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TIM EGGINGTON

Raising the Status of Music and the Musician at the Academy of Ancient Music in Eighteenth-Century London

It is widely recognised that eighteenth-century London's fast changing commercial and cultural environment provided multiple contexts for artistic legitimisation and advancement which took the art of music in new directions.¹ This paper identifies an important, yet little known approach taken by a gathering of musicians who in 1726 met at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on the Strand to form a club that became known as the Academy of Ancient Music.² Although this organisation is well known to those interested in eighteenth-century English music, not least for having hosted one of the earliest public performances of a George Frideric Handel oratorio,³ the wid-

1 Recent additions to this literature can be found in Matthew Gardner and Alison DeSimone (eds.), *Music and the Benefit Performance in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Cambridge 2019, especially Amanda Eubanks Winkler's chapter in that volume, "English Music in Benefit Concerts. Henry Purcell and the Next Generation", pp. 145–161. Further examples include John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, London 1997; Simon McVeigh, *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn*, Cambridge 1993; William Weber, *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-Century England. A Study in Canon, Ritual, and Ideology*, Oxford 1992.

2 Accounts of the Academy of Ancient Music can be found in Christopher Hogwood, "'Gropers into Antique Musick' or 'A very ancient and respectable Society'? Historical Views of the Academy of Ancient Music", in *Coll'astuzia, col giudizio. Essays in Honor of Neal Zaslaw*, ed. Cliff Eisen, Ann Arbor 2009, pp. 127–182; H. Diack Johnstone, "Westminster Abbey and the Academy of Ancient Music. A Library once Lost and now Partially Recovered", in *Music & Letters* 95 (2014), pp. 329–373; Tim Eggington, *The Advancement of Music in Enlightenment England. Benjamin Cooke and the Academy of Ancient Music*, Woodbridge 2014; H. Diack Johnstone, "The Academy of Ancient Music (1726–1802). Its History, Repertoire and Surviving Programmes", in *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 51 (2020), pp. 1–136.

3 This was the last of three performances of *Esther* initiated by the academician Bernard Gates that took place on 23 February, 1 March, and 3 March 1732. See Donald Burrows, *Handel and the English Chapel Royal*, Oxford 2005, pp. 288–289.

er significance of the Academy's various activities when viewed collectively has been less appreciated. This is partly due to the fact that, for much of its long period of existence, the Academy led an insular existence, apparently more interested in furthering its own learned agenda than in promoting its performances as part of London's growing concert life. As we shall see, it was mainly through a network of professional musicians that permeated English musical culture throughout the eighteenth century and after that the ethos of the Academy would ultimately make its mark. By projecting a conception of music as a learned and serious art these musicians assumed a countercultural relationship with mainstream tastes some of which they saw as frivolous. Yet, this story is about much more than simply a reaction to new fashions and habits of consumption. In the Academy's self-avowed commitment to the "Advancement of Musick"⁴ can be perceived an aspiration to further and inform the art of composition, in part, by establishing for music those same tools of historiography and criticism that had been achieved in relation to literature.

I. A "Musick Meeting" for "Grave ancient vocell Musick"

As recorded by one contemporary observer, the Academy first met on 7 January 1726 "at Y^e Crown Tavern near S^t Clements... chiefly [sic] for Grave ancient vocell Musick".⁵ Initially named the Academy of Vocal Musick, the club's aims may be deduced from various overseas correspondences early academicians instigated, partly as a means to raise their status and profile amongst the musical profession both at home and abroad. One of these, written to the Venetian composer Antonio Lotti in 1732, explains how the Academy had been formed:

not for the Management of Theatrical Affairs, but the Improvement of the Science, by searching after, examining, and hearing performed the Works of the Masters, who flourished before, or about the Age of Palestrina: However, not entirely neglecting those who in our Time have grown famous.⁶

4 *Letters from the Academy of Ancient Musick at London, to Sigr Antonio Lotti of Venice. With his Answers and Testimonies*, London 1732, p. 17.

5 Inscription in a manuscript music volume, GB-DRc MS E15, which indicates that the Academy's inaugural meeting began with Luca Marenzio's five-part madrigal, "Dolorosi martir". See Brian Crosby, *A Catalogue of Durham Cathedral Music Manuscripts*, Oxford 1986, p. 66.

6 *Letters from the Academy*, 1732, p. 3.

