

LISTENING TO MUSIC: PEOPLE, PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES

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Samuel Pepys and his experiences of music at Restoration theatres

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Abstract

Restoration London was replete with opportunities to listen to music, even before the first public concerts were established. The Restoration theatre was one of the venues where Londoners had ample opportunity to listen to the newest compositions performed by professionals. But how did listeners write about their experiences? What did listeners notice? What categories were chosen to describe a listening experience? On the basis of the diary of Samuel Pepys, an enthusiastic music lover, the complex issue of early modern writing about listening is approached and analysed in more detail.

Introduction

Music was woven into everyday life in Restoration London. Even despite the absence of modern playback technologies and the resulting dependence on performing individuals in the moment of listening, early modern Londoners engaged in music listening at many different venues.¹ While they did not necessarily produce music themselves, they nevertheless had ample opportunities to listen to others. The theatre was only one of many such places.

One of those Londoners, Samuel Pepys (1633–1703), a well-known figure of the Restoration period, left among his extensive library a diary (which spans the period between 1660 and mid-1669),² containing numerous clues about his varied daily experiences.³ Himself a naval administration officer, he was an enthusiastic amateur musician rather than a professional. His enthusiasm for music infused many aspects of his daily routine and, as a result, is captured in his diary, which also coincides with the beginning of the Restoration period and the re-opening of public theatres.

Scholars have examined Restoration theatre from many different angles.⁴ As far as music is concerned, they have focused on identifying the music that has been performed, on theatre musicians (their role in society, their networks and additional occupations), on composers and on changes in musical style.⁵ To that end, listeners' accounts have been used to illustrate the context of experiences and to serve as individual examples of these features. But they have not been subjected to an exhaustive analysis relating to listening habits, behaviours and verbalisation strategies. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to examine the ways in which Pepys reconstructed his listening experiences at London theatres in writing. Questions asked pertain to Pepys' relationship with the theatre and his attendance habits, as well as the degree to which music is represented in his records and how, that is by what categories. The goal is to show what Pepys determined necessary to write down in order to represent his experiences appropriately and, specifically, what he noticed about music and its performance. However, before the actual analysis, several aspects of Restoration theatre are briefly remarked upon to illustrate common situations and issues listeners were confronted with.

Background on Restoration theatre culture

1660 marks one of the far-reaching turning points of the seventeenth century. With the Restoration of the monarchy, English theatre culture was revived after lying more or less dormant since 1642.⁶ In the intervening period, actors (and musicians) had attempted several times to reinstate theatre performances in public, but these were shut down by the government nearly every time. For that reason, most performances were staged in private homes, accessible only to a select group of people. One of the exceptions shortly before 1660 was the staging of William Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes*,⁷ which was less likely to be interrupted because it contained a high percentage of music.⁸

Despite the various revival attempts during the Commonwealth, theatre houses went into disrepair or were used for other purposes, and no new actors or musicians were trained. Thus, the revival of public theatre performances was a strenuous task. It started up again with King Charles II's Licensing Act, which allowed Thomas Killigrew and William Davenant to each form a theatre company (the former established the King's Company, the latter the

Duke's Company). While Killigrew managed to engage a number of experienced actors who were already active before 1642, and to secure exclusive performance rights to most of the pre-Commonwealth repertoire, Davenant had to look for other competitive advantages.⁹ One of their more pressing tasks was to secure new performance spaces.

Theatre houses

Before the Commonwealth Londoners had a choice between large, public outdoor theatres and a number of smaller private indoor theatres (admission to the latter was more expensive than to the former,¹⁰ but after 1660 only a few indoor theatres were reopened).¹¹ The search for appropriate performance spaces led Killigrew to the Red Bull Theatre in Clerkenwell, a pre-Commonwealth theatre building. But the company quickly moved on to a theatre in Vere Street on 8 November 1660, a building originally known as Gibbon's Tennis Court.¹² Because the Vere Street Theatre was not spacious enough and lacked appropriate stage equipment, Killigrew commissioned a new theatre called the Theatre Royal in Bridges Street near Drury Lane, which opened its doors in 1663. The King's Company was based in that theatre for the rest of Pepys' diary period, not moving on until 1672 after it accidentally burned to the ground. Davenant's company, in turn, started out at Salisbury Court Theatre before settling in to Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre (also a former tennis court) in mid-1661. The company moved from there in 1671, two years after Pepys' last diary entry, into the newly built Dorset Garden Theatre.¹³

Apart from the Theatre Royal and Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, Pepys briefly attended performances at the Red Bull Theatre in Clerkenwell and the old Cockpit Theatre in Drury Lane between 1660 and 1662, and later on he occasionally attended performances at the Court Theatre in Whitehall.¹⁴ In 1667 Killigrew also established a *Nursery*, a training theatre for young actors and actresses. Out of curiosity, Pepys attended their performances twice in February 1668, but said afterwards he would refrain from doing so ever again because he found them lacking in skill.¹⁵

