

## EDITORIAL

*The editors were always intending to establish a practice of invited editorials for Eighteenth-Century Music, as part of our remit to represent the widest possible range of interests and viewpoints. We are delighted that Ludmilla Jordanova has been able to write the first of these for the journal. We should, in addition, signal that her contribution was written independently of the first article of this issue.*



To those of us who are not professional musicologists, music seems not just an *inherently* interdisciplinary topic, but a domain that, because it presents distinct challenges, has the capacity to help scholars think afresh about key issues. Music seems positively to demand interdisciplinary responses, because, for example, it insinuates itself into so much of human life. It involves a notable range of intricate, specialized skills, objects and social relationships. Music is highly technical, and not just in the obvious ways. Instrument making, like the dissemination of music in written form and the design of performance spaces, is ‘technical’ in requiring a range of technologies, occupations and techniques. Yet, however specialized the study of music has become, however much its study demands skills that are not widely dispersed, even in universities, ‘music’ appears as a fount of questions that are exceptionally wide-ranging. I use inverted commas to signal that this seemingly innocent term has to cover so much that containing it is as difficult as defining it.

Some of the challenges relate to a feature that music shares with many other forms of culture – it elicits strong emotional responses that frequently take the form of ‘I like that’ or ‘I don’t like this’, or even ‘I hate . . .’. It is worth pondering what claims about liking or hating actually involve, or, rather, what status they are to be given as judgments in an academic setting. Certainly they can be lazy, facile labelling that pre-empts further thought. But they can also be turned to good account, if we can become analytically self-conscious about them. I have come to believe that such responses are more significant than may appear to be the case: they shape disciplines in all sorts of ways via preferences among students and the general public for certain periods, genres and individuals. In art, the success of blockbuster shows, which respond, for instance, to the passion for impressionism, has made it much harder to gain support for exhibitions that lack the allure of a big name or a familiar style label. It is noteworthy that, at least in the case of the visual arts, the eighteenth century comes way behind the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in such popularity stakes.

There is another, related, challenge to be considered, and this is that intellectual and emotional judgments about artistic quality are deeply entwined. While music is not unique in this respect, it does, like the visual arts, demand exceptionally deft navigation between the aesthetic frameworks of the moment of production, other theories deemed relevant, value judgments by individuals and institutions over successive generations and the realm of the market, that complex amalgam of forces whose logic remains strikingly elusive.

Other challenges are of a quite different kind. For example, historians of music, indeed of anything that is performed, need to grapple with the issues pertaining to audiences. Recent years have witnessed some interesting and provocative work, some of it fashionably invoking the public sphere. Audiences are difficult both to conceptualize and to study empirically; their neglect as a topic of study reinforces a traditional approach to culture that gave priority to production rather than to consumption. Even if it has been a long time since the former held unchallenged sway over the latter, the recent enthusiastic study of consuming – especially that of the eighteenth century – is remarkable. It is in no small measure a projection of our own world. The trend was already clear in Roy Porter’s social history of eighteenth-century Britain, published in 1982. While ‘getting and spending’ (to use Porter’s phrase) and being part of an audience are distinctly different phenomena, the recent attention that has been paid to listening, to changes in collective musical experiences – which after all entail both consumption and being a member of an audience – reveals something of what historians of music in its broadest sense must take on. This invites comparison with the attention being given to patterns of viewing in the eighteenth century, whether by connoisseurs and their associates at home or by groups in more public exhibition spaces. In this spirit, work on eighteenth-century



music will inevitably interact with thinking about other forms of art, resulting ideally in analytically refined comparisons of music and these other forms. By the same token, it would be productive to compare not only the scholarly styles that grow up around distinct cultural forms but also the institutions, markets and popular representations with which they are associated. The result would be a multilayered form of interdisciplinarity, organized less around the loans and borrowings (whether of sources or concepts) between disciplines than has hitherto been the case.

Such an approach, centred on a comparative history of types of culture and using broad themes such as ‘audiences’, differs markedly from familiar discussions of ‘the sister arts’ by historians of ideas. The twin premises of such discussions are, first, the existence of distinct arts and, second, relationships between them that are characterized by either competition or indebtedness (the theme of lending and borrowing is indeed a very old one). Within this framework, which implies rivalry between forms of culture and involves constant discussion about what they owe to each other, issues concerning hierarchy and status have been unavoidable. As a result, anxieties have abounded both about the worth and autonomy of practitioners and about the value of their products.