We get an impression of what it was that this gathering of musicians performed at their semi-public fortnightly performances in another international networking letter, this one sent to Agostino Steffani in 1727:

Seeing that good and true music was everywhere in decline, it was proposed by some to form a band of virtuoso singers and composers, who would meet once a fortnight for two continuous hours in a large room, where they would spend their time singing Masses, psalms, motets, madrigals, canons, and other well-wrought items in four, five or more parts, without instruments.⁷

The letter goes on to include the names of Josquin des Prez, Orlande de Lassus, Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina and a number of other Renaissance and early Baroque composers, some of whose works may never before have been heard in England, and certainly not in a tavern. In order to understand what it was the early academicians intended to achieve through their commitment to “the Advancement of Musick” and the role in it of early music (especially Renaissance polyphony), it must be remembered that at that time, the musical past was relatively little known. Unlike poetry and drama, no musical works had survived from antiquity that could be enjoyed and revered as classics. Viewed by many as ephemeral entertainment, performed music tended to be the work of living composers, conceived, perhaps, for a specific purpose or occasion, after which it was forgotten. So widespread was the acceptance of this ‘contemporaneity’ in musical taste in the early eighteenth century that there was little comment on the matter in published literature.⁸ Yet, a rare and informative exception can be found in the publication of three articles alluding to “Old Stile” music in the *Universal Journal* in 1724, the third appearing on 25 July as a letter from an unidentified correspondent “addressed to” the journal’s “author”.⁹ This letter was

7 Letter from Nicola Haym to Agostino Steffani, 13 / 24 February 1727, transcribed and translated in Colin Timms and Lowell Lindgren, “The Correspondence of Agostino Steffani and Giuseppe Riva, 1720–1728, and Related Correspondence with J. P. F. von Schönborn and S. B. Pallavicini”, in *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 36 (2003), pp. 1–174, pp. 111–112.

8 William Weber has written widely on this subject. See, inter alia, “The Contemporaneity of Eighteenth-Century Musical Taste”, in *Musical Quarterly* 70 (1984), pp. 175–194; id., “The Intellectual Origins of Musical Canon in Eighteenth-Century England”, in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 47 (1994), pp. 488–520; id. 1992, *Rise of Musical Classics*.

9 *Universal Journal*, 25 July 1724, p. 3. The preceding two pieces appeared on 27 May and 11 July. I am indebted here to discussion by William Weber and Donald Burrows in “Henry Purcell and *The Universal Journal*: the building of musical canon in the 1720s”, in *Music and History: Bridging the Disciplines*, eds. Jeffrey H. Jackson and Stanley C. Pelkey, Jackson 2005, pp. 181–199. This quotes all three pieces in full and suggests that they may have been the

devoted entirely to veneration for “the late famous Mr. Henry Purcell” and the correspondent’s resentment towards those who would “lay his Memory low in Oblivion”. Having condemned those “modern Fops who seem resolv’d to tear the Laurel from his Brow” on account of his music being in “Old Stile”, the correspondent asks why this “nice Distinction of Old Stile and New Stile” is applied to music, but not its “Sister-Arts”, painting and poetry:

We have doubtless many good Painters now living; must therefore *Rubens, Van-dyke, Lilly, and Kneller* be forgot? Must *Spencer, Milton, Shakespear, and Addison* be never read, because there are Writers of a later Date? And must *Corelli, Bird, and Purcel* never be sung, because they are Old Stile?¹⁰

As this correspondent would have known, Purcell had in fact been performed during the first decades of the eighteenth century in certain specific contexts, as had the other composers he mentions. Service music and anthems by Elizabethan composers had never entirely fallen from use in the services of the Chapel Royal and certain cathedrals.¹¹ Indeed, it was in part amongst musicians from London’s choral foundations that the activities of the academicians took root. Likewise, following his death in 1713, the concertos of Arcangelo Corelli remained popular in Britain, both among amateur musicians owing to their relative technical ease, but also due to the rare status Corelli’s compositional style attained as an exemplar for clarity and order in harmony and melody, not least, amongst members of the Academy.¹² The reasons for the continued performance of Henry Purcell after his death can to some degree be attributed to factors specific to Purcell. With regard to his theatre music, William Weber has argued that an uncertain commercial and political environment at the turn of the century had led some managers to seek out previously popular works for revival. This and Purcell’s high standing in literary circles had contributed to the revival from 1704 of several plays containing Purcell’s music, and in turn, to the inclusion of his music

work of Ambrose Philips and Leonard Welsted. The last of the three is also quoted in full in the *Handel Reference Database* created by Ilias Chrissochoidis, <http://ichriss.ccarh.org/HRD/> (last access 19 November 2020).