Stage design

Only very few specifics about the respective theatres and their stages have survived and can be stated with certainty. A feature that was already prominent with Renaissance theatres was the apron stage, which protruded into the audience and featured most of the action. The innovation with regard to Restoration theatres was that the stage was extended on both sides, so that performers accessed it through stage doors to either side and not so much from the back of the stage. The stage was lit by footlights and chandeliers. The stage featured a curtain which, once drawn, usually remained that way until the end of the play. One of the novelties introduced to the stage during the

Restoration was painted, moveable scenery, which was placed behind the proscenium arch that framed the main stage. Davenant's company was the first to employ this in a public theatre, continuously looking for a competitive advantage over the King's Company.¹⁶ The scenery was painted on flats or wings that protruded on grooves from both sides onto the stage in vertical succession. This meant that, with scene changes, the front shutters could be moved out of the way to the sides of the stage.¹⁷ This novelty was quite a draw with the audience.¹⁸

Music and its role at Restoration theatre

Music took many forms and roles in Restoration theatre, meaning the music performed does not quite fit into a single category. Curtis Price describes the wide range of music used within the drama as follows:

*Many plays included several songs, at least some of them with choruses and followed by dances; in tragedies one often finds full-blown masques, and music frequently accompanies religious processions or rituals and intensifies and foreshadows tragic events. In comedies, scenes are enhanced with a miscellany of musical entertainments, from miniature concerts to carefully choreographed entry dances.*¹⁹

So musical performances did not just vary in style, but in scale as well. Music also had various functions to fulfil. Price distinguishes, for example, between incidental music and music used within the drama. Incidental music refers to mostly instrumental music that preceded the play (two pairs of contrasting pieces called 'first' and 'second music')²⁰ and was performed between the acts (called 'act tunes' or, towards the end of the century, 'act songs').²¹ Because incidental music was written specifically for each performance and thus offered listeners the newest fashions and styles, its link to the play (if there was any) depended to some extent on the amount of time composers had available to familiarise themselves with the play.²² In the beginning, the main function of the incidental music was 'to provide contrast with and relief from spoken dialogue',²³ although the more music was used within the play the less it could fulfil this function. Additionally, music preceding the play functioned as entertainment while the audience arrived and the end of it simultaneously signalled the beginning of the performance.²⁴ Pepys never mentions incidental music – perhaps an indicator that he did not consider it part of the actual performance and, by extension, of the experience.

As the quote from the beginning of this section suggests, music used within the drama cannot be subsumed under just one category, not just because it could be either vocal or

instrumental, but also because various factors might have been responsible for its inclusion – for example, the plot or expectations inspired by individual actors/musicians. Regarding music within the play, Price attempts to distinguish between para-dramatic music (which is introduced for its own sake) and music that is integral to the development of the plot (and could either enhance the plot's atmosphere or develop naturally through the plot).²⁵

Musicians

Different types of musicians were involved in a theatre performance: a group of instrumentalists, stage musicians (often referred to as 'the musick', which was ambiguously also used to denote music performed)²⁶ and the actors themselves, who performed most of the singing parts and dances.

The group of instrumentalists varied in size depending on the budget. They performed mainly the first and second music and the overture, as well as the act tunes, but also became involved when more elaborate musical scenes were staged.²⁷ The position of the group depended on the setting – wherever there was enough room, but that was not necessarily on stage. One option was the music room – a feature of Renaissance theatres which early Restoration theatres still used; depictions show it right above the stage, though in reality a side balcony might have been used instead.²⁸ Pepys records not just the instrumentalists performing out of the music room, but singers as well.²⁹ Another option was, at least at the newly built Theatre Royal in Bridges Street, in front of or under the apron stage – a position Pepys strongly criticises:

*Only, above all, the Musique being below, and most of it sounding under the very stage, there is no hearing of the bases at all, nor very well of the trebles, which sure must be mended.*³⁰

The stage band often consisted of four or more musicians who performed different kinds of music (dances, serenades, accompaniment to songs, and so on), either on stage in costumes and in minor roles or off stage.³¹ Song accompaniment was usually done by a continuo-player (lutenist or later also a guitarist).³² While melody and lyrics of songs often survived in song anthologies, their accompaniment (that is, as it was actually performed on stage), as well as dance music, is more ephemeral.

The actors performed mostly on stage. Just as their instrumentalist counterparts were expected to possess a certain level of acting skill, so actors needed to have some skill in singing and dancing, although they mostly did not reach a professional level.³³ Thus, demanding repertoire was performed by members of the stage band.

