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FORTIETH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY STUDIES

MARRIOTT RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, 26–29 MARCH 2009

For several years now eighteenth-century studies (and *Eighteenth-Century Studies*) have been busy absorbing the methods and topical concerns associated with cultural studies and critical theory. In particular, postcolonial studies and its newer subdisciplines – alterity, border, émigré, creole and diaspora studies, to name a few – have helped establish our now-familiar ‘wide’ eighteenth century, in which new attention to colonialism, orientalism, the slave trade and the broader extra-European experience has in turn inspired destabilizing reconsiderations of the canonical European literature. Upcoming disciplinary conferences with themes such as ‘Journeys’, ‘Expanding Borders’ and ‘Falling Walls Changing Borders’ give some indication of the currency of these issues. But the March 2009 ASECS meeting in Richmond, Virginia, might as well have had a similar title, with papers and panels on Saint-Domingue, the construction of the Arab and emigrant narratives rubbing shoulders with the more traditional British and French author-driven studies.

A survey of the music papers offered at this year’s ASECS, however, shows that perhaps musicology has yet to establish its own ‘wide’ eighteenth century. Notwithstanding recent research on eighteenth-century musical encounters with, and representations of, the Ottoman Empire, the Pacific Islands and the New World, far-flung musical locales were few and far between at the conference. One panel, entitled ‘The Arts in the Long Eighteenth Century in Spain and Spanish America’, treated the history and influence of Spanish, Mexican and Basque dance traditions in eighteenth-century performance and criticism. Elsewhere, in a panel on ‘Rousseau’s Legacies’, Julia Simon (University of California, Davis) made the case for the Enlightenment thinker as proto-ethnomusicologist (one working, none the less, from the premises of genetic logic and elegiac primitivism). The four explicitly music-centred panels, on the other hand, were based squarely within the European tradition, either focusing on the most familiar late eighteenth-century composers (two bicentenary panels on Haydn, one sponsored by the German Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, and one Mozart panel held by the Mozart Society of America) or organized according to that handily indeterminate category, ‘other’ (the catch-all Society for Eighteenth-Century Music panel, ‘Music in the Long Eighteenth Century’).

Perhaps it is misleading, however, to compare ‘musicological ASECS’ to ASECS as a whole along these narrow lines – and not just because our canon allows for few parallels to literary works like *Oroonoko* (1688), *Caribbeana* (1741), or *L’Histoire des deux Indes* (1770). There were, after all, many more points of contact to be found at the conference than ethnic and geographical ones: scholars also examined those that were commercial, generic and medial. Translation, adaptation, plagiarism and piracy were just some of the forms of cultural transfer that came in for close scrutiny, while artefacts ranging from pornographic plays to portrait galleries were shown to be engaged in thick intertextual webs. A number of the presentations – including one of the keynote addresses – were concerned with occasions in which the printed word appeared to stand in for live performance, to seek to replicate it or in some other way to be constructed in its terms. For musicologists especially, this represents a refreshing turn from the opposite tendency (now decades old, and showing its age, yet persistently alluring even within our discipline) to treat all cultural products as texts.

It was the more flexible understanding of ‘borders’ that allowed for meaningful links between the musicology papers and those elsewhere in the humanities. Several of the free-standing papers relating to music, including those by scholars outside musicology, took up the intermedial thread running through ASECS as a whole. Examples included a consideration of the connections between Gluck operas and narrative paintings from the studio of Jacques-Louis David (Anne Schroeder, Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University), a survey of theatrical allegories of the early eighteenth-century rivalry between the Paris theatres (Marcie Ray, University of California, Los Angeles), a paper on the interaction between popular ballads and the hymns of English Methodism (Misty Anderson, University of Tennessee) and a discussion of



the harpsichord as a sexual signifier in the soundtrack to the 1963 film adaptation of *Tom Jones* (Raymond Ricketts, Bryn Mawr College). The conference's unofficial theme of text as surrogate for performance was taken up by Estelle Joubert (Dalhousie University) in her contribution to a panel on continental periodical literature sponsored by the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing. With Princess Maria Antonia of Saxony's opera *Il trionfo della fedeltà* (1754) as a foundational case study, Joubert traced the emergence of a canonizing public discourse on opera in mid-century Germany to two related innovations on the part of Breitkopf and Härtel: moveable type, which initiated the rise of the score excerpt in periodical reviews of opera, and the inclusion of engravings of set designs in published opera scores. As Joubert argued, Maria Antonia's opera thus coincided with an increasing emphasis on printed text over live performance in the public evaluation of operatic works.

The music panels' lack of topical organization left it to attendees to wander, *flâneur*-like, constructing their own themes; and perhaps this is all to the good, for there were occasionally stronger connections to be found between disparate papers than between those placed side by side. To begin with, even the most composer-oriented of the composer papers tended to examine the construction of Haydn's and Mozart's legendary status from a keenly historicist perspective. In her survey of the shifting iconography of Mozart and his keyboard instruments in portraits of the young composer, Kathryn Libin (Vassar College, and current president of the Mozart Society of America) touched on the ways in which patrons often objectified Mozart as a courtly ornament or curio. Emily Dolan (University of Pennsylvania) noted the prominence of orchestration – and debates about its proper role in determining form – in early nineteenth-century evaluations of Haydn's legacy as a musical 'revolutionary'. Elsewhere, papers on early Anglo-American biographies of Mozart (Dorothy Potter, Lynchburg College) and the contents of Haydn's personal library (Ulrich Konrad, Universität Würzburg) continued the discussion of the reading of genius, and of the genius reading. The most diverting of the biographical offerings came from Peter Hoyt (University of South Carolina), who explained the uncharacteristically stiff, pedantic style of Mozart's sole surviving letter to Aloysia Weber with recourse to historical information about the monitoring of young ladies' correspondence and the use of ciphers and double entendres to enable private communication to circumvent parental (and even governmental) surveillance. Hoyt intimated a suggestive subtext to Mozart's instructions to Aloysia regarding his Andromeda aria 'Ah, lo previdi', K272 (1777), based on the erotic visual tradition behind the Andromeda myth. Of course, the aria in question depicts not the 'tied to the rock' image, but rather a later scene, when Andromeda is informed of Perseus's death. While this fact was not mentioned in Hoyt's discussion, it does not detract from the broader point that anachronistic prudery leaves us with not only a drab but an incomplete understanding of past lives.