¹⁰ *Universal Journal*, 25 July 1724, p. 3.

¹¹ Weber 1992, *Rise of Musical Classics*, chapter 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 77–89. For discussion of the exalted position attained by Corelli in the teaching and thinking of the founder academician, Johann Christoph Pepusch, see John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* [1776], new ed., 2 vols., London 1853, vol. 2, p. 832.

in concerts of the period.¹³ Within the wider context of English eighteenth-century musical culture these were, however, relatively isolated instances and the popularity of Corelli and Purcell had in any case largely dissipated by the 1750s.¹⁴ Indeed, the following remarks concerning the public's "love of Novelty" by the academician John Hawkins in 1769 suggest that as far as he was concerned, little had changed since publication of the letter on "Old Stile" over forty years previously: "Nothing in music is estimable, that is not new. No music tolerable, which has been heard before". In Hawkins' view, such reasoning had never been applied to other "intellectual gratifications": "no man was ever yet so weak as to object to the works of Virgil or Raffaëlle, that the one wrote seventeen hundred, or that the other painted two hundred and fifty years ago."¹⁵

With little knowledge or appreciation for the musical past amongst audiences, the academicians' cosmopolitan breadth of interest in "Grave ancient vocell Musick" would have seemed remarkable, if not eccentric at the time of their first meeting. We get a hint of uncertainty concerning the dating of the music that featured in their own performances from the early academicians themselves. A memo dated 26 May 1731 in a manuscript volume containing the Academy's original constitution and subscribers' lists defines the word "ancient" thus: "By y^e Compositions of the Ancients is meant of such as lived before y^e end of the ~~fifteenth~~ ^{Sixteenth} Century".¹⁶ It was precisely this kind of uncertainty that academicians and their associates would do so much to diminish through their various historicist activities.

As possibly the first organisation to revive and perform Renaissance madrigals, masses and motets in a secular and semi-public context for the purposes of studying and enjoying them, the academicians anticipated the emergence of musical classics that would occur early in the next century. There was, however, much more to the Academy than a seemingly eccentric taste for old music. In reality, their interest in the musical past was

13 Weber 1992, *Rise of Musical Classics*, pp. 89–102. See also Richard Lockett, "Or Rather our Musical Shakespeare: Charles Burney's Purcell", in *Music in Eighteenth-Century England: Essays in Memory of Charles Cudworth*, eds. Christopher Hogwood and Richard Lockett, Cambridge 1983, pp. 59–77; Winkler 2019, "English Music in Benefit Concerts".

14 Surviving Academy programmes suggest that Purcell was little performed at the Academy until the 1760s when his music began to achieve greater prominence at its meetings. For further discussion see Eggington 2014, *The Advancement of Music*, pp. 94–96.

15 [John Hawkins], *An Account of the Institution and Progress of the Academy of Ancient Music*, London 1770, p. 13.

16 GB-Lbl Add. MS 11732, fol. 16^r.

part of a more ambitious agenda that played a pioneering role in activities such as music editing, theorising, publishing and historiography. Even more importantly for some of the club's members, study of the musical past promised the means to advance the modern art of composition. Before considering aspects of this agenda and its role in the legitimisation and advancement of music and musicians, let us first consider who the club's early members were.

II. The Academy's founding membership

The sense of exclusivity that characterised the club's early years is emphasised in the academician Nicola Haym's boast that the Academy's activities were "undertaken solely for our study and pleasure, and not to provide unappreciated nourishment for the ignorant".¹⁷ It was in order to realise this aspiration for exclusivity that the subscribing membership was initially restricted to members of the music profession.¹⁸ Although this would undergo a degree of relaxation in 1735 to allow for the admittance of auditors as subscribers¹⁹ the status of the Academy as a professional club directed by learned musicians would remain for a period of over fifty years. In this the Academy privileged musical expertise above any lingering obligations to patronage that may still have held sway over English musical life. Amongst the thirteen who attended the Academy's first meeting were a group from London choral foundations, the most accomplished being the composer Maurice Greene (then vicar-choral and organist at St Paul's Cathedral).²⁰ The presence of two German musicians, Johann Christoph Pepusch and John Ernest Galliard, emphasises the cosmopolitan nature of the organisation in its earliest years, both in terms of its membership and interests. The aforementioned manuscript volume now in the British Library containing lists of early subscribers to the Academy shows how the society's programme of fortnightly meetings quickly attracted new members, some of whom can

17 Letter from Nicola Haym to Agostino Steffani, 13 / 24 February 1727, in Timms and Lindgren 2003, "The Correspondence of Agostino Steffani and Giuseppe Riva", p. 111.