Audience

Due to a lack of sufficient source material such as subscription lists, the social composition of the Restoration audience has been the subject of some scholarly debate. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarly misconception of the Restoration audience as a more or less homogeneous group of disinterested, rowdy aristocrats was re-evaluated in the late twentieth century. Javier García argued, for example, that plays were commonly referred to in non-theatre-related political publications that addressed diverse social groups, who consequently must have had knowledge of the plays' content. This, he argues, is an indicator of a more diverse composition of the audience.³⁴ He argues further that scholarly misconceptions might have stemmed from an inappropriate interpretation of characters, and from other contemporary publications that exaggerated the situation because of their targeted readership.³⁵ As a result of these discussions, it is now widely accepted that the audience was composed of multiple social classes. Through an analysis of Pepys' diary, Emmet Avery has shown, for instance, that the audience on these occasions when Pepys attended the theatre included members of the aristocracy (royalty included), parliament, the clergy, physicians, various family members and their servants, apprentices, public servants, and also playwrights or competing actors and actresses.³⁶ Because ticket prices only rudimentarily regulated the seating arrangements, social groups were not strictly separated from each other.³⁷ Despite the common occurrence of social variance, Pepys favoured a certain degree of balance between middling classes and the nobility, criticising the situation if in his opinion the audience was dominated too much by 'citizens'.³⁸

Another discussion point is theatre-goers' degree of attention towards the stage (not only during the Restoration, but also in the eighteenth century).³⁹ Theatre-going was a social act – that is well established – and the conditions favoured interaction among audience members: the auditorium remained lit by candles throughout the performance; and orange sellers walked around and sold snacks. From Pepys' records of other people's behaviour, it becomes clear that audience members were quite attentive, despite such distractions, and as part of their attentiveness offered immediate feedback, which they not only directed towards the stage, but exchanged with each other. Pepys records one of these instances:

[T]o the King's playhouse, where The Heiress, notwithstanding Kinaston's being beaten, is acted; and they say the King is very angry with Sir Ch. Sidly for his being beaten; but he doth deny it. But his part is done by Beeston, who is fain to read it out of a book all the while, and thereby spoils the part and almost the play, it being one of the best parts in it; [...]. But it was pleasant to see Beeston come in with others, supposing it to be dark and yet he is forced to read his part by the light of the candles. And this I observing to a gentleman that sat

by me, he was mightily pleased therewith and spread it up and down.⁴⁰

On one occasion audience members hissed performers off the stage, because they disliked the singing so much.⁴¹ On other occasions it is the lack of reaction from them that supports Pepys' low opinion of a performance.⁴²

Macro perspective: Pepys' theatre-related habits over the course of his diary

After pointing out some of the circumstances surrounding Restoration theatre-going, the analysis will turn to Pepys' diary from three different perspectives, starting with the macro level, looking at the whole diary.

In total, the diary includes 350 instances in which Pepys attended the theatre in person.⁴³ Figure 1 shows the distribution of *absolute counts* for his attendance, sorted by year. After the newly-formed theatre companies tentatively started out in 1660, the following year Pepys suddenly found ample opportunity to visit them, eager as he was to attend plays. After that, the sudden drop in attendance marks the beginning of the effect of his vows⁴⁴ – a means of self-control, by which he attempted to temper his pleasure-seeking nature and improve his reputation.⁴⁵ Thus, during the following years (that is, 1662 to 1666) his attendance is rather moderate. Besides that, both catastrophes (the plague and Great Fire) that struck London during 1665 and 1666 show up clearly in the data.⁴⁶ After that, not only did Pepys enjoy performances with higher frequency, but his entries become longer and more detailed.