There are other ways of conceptualizing the relationships between distinct types of culture. One is to trace their genesis in a shared context, to give a historical account that is rich enough to encompass seemingly diverse cultural manifestations. In practice such an approach relies on discerning something like a zeitgeist or an all-pervasive style, or needs to be based on patronage so dominant that it was capable of moulding many kinds of makers and performers at once. If we want to place more emphasis on horizontal social relationships, it is possible to trace networks that run across forms of culture. It is well known that the painter Thomas Gainsborough’s enthusiasm for and involvement with music and musicians resulted in some significant portraits. He participated in some elaborate, influential and important networks, and analysing them as such is a productive, and necessarily interdisciplinary, enterprise. Gainsborough painted enough such likenesses for us to be able to consider how he put his specifically visual intelligence to work in relation to music. I have used his depiction of the very feisty Ann Ford, together with other evidence of her life, to explore attitudes to gender and kinship (in my *Nature Displayed: Gender, Science and Medicine 1760–1820* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), chapter 12). Painted in 1760 before her marriage to the controversialist Philip Thicknesse, this is emphatically a swagger portrait, which not only lovingly depicts the musical instruments but also conveys Ford’s performing personality through the sumptuous, if fanciful, satin dress that covers much of its surface. Studying networks is a useful way of beginning to evoke Gainsborough’s involvement with music. In this case the interdisciplinarity arises out of the materials themselves, or rather it can do so fairly effortlessly once they are given a certain kind of attention.

Yet another route is to select a theme that appears in a range of cultural forms, especially if it is period-specific. A theme found in many times and places may not only be unmanageably vast, but less able to offer period-specific insights. Readers of this journal must be less interested in the fact of music’s general interdisciplinarity than in the particular forms this takes in the eighteenth century – already a huge field. The use of style terms has often been seen as a conventional way of achieving this particularity, even if they do not in fact move as easily from one cultural form to another as might be supposed. Far from dismissing the category ‘style’, I believe it is worth revisiting it, and rethinking not only its general value as an analytical tool but also its potential for opening up just the comparisons of different cultural forms that I advocated above. Here, art history and music history are obvious bedfellows.

A number of recent works that explore music in an interdisciplinary fashion propose developments that are period-specific. Invoking the development of ‘the public sphere’ is, as already mentioned, a recurrent theme in such work. It is used, for example, by Thomas Tolley in *Painting the Cannon’s Roar* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001). This is a significant volume, by an art historian, which attempts to rethink the relationships between art and music. Tolley’s goal, to describe ‘the emergence of a kind of meeting of aural and visual perceptions in the public sphere’ (ix), is worth careful consideration. How useful is the idea of a ‘period ear’? Can influential accounts, such as Michael Baxandall’s of fifteenth-century Italy, in which he developed the notion of a period eye, be transferred to other times, places and senses? Tolley suggests, for example, that the



conversational mode of string quartets ‘closely parallels’ the conversation-piece genre in painting, and that conversation is itself an important eighteenth-century theme (x). This is a thought-provoking idea, especially since conversation pieces, while hardly virgin territory, could benefit from more scholarly attention. A fresh systematic analysis of the genre, of which the depiction of musical conversations forms an important subset, would be timely.

Yet there is an obvious danger here, what I have called elsewhere the ‘and’ problem. In a flush of interdisciplinary enthusiasm, it is tempting to juxtapose science *and* literature, art *and* medicine, music *and* . . . If a form of culture insinuates itself into the discussion, there are many *ands* to be found, and each one can provide a comfortable living for a group of academics. ‘And’ is like ‘parallel’: it under-conceptualizes just what the relationships between the two terms are. One alternative is ‘in’ – which may account for the current lively interest in librettos, especially where it is possible to document the nature of the collaboration between composer and writer. Accordingly, I have found sustained attempts by poets and novelists to write about the visual arts (art *in* literature) to be fruitful sources. In a way their drawback is that they are likely to be exceptional, which sometimes elicits sceptical comments from historians about representativeness. But the issue is not about sources being more or less useful but about how, precisely, they are distinctively useful. Another possibility is to search for bodies of work substantial enough to be used in a more systematic fashion, and I have suggested that musical conversations could be used in this way. So, of course, could portraiture in general. By the eighteenth century portraits of both composers and performers were sufficiently numerous to be a rich source – one that remains relatively untapped. They could be used not just to consider the lending of heroic status to already well known figures, although that is indeed an important theme, but also as a tool for thinking about occupational cultures. Music involves a complicated array of work practices, which are inevitably bound up with mentalities, behaviours, representations, social organizations, kinship patterns, class, gender and status. These are the elements that make up occupational cultures, and they are mediated by portrait artists. Successful portraits were predicated on artists using their visual intelligence in relation to specific sitters. In the case of musicians, their musicianship is being *visualized*, even where no specific references are made to it, since the artist has certainly exercised a choice in the matter. So such items are music *in* art. They can readily be used in the comparative analytical mode that I have outlined here, even if they are more familiar as decorative illustrations, as attractive supplements to texts.

Utilizing such interdisciplinary models and paying close attention to the music are perfectly compatible. It is fruitless to get caught up in a false polarity of internalist and externalist approaches. Comparisons of forms of culture, explorations of how they work their way inside each other, the examination of themes of broad embrace: all these are part of a generous-minded history. We can anticipate that under a capacious historical umbrella those who study music will play ever more central roles, helping other scholars, in this case of the eighteenth century, to think in new ways about style, performance, social status, audiences, the senses, sociability and much more.

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