18 The original constitution states that "any Gentleman of his Majesty's Chappel Royal, or of the Cathedrals may be admitted of this Academy if they desire itt, and no other persons, but such as profess Musick, and shall be approv'd of by the Majority". GB-Lbl Add. MS 11732, fol. 1r.

19 Joseph Doane, "History of the Academy of Ancient Music", in *Musical Directory for the Year 1794*, London 1794, pp. 76–83, p. 79.

20 Listed in GB-Lbl Add. MS 11732., fol. 2r.

be numbered amongst Europe's greatest living musicians, then working in London. For example, the opera composer and impresario, Giovanni Bononcini, paid all eight subscriptions from 1726 until 1730 whilst the violinist and composer Francesco Geminiani and the finest opera singer of the age, Francesco Bernardi (nicknamed Senesino) both paid subscriptions in 1726 and 1727. The outward-looking ambition of the early academicians is evident in their decision to search abroad for a musician of high standing to act as the society's president. This led to the election in absentia on 1 June 1727 of the aforementioned Steffani who, as an internationally important opera composer, diplomat and bishop, must have seemed ideal for the role.²¹ That Steffani was based in Hanover and unlikely ever to visit London on account of his advanced age and infirmity seems not to have mattered to the academicians. As Galliard explained, their intention had been to elect a figure-head able to "add lustre to the whole body", the honour being "due by right to him, in preference to any other person alive today."²² Following requests from the Academy, Steffani sent copies of his own compositions to London, including a specially composed madrigal and motet, and his famous *Stabat Mater*. Conceived or chosen with a view to gratifying the academicians' tastes for learned contrapuntal styles, these works were deposited in the Academy's growing library. There they would subsequently be joined by further similarly learned music, some of it acquired via a comparable method of solicitation from other continental composers.²³ It was however from around 1731, at the time of an infamous Academy controversy in which Bononcini was found guilty of plagiarising the work of Lotti, that the Academy appears to have become less attractive to the Italian opera stars.²⁴ With the disgraced Bononcini and his associates no longer in attendance, other big names, for varying reasons, also departed leaving behind a clique of mainly (but not entirely) English musicians under the leadership of Pepusch. By

21 Steffani's election ("Nemine Contradicente") is recorded in *ibid.*, fol. 4^v.

22 Letter from John Ernest Galliard to Giuseppe Riva, 7 / 18 July 1727, in Timms and Lindgren 2003, "The Correspondence of Agostino Steffani and Giuseppe Riva", pp. 120–122.

23 Although Academy correspondence suggests that the *Stabat Mater* was composed by Steffani with the Academy in mind, recent research suggests the work was in fact began much earlier. See Colin Timms, "La canzone and *Stabat Mater*. Steffani's First and Last Gifts to the Academy of Ancient Music?", in *Early Music* 47 (2019), pp. 65–82.

24 *Letters from the Academy*, 1732. See also Lowell Lindgren, "The Three Great Noises 'Fatal to the Interests' of Bononcini", in *Musical Quarterly* 61 (1975), pp. 560–583, and Stephen Rose, "Plagiarism at the Academy of Ancient Music. A Case Study in Authorship, Style and Judgement", in *Concepts of Creativity in Seventeenth-Century England*, eds. Rebecca Herissone and Alan Howard, Woodbridge 2013, pp. 181–198.

now renamed as the Academy of Ancient Music, it was in this guise, aided by a growing contingent of “auditor members” that the Academy over the next fifty years would achieve its greatest contribution to musical culture.²⁵