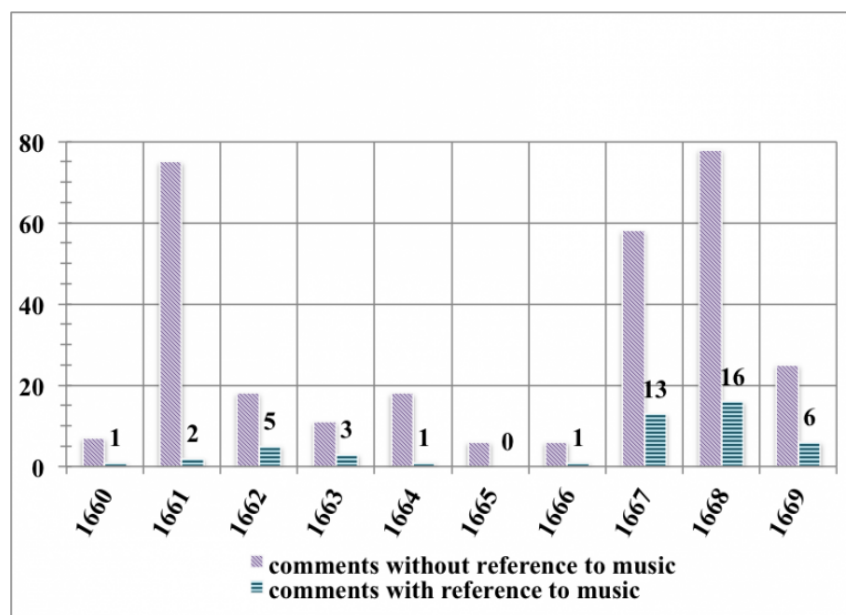


Figure 1: Attendance of theatre performances in absolute numbers

Figure 1 also makes it clear that music in comparison is not a prominent feature in Pepys' recollection of theatre experiences. Only in 48 out of the 350 cases does music come up. The incidences become more frequent in the latter years of his diary, suggesting that he might have needed time to build up an expertise in theatrical music first and only afterwards felt competent enough to have an opinion. As already mentioned, Pepys does not comment on incidental music, focusing only on music within the drama. But still, keeping in mind the prominent role music had within the drama suggests that Pepys perceived this kind of music as an integral part of the play, and as an aspect not easily separated from the whole theatrical performance. And because he did not appear to consider the music and play separate from each other, this could explain why, despite music's quantitative presence, it is not mentioned more frequently in the diary. In such cases, music possibly did not outshine the rest of the play enough and, consequently, was left out of the description. This selectiveness is one of the disadvantages of the diary format. Due to the limitations dictated by the diary's materiality, anything that is recorded has to constitute an indispensable part of the experience that is necessary to record in order to define the experience itself.

A closer examination of the nature of Pepys' accounts shows that they vary to some extent in length. On average, over the whole of the diary, a description of a theatrical experience is 77 words long (accounts including music are on average 118 words long; accounts that do not comment on music are on average 70 words long). A glance at a higher resolution of the distribution over the years (see Figure 2) shows that entries including musical references are generally longer – the exception being around the year 1665, during which Pepys had less opportunity to witness performances in general because theatres were closed from mid-1665 until late in 1666 due to the plague and the Great Fire. Besides, when the King and court left London due to the situation, so did most musicians, which suggests that either the proportion of music included in theatrical performances was reduced or Pepys could also have been too distracted by current events, which might have resulted in shorter entries.

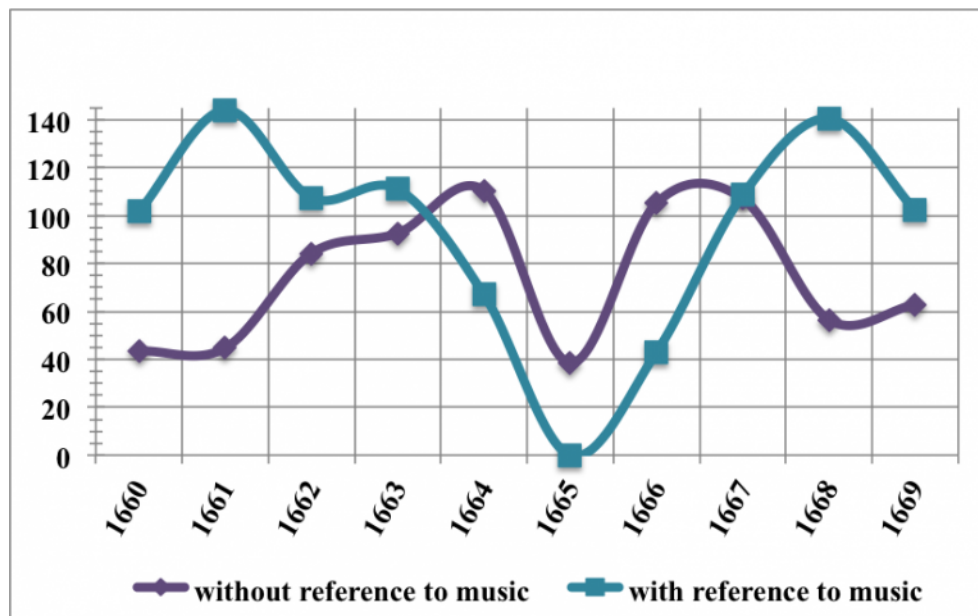


Figure 2: Average length of entries based on number of words

And at this point, on the macro level at least, it becomes peculiar because, on the one hand – looking back to Figure 1 – though performances included music, it is seldom mentioned, despite its quantitative presence. An explanation might be that it is perceived as an integral part of the whole performance and thus requires a specific degree of exceptionality to be noticed. However, on the other hand – turning now again to Figure 2 – the difference in entry length suggests that music is not as integrated into the experience as one might think, but comes to the experience on top of what usually determines it. Because the solution to this contradiction seems elusive on the macro level, a closer examination of the way Pepys reconstructs his experiences on paper might shed more light on this.

Meso perspective: categories that determine a theatre-related experience

Pepys uses quite a formalised method of record-keeping. Entries featuring theatre-related experiences are all fairly similarly constructed. Figure 3 shows the categories Pepys creates and the way in which he connects them to reconstruct his experiences in writing.

