Zoom.

‘The Salon and the Senses’ was organized by the ‘Experiencing the Salon’ working group at the Rutgers Center for Cultural Analysis. The original (in-person) conference was slated to include a ‘pop-up salon’, held in the chapel of the university’s Theological Seminary, so that participants could, indeed, experience an approximation of the eighteenth-century salon and the sensory environments attributed to it. And while it was a shame that these ‘multi-sensory’ events could not be experienced in person, the conference organizers, Rutgers historian Jennifer Jones and musicologist Rebecca Cypess, did a stellar job of moving these facets of the conference to an online format. The ‘pop-up salon’ was held on Zoom, featuring a workshop on the uses of salon re-enactment in classroom pedagogy, a lively round of parlour games and a recreation of an Enlightenment literary *cercle*, performed by theatre students from the conservatory at the Rutgers Mason Gross School of the Arts. There was also a delightful performance of music from the salon of Elizabeth Graeme (1737–1801), whose intimate gatherings served the elite Anglican communities of eighteenth-century Philadelphia, given by Cypess’s ensemble, the Raritan Players.

But why go to so much effort to recreate the sensory environment of the eighteenth-century salon? To musicologists, it may not seem so radical to emphasize the sensory dimension of the Enlightenment salon; after all, scholars of eighteenth-century music have long considered the salon to be an important site of acoustical encounter. Indeed, these social gatherings featured some of the most striking emblems of Western sonic culture, from the string quartet to the piano sonata. And yet, there is often a disconnect between the highly sensory musicological account of the salon and the ways in which it has been discussed in the historical literature more broadly. Historians have long elided the salon with intellectual (rather than sensory) culture, holding it up as the locus of the Enlightenment ‘Republic of Letters’. Jürgen Habermas was, perhaps, the most ardent proponent of this belief, positioning the eighteenth-century salon as the birthplace of the ‘bourgeois public sphere’ – a semi-public, semi-private space where the civic-minded middle classes could come together to discuss important political issues (Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Darmstadt: Hermann Luchterhand, 1962)). Revisionist historians have continued to view the salon in this vein: a wave of feminist scholarship in the 1990s, led by Dena Goodman, positioned the *salonnières* at the centre of the salon’s intellectual power, recasting these figures as the unsung engines of Enlightenment thought (Dena Goodman, ‘Enlightenment Salons: The Convergence of Female and Philosophic Ambitions’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22/3 (1989), 329–350).

More recent accounts, however, might prompt us to rethink the image of the salon as a site of purely intellectual edification. There is, of course, Antoine Lilti's towering revisionist history, which (among other things) drew new attention to the great diversity of experiences on offer in French salon culture (*Le monde des salons: sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2005)). But, on top of that, the humanities' recent 'material' turn – paired with a growing emphasis on the so-called 'artisanal enlightenment' – has spurred a new focus on the physical spaces of the eighteenth-century salon, the objects that populated them and the ways that salon guests experienced them. This conference, then, brought together recent themes in historical thought with long-standing musicological enquiry to prompt new discussions about the sensory dimensions of eighteenth-century salon life.

The keynote address, by Melanie Conroy (University of Memphis), indicated how the digital humanities might be harnessed to recreate the social experience of the literary salon in eighteenth-century France. Drawing on data from the 'Mapping the Republic of Letters' project, Conroy presented the average salon attendee as a small node in an overwhelming social, political and intellectual network, often spanning multiple salons and only loosely governed by such regulatory devices as *cercles* or *salonnières*.

While Conroy's address dealt exclusively with literary salons, a number of papers addressed the interpersonal networks and social mores which governed eighteenth-century musical salons. Michael Bane (Indiana University) examined the 'irksome obligation' to compliment sub-par performances in the salon, laying bare a culture of compulsory praise (delivered both before and after performances) that undergirded Enlightenment musical *politesse*. Markus Rathey (Yale University) drew attention to the broader social influence of the eighteenth-century *salonnière* through the lens of Bach's *Kaffeekantate*. Rathey suggested that Bach – who happily collaborated with the *salonnière* Christiana Mariana von Ziegler (1695–1760) on a number of projects – weighed into broader debates concerning the role of women in salons in eighteenth-century Germany with his musical setting of the text, which quietly contradicts the misogynistic messages of Picander's libretto. My own paper (Callum Blackmore, Columbia University) examined the musical cultures of the Directory-era salon through the chamber music of Hyacinthe Jadin (1776–1800), arguing that the string quartets that Jadin published during the Directory were indebted to the professional networks that he had established during the Terror.

Papers by Lindsay Jones (University of Toronto) and Nicole Vilknér (Duquesne University) both dealt with the long-term resonances of the Enlightenment salon in nineteenth-century cultures of sociability. Vilknér argued that the *opérettes de salon* of the mid- to late nineteenth century – domestic entertainments tailored to the layout of an individual patron's home – owed much to the architecture of the eighteenth-century salon. She suggested that the Enlightenment construction boom, combined with an architectural ethos of 'free circulation' in the eighteenth-century townhouses known as *hôtels particuliers*, conspired to create a spatial environment ideally suited to the salon operas of the nineteenth century, which were often performed *en promenade* across multiple rooms. Jones situated the chamber music of guitarist Mauro Giuliani (1781–1829) within the pomp and politics surrounding the Congress of Vienna, arguing that his solo guitar works constitute an intimate (and politically engaged) response to this monumental event.

While the majority of the papers dealt with the auditory dimensions of the eighteenth-century salon, other senses were also represented. The smells of the eighteenth-century salon were examined in a paper by Érika Wicky (Université Lumière Lyon 2). The paints used to decorate these spaces, she argued, omitted a foul (and often poisonous) odour, which was tolerated by most salon-goers in the name of fashion, despite its deleterious effects. Iris Moon (Metropolitan Museum of Art), meanwhile, addressed the sense of touch. Her paper underlined the sophisticated tactile manoeuvring required to operate an eighteenth-century snuffbox, arguing that these elegant objects offer a way of thinking about touch within the contexts of intimacy, sociability and politics. Finally, Marjanne Elaine Goozé (University of Georgia) addressed the nefarious uses of humour in late

eighteenth-century Berlin salons. She suggested that pro-Jewish politicians and intellectuals used anti-Semitic humour to ridicule and attack influential Jewish *salonnières* in their own salons – a cruel form of social hazing that Jewish women were forced to endure amicably.

Ultimately, although the pandemic limited attempts to recreate the experience and the ambience of the eighteenth-century salon, the papers presented offered up a number of new avenues for exploring the manifold sensory worlds of Enlightenment sociability. Moreover, the interdisciplinary bent of the conference hinted at ways in which musicology, as a discipline, might fruitfully draw from other branches of the humanities in our approach to these worlds. If we attune our senses not just to the way that the eighteenth-century salon sounded, but to the way it looked, smelled, tasted and felt as well, we might begin to hear the music of the Enlightenment with fresh ears.

Callum Blackmore is a graduate student in historical musicology at Columbia University studying French opera in the long eighteenth century. His dissertation, 'Opera at the Dawn of Capitalism: Staging Economic Change in France and Its Colonies from Rameau to Cherubini', explores representations of economic life on the operatic stage in the lead-up to the French and Haitian Revolutions. His work has been published in *Current Musicology* and *Naxos Musicology International* and he has presented his research at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society. His research has been supported by the Barker Fellowship, the M. Elizabeth Bartlet Fund and the Institute for Religion, Culture and Public Life.