The founder-academician Pepusch provides the most revealing insight into the distinctive ethos for musical advancement and legitimisation that characterised the Academy in its early years. Having arrived in London in around 1697, Pepusch went on to prosper as an orchestral musician, as a musical director and as a composer. In that capacity he produced much instrumental and vocal music including solos, trio sonatas, concertos, as well as some fine English cantatas, anthems and famously, the overture for John Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* (1728) for which he also arranged the airs. In around 1717 Pepusch became associated with Handel as a guest, and two years later as Musical Director, at the Cannons estate of James Brydges (from 1719, First Duke of Chandos) for whom both composers produced anthems and other works. It was however, in part, through the learned pursuits with which Pepusch was increasingly engaged in later life that he made his mark. Collecting old music, music theory (especially ancient Greek music theory) and music history all played a part in Pepusch’s pursuit of what he reputedly termed “the true, ancient, art” of music, “depending on nature and mathematical principles”.²⁶ It was this conception of music that would so influence an entire generation of English musicians who came in contact with it, either as pupils of Pepusch or as members of the Academy of Ancient Music.

III. Collecting and editing

One dimension of the historicist conception of music championed by Pepusch and his followers can be seen in the music collections amassed by academicians and, in particular, the Academy itself. In an age when earlier music was little known and copies of foreign works could be hard to come by, a crucial objective for the Academy was the procurement of music and the formation of its library. That the academicians achieved this objective is proclaimed in Hawkins’ description of their library as “perhaps, the most

25 The new name probably came into use in 1731 when the Academy defined its use of the term “Ancient” (see above.)

26 John Wesley, diary entry dated 13 June 1748, in *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley [...]*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock, 8 vols., London 1909–1916, vol. 3, 1909, pp. 355–356. See D. F. Cook, *The Life and Works of Johann Christoph Pepusch (1667–1752), with special reference to his Dramatic Works and Cantatas*, PhD thesis, King’s College, University of London 1982, chapter 7.

valuable repository of musical treasure in Europe”.²⁷ Indeed, one of the great achievements of the Academy and those associated with it was their preservation for posterity of musical scores, many of which can now be found in research collections in the UK and beyond.²⁸ Some of this collecting took the form of prints, autographs and manuscript copies acquired, perhaps, with a view to chronicling and mapping the then little known musical past. The very act of copying works from partbooks into score is significant as evidence of some of the earliest attempts to grapple with issues of editing.²⁹ Through various publication projects undertaken by musicians influenced by Pepusch and the Academy during the course of the century these works were brought to light for the first time. We see this in transcriptions made by the prominent academician and pupil of Pepusch, Benjamin Cooke, who sometime after Pepusch’s death in 1752 “at length” succeeded him as the Academy’s Director.³⁰ Cooke transcribed several part songs from the famous Fayrfax Manuscript of early Tudor secular song³¹ and other early sources for inclusion in Hawkins’ *General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (1776).³² Perhaps the most famous published product of the ethos surrounding the Academy’s culture of collecting was the monumental edition of *Cathedral Music* by “English Masters” of the previous “Two Hundred Years” compiled by the former Pepusch pupil, William Boyce.³³ Published in three instalments (1760–1773), this was the outcome of a project first conceived early in the century by the founder academician, Greene, from whom Boyce had received musical training as his apprentice. Although Boyce’s collection was avowedly practical in its ground-breaking objective to provide what

27 [Hawkins] 1770, *An Account*, p. 9.

28 Foremost amongst these are the British Library and the libraries of Westminster Abbey, Royal College of Music, Royal Academy of Music all of which are in London, together with the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge and the Bodleian Library, Oxford. See Johnstone 2014, “Westminster Abbey and the Academy of Ancient Music”.

29 For further discussion of collecting and editing by academicians see A. Hyatt King, *Some British Collectors of Music, c. 1600–1960*, Cambridge 1961, pp. 1–47; D. F. Cook, “J. C. Pepusch: An 18th-Century Musical Bibliophile”, in *Soundings* 9 (1982), pp. 11–28; Percy Lovell, “‘Ancient’ Music in Eighteenth-Century England”, in *Music & Letters* 60 (1979), pp. 401–415; Owen Rees, “Adventures of Portuguese ‘Ancient Music’ in Oxford, London, and Paris: Duarte Lobo’s ‘Liber Missarum’ and Musical Antiquarianism, 1650–1850”, in *Music & Letters* 86 (2005), pp. 42–73.

30 Doane 1794, “History of the Academy of Ancient Music”, p. 78.; See also [Henry Cooke], *Some Account of Doctor Cooke, Organist of Westminster Abbey, &c.*, London 1837, p. 12.