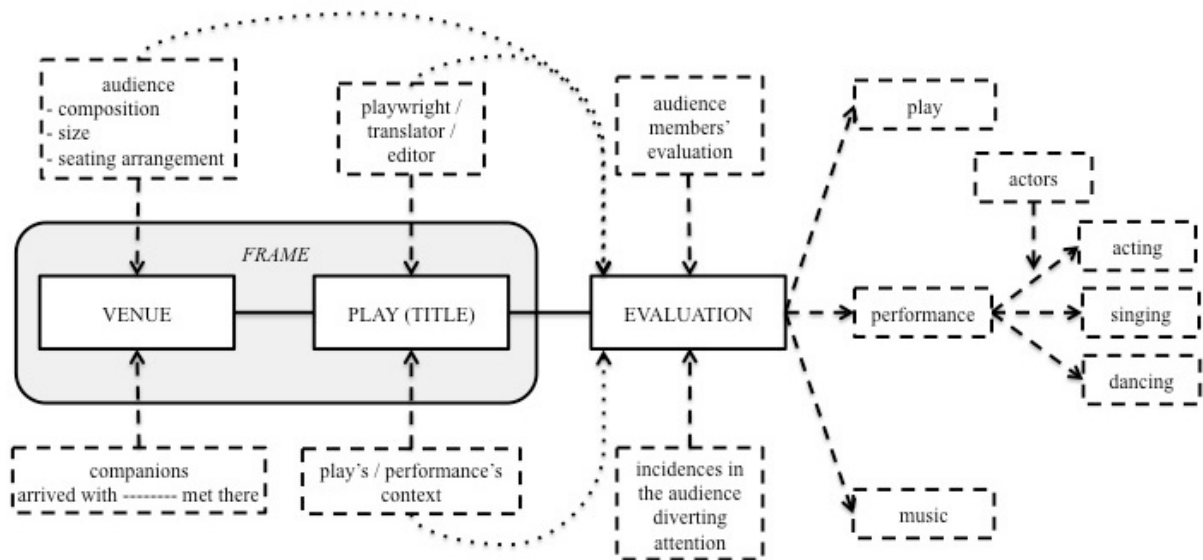


Figure 3: Schematic representation of Pepys' entries relating to theatrical experiences

First of all, Pepys constructs a frame for each experience with the categories *venue* and *play* – for instance: ‘I to the Duke of York’s playhouse, where a new play of Etheriges called *She would if she could*’.⁴⁷ There are only six occasions for which Pepys neglects to set this frame.⁴⁸ This frame is then continued by one or more evaluations that describe Pepys’ opinion about individual aspects of said frame and occasionally the effect the experience had on him – placing the third cornerstone. Because no evaluations are made in very abbreviated entries, the third cornerstone is not included in the frame itself, but is positioned as more of a continuation of it.

Depending on what a situation requires, any of the three cornerstones might be augmented with various details. Nearly all of these additional details can influence Pepys’ evaluations of the experience (see the dotted, curved lines in Figure 3). An exception to this is his immediate company, a detail he uses to expand on the category *venue*.⁴⁹ Further details used to enrich the description are related to the audience⁵⁰ – its social composition and the seating arrangements. To return to the example introduced in the last paragraph, it continues thus:

And though I was there by 2 a-clock, there was 1000 people put back that could not have room in the pit; and I at last, because my wife was there, made shift to get into the 18d box – and there saw; but Lord, how full was the house [...]. The King was there; but I sat mightily behind, and could see but little and hear not all.⁵¹

While his immediate companions do not influence his evaluations (that is the reason why in Figure 3 no dotted curved line links his companions to the evaluation category), the composition and size of the audience did occasionally have an impact, especially considering an imbalance between gentlemen/-women and ‘citizens’ in the audience (see section on ‘Audience’). Apart from Pepys’ perception of social inappropriateness regarding

the audience's composition, the seating arrangement occasionally impaired his view or the acoustics (see the last quote), thus indirectly impacting the evaluation. Furthermore, from Pepys' remarks on other incidents it becomes apparent that in Restoration London the number of theatre-goers did not suffice to fill both major theatres at the same time.⁵² Rather, Pepys notes how premieres, even performances on the second day and special events pulled the audience to one house, leaving the other almost empty. Novelty seems to have been ranked higher than quality among the deciding factors regarding the choice of venue.⁵³

The second cornerstone of Pepys' frame – the category *play* – is expanded by adding details that concern the person responsible for the textual material, be it the actual playwright, the translator or the editor. By mentioning these names Pepys implies expectations he had towards the performance, as in this example:

*The play is a translation out of French, and the plot Spanish; but not anything extraordinary at all in it, though translated by Sir W Davenant.*⁵⁴

Further details create a context for the performance and include additional information about the play in the form of phrase-like labels, for example, that it is a new play, an old one newly adapted, the premiere of the play, the second or third day of its performance, and so on. All of these additional details that expand the frame constituted by *venue* and *play* are presented in a factual manner, despite their potential to influence following evaluations. They might have carried along expectations, but seldom carried any evaluation in their description.

