



COMMUNICATION: CONFERENCE REPORT

Ninth Biennial Conference of the Society for Eighteenth-Century Music

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A conference on ‘Global Intersections in the Music of the 18th Century’ had been planned by the Society for Eighteenth-Century Music for March of 2020 in Stockholm, in collaboration with the Royal Swedish Academy of Music. It was postponed just days before its opening in response to increasingly grim news about the Covid-19 pandemic. Deferring it to a videoconference in August 2021 forced the cancellation of plans to hold paper sessions and a reception at the Academy’s headquarters in the Gamla Stan (Old Town) and enjoy backstage tours of Drottningholm and other historic opera venues, but had the positive outcome of making the conference part of the celebration of the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Academy in 1771. More than fifty *dix-huitièmistes* from all over the world gathered on four half-days to hear a total of twenty-eight papers, amid the congeniality and good humour that have been features of SECM gatherings since the organization’s founding in the tap room of Philadelphia’s historic City Tavern in 2000.

In honour of the hosts, the Baltic region was the subject of eight papers. Erik Wallrup (Södertörns högskola) described how the Royal Swedish Academy, as a vehicle of King Gustav III’s cultural revolution, was structured as a blend of the humanist Italian academy tradition and the scientific academies of England and France; although it no longer receives government funding, it remains an important centre of cultural exchange. Bella Brover-Lubovsky (Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance) gave a paper on the inaugural performance at Catherine the Great’s Hermitage Theatre in 1786 of Giuseppe Sarti’s *Armida e Rinaldo* (Vienna, 1774), with ballet divertissements added and famous Italian singers in the lead roles. Anna Parkitna (independent scholar, Kiel) spoke on how importing opera buffa and opéra-comique in the 1760s brought Warsaw into the Enlightenment world; the venue was the first fully public theatre in Poland, and the king personally participated in choosing repertory and providing subvention. Māra Grudule, a literary scholar at Latvijas Universitāte, presented ‘The Peasant at the Piano’, linking the music of elites such as the Duchess of Courland to the music of Latvian serfs, who often served as nurses and nannies for their children; the duchess and her husband later abolished serfdom on their lands.

There were three papers on north German topics: John Wilson (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften) on Beethoven’s Italian arias written in Bonn, Todd Rober (Kutztown University) on ‘hunt’ symphonies at country estates in Saxony that recalled the events of the day’s hunt for people who did not ride to the hounds, and Kimary Fick (Oregon State University) on the link between published keyboard music for amateurs and the early romantic idealization of solitude. Paul Corneilson (C. P. E. Bach Edition) gave a fitting final paper for the conference, describing an incognito visit to Hamburg in 1770 by the Swedish crown prince a year before he became Gustav III, and an unusual *pièce de circonstance* with an Italian text composed by C. P. E. Bach and copied into parts with great haste through the combined efforts of professional and amateur copyists.

Further south in the German-speaking lands, the papers mostly concerned Vienna, but as an intersection where music of many lands met and melded. Austin Glatthorn (Durham University) provided insight into a corpus of letters between theatre people in which their sharing of advice, and even of costumes and stage sets, led to a shared repertory of melodramas and *Singspiele*. Karina Valnumsen Hansen (Norges teknisk-naturvitenskaplige universitet) and Laurel Zeiss (Baylor University) read papers on Mozart's sacred choruses and strophic arias respectively, and Pierpaolo Polzonetti (University of California Davis) pointed out previously unrecognized allusions to enslaved people in Mozart's late operas. For example, the fandango in *Le nozze di Figaro*, when the servants set in motion their plot against the Count, suggests a parallel between servants and enslaved Africans. Magnus Tessing Schneider (Stockholms universitet) built on Polzonetti's earlier work on Calzabigi's libretto for *Amiti e Ontario* by going back in time to its original 1772 private performance at a Bohemian country estate, where the powerful argument for freeing the Native American slaves – they are the *seria* characters in this libretto – would certainly have been perceived as applicable to the local Bohemian serfs, some of whom were freed the following year.

One of the papers on France and England with particular relevance to today, by Julia Doe (Columbia University), concerned a Favart–Blaise vaudeville opera on the theme of smallpox inoculation: royal opposition to the world's first large-scale vaccination campaign did an abrupt about-face after Louis XV died of the disease, and the reprise of this opera at court the following year at the behest of Marie Antoinette politicized vaccination status as a marker of enlightened thinking. The other papers were a smorgasbord that included English and French luxury goods at London pleasure gardens that were produced by slave labour in the West Indies (Ashley Greathouse, University of Cincinnati), the unpublished music treatise of the musician-turned-astronomer William Herschel (Sarah Waltz, University of the Pacific), early London musical-miscellany publications that presented excerpts from Handel's operas in new and surprising ways (Alison DeSimone, University of Missouri–Kansas City) and my own paper concerning a satire on French provincial orchestras (Beverly Wilcox, California State University Sacramento). Morton Wan (Cornell University) contributed a talk describing English diplomatic failures and French Jesuit successes in introducing European keyboard instruments to the Qing court that received an honourable mention in the student-paper competition.