Many of the Haydn scholars drew on a New Historicist model in offering 'thickly' contextual readings of familiar works. Nancy November (University of Auckland) drew on Kant in her consideration of the F minor Variations (1793) as an expression of a 'speculative', sublime melancholy common to a number of late eighteenth-century German instrumental works. In the first of a pair of wide-ranging papers on Haydn's musical encounters with the natural world, Karen Hiles (Muhlenberg College) discussed 'The Sailor's Song' (which opens the Second Set of Haydn's *Canzonettas* (1795)) in terms of the composer's own crossing of the English channel and a host of other cultural referents, from continental constructions of England's maritime identity to the vogue for panoramas, carousels and other means of testing perceptual limits. This was followed by a paper from Elaine Sisman (Columbia University) that reconsidered Haydn's *Matin-Midi-Soir* symphonies (1761) as expressions of the composer's 'poetics of solar time'. The 1761 Transit of Venus across the sun provided the historical grounding for Sisman's broadly intertextual case for certain solar topoi in the symphonies and in *Die Schöpfung* (1796–1798). Alejandro E. Planchart (University of California, Santa Barbara) undertook a project similar to Sisman's, though with less specific cultural evidence marshalled to support his case. With reference to selected Haydn divertimentos and symphonies from the 1760s and 1770s, Planchart argued for the interpretation of certain gestures as representations of a host of operatic formal conventions, voice types and narrative styles – an intriguing possible direction for future expansion of the topical lexicon.



The role of physical spaces in mediating encounters between subjects and rulers – a frequent subject of the conference as a whole – was taken up by Anthony Deldonna (Georgetown University) in his study of the Neapolitan *feste di ballo* of the 1780s, by April Greenan (University of Utah), who located the middle-class concert hall as a site for the democratic pursuit of happiness, and by R. Todd Rober (Kutztown University), whose discussion of Dresden composer Gottlob Harrer's hunt sinfonias (1737 and 1747) raised intriguing questions about boundaries between interior and exterior space. Issues of cultural transfer within continental Europe were addressed by musicologists like Mark Evan Bonds (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), who made the somewhat offbeat move of giving a paper on a work that was never composed. Bonds read Haydn's unrealized 'National Symphony' (proposed in a 1789 letter to a Parisian publisher) as an evocation of French Revolutionary sentiment, based on Viennese reception of the revolt's early days and on broader popular constructions of the 'national' at this time – without, however, addressing the Austro-German nationalism of such near-contemporary projects as the Vienna Nationaltheater and National Singspiel. Transnational tensions often belie the conventional wisdom regarding the eighteenth century's casual cosmopolitanism, as shown in two of the SECM papers. Beverly M. Wilcox (University of California, Davis) discussed the infamous hissing of violinist André-Noël Pagin at the Concert Spirituel in 1750 for, as Burney put it, 'daring to play in the Italian style'. A similarly unruly interaction between performer and audience was the subject of the dynamic paper from Corbett Bazler (Columbia University) treating incongruous laughter at the opera in early eighteenth-century London – whether at stage accidents or simply at the 'absurd' extravagances of Italian operatic conventions. Bazler gave a persuasive account of the ways theatre audiences enjoyed and even abetted the destabilization of the work; at this time, he concluded, 'opera's allure came precisely from its failure to achieve verisimilitude'.

A final indication that musicology may be seen as a model for current efforts to 'de-text' eighteenth-century studies more broadly was the encouraging fact that musicologists were responsible for two of the three winning proposals in the annual Innovative Course Design contest. In the course developed by Sarah Day-O'Connell (Knox College), a focus on listening – both as a cultural practice in the eighteenth century and as an ever-shifting arbiter of modern-day evaluations of musical meaning – allows for a critical, historiographical approach to familiar works, resulting in a hybrid of survey and topic course. The course designed by Kathryn Lowerre (Michigan State University) examines London concert life in the 'long' eighteenth century from an almost ethnographic perspective, with performance sites, concert programming and reception playing leading roles. It was a disappointment to see the Innovative Course Design panel scheduled at the same time as the SECM panel; but fortunately, over ten years of winning proposals are posted on the ASECS website, allowing all to benefit from the thoughtful work of Lowerre, Day-O'Connell and many others.

If scholars of eighteenth-century music have not, for the most part, adopted wholesale the trends currently predominating in the broader discipline of eighteenth-century studies, the increasingly fluid relation between text and performance throughout the conference seemed to indicate that the idea of the border as a zone of encounter will continue to invigorate all of our disciplines. In his novel *Summerland* (New York: Mirimax, 2002) Michael Chabon writes that 'a baseball game is nothing but a great slow contraption for getting you to pay attention to the cadence of a summer day.' Chabon's adoption of musical terminology is no accident, for music – especially the profoundly convivial music of the eighteenth century – is among the most poignant exemplars of the arts' potential as a means of rapprochement, whether between humans and the natural world or between nations, languages, genres or simply bodies in a room. It can be, in other words, pretext, in the richest sense of the word.

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