The third cornerstone of Pepys' experience reconstruction – *evaluation* – tells, among other things, about music heard. That music is not part of the frame is another discovery. It supports the hypothesis that music within the drama is not easily separated from the play and its performance, but perceived as an integral, yet not itself a defining part. Evaluations can be subdivided into three main subcategories: *play*, *performance* and *music*, the second of which can be subdivided again into *acting*, *singing* and *dancing*. These subcategories are not independent of each other in every case; for example *acting* might sometimes include a musical performance, because songs were mostly performed by actors (see the [section on 'Musicians'](#)). Each of these subcategories can be applied as need be, whenever the situation requires it. A closer look at the whole of Pepys' evaluations shows that he uses two different types of judgements for this category: type A – a very brief one (for exemplary quotes see Table 1), offering just a qualitative evaluation without stating reasons or being specific about what aspects are actually judged; and type B – a more detailed, often longer evaluation (for exemplary quotes see Tables 2 and 3). Both types follow a hierarchy with type A ranking higher, that is type A judgements are usually employed first and with higher frequency.

Table 1: Vocabulary used for brief evaluations (excerpts from accounts of those theatre experiences that include music only: Pepys, Diary, various vols.)

	Play	Performance			Music
		Acting	Singing	Dancing	
		<i>general level</i>			
POSITIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (very) good • very pleasant • most innocent • one of the best plays for a stage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • well acted / performed • actors most good in it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very pretty • good singing • sings finely • very properly • singing did please us 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pretty • some good dancing • very good • most excellently done • dances finely • most admirable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mighty pretty • curious piece of music • very stately • better than we looked
NEGATIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bad one • little good in it • not anything extraordinary at all in it • no excellent • mean • ordinary • most insipid, ridiculous • (very) silly • silly, dull thing • so so • a play I could not make anything of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poorly done • indifferently done • ill acted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not singing it right • sings naughtily • sings meanly • voice not very good 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • never was worse music played; that is, worse things composed

- by those two acts
- not that the play is worth much

Looking at the distribution of excerpts of type A judgements in Table 1, the most immediate conclusion is that Pepys uses a more varied vocabulary for the general evaluation of plays than for any other evaluated subcategory.⁵⁵ Furthermore, while adjectives used for general, positive judgements do not discriminate between different subcategories and thus are quite similar, focusing heavily on variations of *good*, the picture looks different for general, negative judgements. Here adjectives used vary to a greater degree in the case of plays than those used for the execution subcategories (that is, acting, singing, and dancing). This level of evaluation does not offer many insights into Pepys' thoughts, but rather just classifies individual parts that constitute the event. It is important to keep in mind at this point, that not all these different elements are necessarily classified for every event. Again, the diary format is probably the reason for this. But considering the function of these brief evaluations, it is interesting that Pepys distinguishes at all between not only material and execution, but also different kinds of executions.

Looking next at the type B evaluations – the more descriptive, often longer ones – it is noteworthy that especially after 1666 Pepys becomes more verbose, specifically when judging the play and the musical performance. On this evaluation level Pepys no longer just praises or discards various subcategories defining his experience, but on the one hand he names specific characteristics that are evaluated and on the other hand he more often deliberates about the quality, comparing it with his expectations, with preconceived ideals or past experiences.

Table 2: Vocabulary used for specific evaluations of 'play' (excerpts from accounts of those theatre experiences that include music only: Pepys, Diary, various vols.)

Play

specific level

POSITIVE

- good action in it
- full of variety
- having many good humours in it

COMPARATIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no great wit, but yet good, above ordinary • a most sad, melancholy play, and pretty good, but nothing eminent in it as some Tragedies are • a very good play, but only the fancy; most of it the same as in the rest of my Lord Orery's plays • but his words are but silly • while all the rest did through the whole pit blame the play as a silly, dull thing, though there was something very roguish and witty; but the design of the play, and end, mighty insipid • though there was here and there a pretty saying, and that not very many neither, yet the whole of the play had nothing extraordinary in it at all, neither of language nor design • and though the design is in the first conception of it pretty good, yet it is but an indifferent play • he silliest for words and design, and everything, that ever I saw in my whole life, there being nothing in the world pleasing in it but a good martial dance of pike-men
<hr/>	
NEGATIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • but of all the plays that ever I did see, the worst, having neither plot, language, nor anything in the earth that is acceptable • a silly play, I think, only the spirit in it, that grows very Tall and then sinks again to nothing

An examination of the type B evaluations of the subcategory 'play' (see Table 2) shows that aspects such as 'design', 'language', 'action', 'humour and wit', as well as 'variety', are influential in the deliberate, qualitative evaluation. With regards to the content of the categories, Pepys does not create new subcategories. He also does not change the vocabulary used to assign qualitative value, but rather he attributes the same evaluative adjectives to more precise characteristics of the respective subcategory. Thus, type B judgements are not necessarily longer than type A ones, but more precise.