The music of Italy was omnipresent at the conference; while it was viewed as an import in most papers, one dealt with it as an export: Margaret Butler (University of Wisconsin–Madison) showed how the prima donna Caterina Gabrielli became Italian opera's first modern diva, offering insight into the beginnings of today's celebrity culture. Adriana De Feo (Universität Wien) looked into the way Apostolo Zenò incorporated both renaissance humanism and classical French literature into his librettos in order to focus on the psychological motivations for human behaviour. Bruce Alan Brown (University of Southern California), after a dramatic live demonstration of a centuries-old gargling remedy for singers, showed how a castrato singer remained on good terms, throughout his stage career, with his teacher, a hospital administrator who prescribed the gargle and may have had a role in recruiting him for castration. Holly Roberts (University of Oregon) dealt with Neoplatonism in a 1701 Colombani oratorio about Saint Cecilia, and considered whether such music was composed to help listeners experience the mystic transports of the saints. Nicola Usula (Université de Fribourg; his paper was read by Magnus Tessing Schneider because the fires in Sardinia had cut off his internet connection) delved into the ways in which Metastasio's *Demofonte* was reworked between its first production in Vienna (music by Caldara, 1733) and a 1735 setting in Genoa by Pietro Vincenzo Chiocchetti (1680–1753): scenes were shortened, the order of arias was improved and singer-requested substitution arias were not always felicitous.

Four papers dealt with music in the New World. Christopher Parton's (Princeton University) paper revealed how Handel reception in Boston promoted 'gendered, embodied, and racialized ideals of gentility and good taste' as a way for Americans to achieve moral parity with European culture. Callum Blackmore (Columbia University) shed light on multiple reprises between 1766

and 1785 of Favart's Paris opéra-comique *Les trois sultanes* in Saint-Domingue (Haiti), in which the chorus of slaves, remaining onstage for all of the second act, sentimentalizes the slave economy on which the colony depended; this presentation won the SECM student-paper competition. Faith Lanam (University of California Santa Cruz) gave an update on her latest research on the *Vezerro de lecciones* manuscript, a collection of solfeggi by Feo, Leo and Ignacio Jerusalem that was used to train lower-status girls to enter high-status Mexico City convents as choir nuns. Finally, Louise K. Stein (University of Michigan) presented new documentation about the first opera productions in the Americas, *La púrpura de la rosa* (Lima, 1701), *Celos aun del aire matan* (Mexico, 1728), *El Zeleuco* (Mexico, 1710) and *La Partenope* (Mexico, undated), explaining how they travelled via Spanish diplomatic networks from Naples and Madrid to the colonies and observed a number of typically Spanish performance conventions.

The meeting was hosted via Zoom videoconferencing, using a university's paid subscription. Approximately the same number of participants attended as would have been the case for the live conference. Most used the Zoom desktop client, but a few relied on mobile phones, and about half left their cameras off during the talks, so that the audience conserved bandwidth while still giving speakers the sort of visual feedback that a live audience normally provides. There were no more technology problems than there would have been at a live conference. Most speakers shared audio and slides (but not video), and this made it easy to gather information useful to one's own research with a screenshot instead of scribbling illegible notes. Chat was disabled during the papers, thus reducing distractions. The question-and-answer periods seemed to be more focused than at live conferences, with no long-winded disquisitions, perhaps because questioners could consult their books and research notes in formulating questions, rather than relying on memory. The discussions were lively, and being able to see the names of the commenters made it easy to follow up after the conference. Nevertheless, the free interchange of ideas and opportunities to network were severely limited.

The full conference programme, including detailed abstracts, is available at www.secm.org, and a selection of the conference papers will be published in book form. The Society's president, Guido Olivieri, and conference organizer, Bertil van Boer, closed the programme with an invitation to SECM's next events: a jointly sponsored conference with the Mozart Society of America, 'Mozart and Salzburg', to be held in Salzburg on 26–29 May 2022, and a panel at the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies in Baltimore on 31 March–2 April 2022, 'Decolonizing the Pedagogy of Eighteenth-Century Music'.

Beverly Wilcox lectures in music history at California State University-Sacramento, and obtained her PhD from the University of California Davis in 2013. She works on the history of one of the earliest known public-concert organizations, the Paris Concert Spirituel. She has published articles in *Revue de musicologie*, *Grove Music Online* and the recent *Dictionnaire de l'Opéra de Paris sous l'Ancien Régime (1669–1791)*, ed. Sylvie Boissou and others (Paris: Garnier, 2019), and is working on her first book.