In contrast, type B evaluations of the 'performance' (see Table 3), more specifically those referring to *acting* and *singing*, leave out any characteristics of execution that might indicate what has influenced Pepys' judgement, and instead focus on who performs what, followed by a preference judgement. Only in reference to *dancing* is 'variety' again identified as an influential factor. A possible explanation for the difference between type B evaluations of *play* and *performance* might be hidden in the distinction between material and performative action. The aspects Pepys identifies as the basis for his evaluation of plays are based on literary ideals – characteristics that Pepys might have learned at school

or through private study, aspects readers outside the performance context would consider, too. On the other hand, Pepys' evaluation of performative action lacks those preconceived ideals. This is not limited to performances in the theatre context, but applies, for example, to musical performances in domestic contexts as well. A possible explanation might be that Pepys knew the contemporary literary discourse on drama and extracted characteristics necessary to evaluate from it, but he did not possess the same theoretical knowledge with regard to the performance of drama and music. This would imply that he did not know what to listen and watch for. Because literature related to music that Pepys had access to rarely said much about music composition (it focused either on philosophy or performance practice) and music criticism had not been institutionalised yet, Pepys could also be missing role models on which he could model his own writings. This would mean that modes of writing or speaking about performances might not have been as differentiated as in the case of literature.

Table 3: Vocabulary used for specific evaluations of the 'performance' (excerpts from accounts of those theatre experiences that include music only: Pepys, Diary, various vols.)

Performance			
	Acting	Singing	Dancing
	<i>specific level</i>		
POSITIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> made the loveliest lady giving us fresh reason never to think enough of Betterton Knipp does the Widow well Nelly, a most pretty woman, who acted the great part, Coelia, today very fine, and did it pretty well finely Acted by Becke Marshall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sings a little song admirably pretty to hear Knipp sing in the play very properly, <i>All night I Weep</i>, and sung it admirably that we might hear the French Eunuch sing; which we did, to our great content But such action and singing I could never have 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the best variety of dancing and music that ever I saw great variety of dances, and those most excellently done In the dance, the Tall Devil's actions was very pretty Miss' dancing in a shepherd's clothes did please us mightily I was pleased to see Knipp dance among the milkmaids

- imagined to have heard
- but that that pleased me most in the play is the first song that Knipp sings (she singing three or four); and indeed, it was very finely sung
- a most admirable dance at the end, of the ladies in a Military manner, which indeed did please me mightily
- a good martial dance of pike-men, where Harris and another do handle their pikes in a dance to admiration

COMPARATIVE

- doth it rather better in all respects, for person, voice and judgment
- ill acted to what it was heretofore in Clun's time and when Lacy could dance

- this being infinitely beyond the other

- being most pleased to see the little girl dance in boy's apparel, she having very fine legs; only, bends in the hams as I perceive all women do
- there is no comparison between Nell's dancing the other day at the King's house in boy's clothes and this, this being infinitely beyond the other

NEGATIVE

- with much disorder
- the acting not much worse, because I expected as bad as could: and I was not much mistaken, for it was so

- fell out of key
- [he] was so much out

- But his part is done
by Beeston, who is
fain to read it out of a
book all the while,
and thereby spoils
the part and almost
the play, it being one
of the best parts in it
-

Another observation that is evident in Table 3 is that for *singing* and *dancing* Pepys mixes in more personal statements about his preference – for example, he is ‘pleased’ to hear someone sing. While all of his evaluations are of course subjective, they are usually at least presented in a more objective manner; but, at this point his individual reaction starts to shine through.

Musical material unfortunately is not evaluated in detail. This, too, is not specific to the theatre context. Apart from these most frequently occurring subcategories, Pepys occasionally also evaluates actors’ or actresses’ outer appearance; he shows appreciation for painted scenery employed on stage and very rarely judges the architecture of the theatre, referring to the latter mostly when seating arrangements impair his view and/or the acoustics. His evaluations remain mostly constant over multiple viewings of the play, especially if he liked the experience from the beginning.⁵⁶ Another discovery is that in the case of multiple viewings different things seem to become noteworthy to him. He does not usually mention things – apart from the type A judgements – twice.

Micro perspective: how music affected Pepys

On a micro level, the differences between quotes from either end of the diary mark changes in the way Pepys describes his listening experiences. While Pepys remains constant in his evaluation practice by stating preferences, rather than identifying and judging characteristics of music, in later years he increasingly adds details about emotional effects to his descriptions; for example, on 27 February 1668 Pepys writes:

[A]nd thence with my wife and Deb to the King’s House to see Virgin Martyr, the first time it hath been acted a great while, and it is mighty pleasant; not that the play is worth much, but it is finely Acted by Becke Marshall; but that which did please me beyond anything in the whole world was the wind-musique when the Angell comes down,

*which is so sweet that it ravished me; and indeed, in a word, did wrap up my soul so that it made me really sick, just as I have formerly been when in love with my wife; that neither then, nor all the evening going home and at home, I was able to think of anything, but remained all night transported, so as I could not believe that ever any music hath that real command over the soul of a man as this did upon me.*⁵⁷

This quote on its own shows Pepys' modular strategy of experience reconstruction in action: he starts with the frame constituted by *venue* ('King's House', that is Theatre Royal in Bridges Street) and *play* ('Virgin Martyr'), and expands the latter with details about the play's performance history ('first time it hath been acted a great while'), and the former with naming his companions (his wife and her maid). He goes on giving type A judgements of the 'play' and the *acting* ('not that the play is worth much'; 'it is mighty pleasant'). And then he continues with two type B evaluations, giving a little more detail on the 'acting' ('it is finely Acted by Becke Marshall') and culminating in the emphatic evaluation of the musical performance, describing how deeply and especially physically it affected him. Beyond naming the type of music ('wind-musique') and the visual description of the moment of its experience ('when the Angell comes down'), he focuses on its effects. One could argue that 'sweet' is an auditory characteristic, but that is the only one tentatively going in that direction. The rest of the description is completely focused on the way it affected his mind and body.

But that quote is particular in two further ways: for one thing, it describes instrumental music that seemingly was not performed on stage, but could be linked to the supernatural being, the angel, coming from above. Instrumental music is usually something Pepys does not notice unless it is part of the plot and thus linked to a performer or intended target on stage, the visual link between action and sound being a determining factor.

Despite numerous plays including supernatural beings, Pepys rarely mentions them and an explanation for his curiously empathic exclamation about the physical effects might be due to the link to the supernatural whose power is transferred via the visual onto the acoustic and thus could explain the extreme reaction.⁵⁸

In any case, lingering effects and strong physical reactions are rare in Pepys descriptions and occur only in the latter part of the diary. There are not enough of these quotes to constitute with certainty a change in writing strategy with regard to music, but its particularity stands out nonetheless.

Conclusion

So far, the analysis of Pepys' diary from three different vantage points has shown that music listening cannot be easily extracted or separated from descriptions of theatre-related experiences. Pepys does not write about incidental music, but rather about music within the drama only. He focuses heavily on songs and dances that were mostly performed by actors visible to him during the experience. Thus, the music Pepys describes is, in most cases, an integral part of the theatrical performance. The sparseness with which Pepys includes music in his entries supports this, taking into account that the material limitations of the diary format required everything recorded to cross a certain threshold of exceptionality and importance first in order to warrant its incorporation into the account as part of the experience.

The possibility that Pepys perceived music as something extra rather than integral to the play, which the data represented in Figure 2 initially suggested (because diary entries including music in the theatre context on average are longer than those not referring to music), has been countered by the analysis of his systematic approach (see Figure 3). For each theatrical experience Pepys meticulously sets up a frame which is continued by evaluations. To enrich his report, he chooses from a set of categories (including *play*, *music* and *performance*, that is, acting, singing and dancing), all of which represent parts of the experience but are only mentioned if they are deemed indispensable for the definition of the experience as a whole. Therefore, the fact that Pepys' accounts including music are longer could have another cause. One explanation might be that the length is a representation of his uncertainty, his ignorance with regard to common ideals of composition and sound. Commenting on his personal preferences and on the impact music had on him might be his way of hiding the fact. He does not reflect on why he considers it necessary to judge individual parts of his experience, including music. The evaluation of music he experiences is also not limited to the theatre context, which could mean that this habit was a defining component of Pepys' music listening practice on a broader scale.

A closer analysis of vocabulary used to evaluate several different categories relating to performative action challenges the idea that music might be perceived separately from the play even further, because Pepys does not discriminate between individual categories. Instead, he uses the same vocabulary for them all on the general evaluative level. Furthermore, the analysis showed that Pepys employs two different types of evaluation, the difference between them pertaining to their level of specificity. While more elaborated judgements of the material basis for the performance remained brief, but became more distinct and precise, judgements of performative categories like *acting*, *singing* and *dancing* in contrast remained rather unspecific. Pepys added to them only circumstantial facts. The analysis thus has shown that during the 1660s at least Pepys' verbalisation strategies differ in the cases of literature and performance. This difference could stem either from his ignorance with regard to respective contemporary discourses, that is from not knowing what to evaluate in more detail and how to describe it, or it could stem from

differing natures of writing and speaking about both categories. In any case, Pepys' evaluations of performance and music remain simple.

It is unfortunate that Pepys discontinued his diary in 1669. It would have been interesting to compare his descriptions of listening at the theatre with experiences he probably had at the first commercial concerts in the 1670s, to find out how his perception of music, and maybe even the strategy used to describe it, had developed by then.

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📖 **LISTENING IN HISTORICAL CONTEXTS**

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