31 GB-Lbl Add. MS 5465.

32 Hawkins [1776] 1853, *A General History*, vol. 1, pp. 368–376. Discussed in Egginton 2014, *The Advancement of Music*, pp. 173–176.

33 Cf. H. Diack Johnstone, “The Genesis of Boyce’s ‘Cathedral Music’”, in *Music & Letters* 56 (1975), pp. 26–40.

might now be termed a critical edition for performance, Boyce also aimed to provide “reputable models” of the “true style and standard of such compositions.”³⁴ In this Boyce alluded to a key Academy aim which was, as Hawkins later put it, to enable “students and performers to contemplate and compare styles” so as to “fix the standard of a judicious and rational taste.”³⁵ It was, in part, for this reason that a whole community of copyists associated with the Academy copied into score the works of Lassus, Alonso Lobo, Jean Mouton and numerous other Renaissance polyphonists from which much Academy repertory was selected. As extant Academy programmes concur, the most performed of these composers was Palestrina whose works appear to have assumed a classical status in the minds of academicians.³⁶

It is crucial to remember, however, that a large proportion of Academy collections and performances was devoted not to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century music, but rather to a particular kind of eighteenth-century music. Much of it sacred and for chorus and orchestra, the music that played so important a part in Academy thinking tended to include large scale masses and liturgical settings by Steffani, Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, Lotti and other nowadays neglected Italians. In addition, by far the most important exponent of this kind of statement was the Academy’s most performed composer, George Frideric Handel. Although Handel was undoubtedly an unwitting participant in this venture, it was a particular seam of his output that played so important a part at the Academy. This comprised orchestral anthems, Te Deums and, following the first public performances of *Esther* in 1732, oratorios.³⁷ In their combination of up-to-date Italianate melody with

34 William Boyce, *Cathedral Music*, 3 vols., London 1760–1773, vol. 1, 1760, p. iii.

35 Hawkins [1776], *A General History*, vol. 2, p. 886.

36 [Hawkins] 1770, *An Account*, pp. 18–19. The music of Palestrina features more than that of any other “ancient” composer in surviving Academy programmes (in which he is sometimes referred to as Prenestini), see Eggington 2014, *The Advancement of Music*, pp. 36–39, 90–93. Palestrina featured often in the collecting undertaken by Academy members, the twenty-seven volume collection copied out by the academician Henry Needler including over two hundred of his works, GB-Lbl Add. MSS 5036–5062. Alongside newspaper reports, evidence of Academy repertory exists in surviving published wordbook programmes, and in a publication entitled *The Words of Such Pieces as Are Most Usually Performed by the Academy of Ancient Music* issued in 1761 with a second edition in 1768. There is also a bound volume containing a complete run of hand-written programmes covering five entire seasons from September 1768 until May 1773 now held in the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale, Conservatoire Collection (F-Pn Rés. F. 1507). For a transcribed listing of all known Academy programmes see H. Diack Johnstone, “The Academy of Ancient Music (1726–1802). Its History, Repertoire and Surviving Programmes”, pp. 1–136, pp. 17–120.

37 See Burrows 2005, *Handel and the English Chapel Royal*, pp. 288–289.

learned choral counterpoint these works, as much as any others, offered the “perfect models” Hawkins hoped might enable the Academy’s students of composition to form their style.³⁸

We might at this point ask why modern music played so central a part in the performances and collecting of an organisation calling itself the Academy of Ancient Music. The key to understanding what it was that interested academicians in this seemingly diverse assortment of old and new music, and why they prized Palestrina, Steffani and Handel in particular, is in a much idealised, though never clearly defined property, which they termed “harmony”. Although, of course, harmony was an essential element of most music, it was in the music academicians revered most that its potential had, in their view, been truly realised. In harmony, certain academicians perceived a mathematical and archetypal language of nature, essential to what they saw as music’s highest calling, the expression of serious and profound sentiments. Although a sometimes vague notion, broadly speaking, their harmony correlated in part with what might now be termed polyphony but it also denoted the language of composers such as Handel and Pergolesi, who had used expressive and adventurous harmonic language to invoke sublime effects.³⁹

IV. Harmony

This interest in harmony can be seen as a defining theme for the Academy in the way it delineates the society’s relationship with eighteenth-century music and arts more generally. More than simply a concern for practical pedagogy, the academicians’ engagement with this subject sought music’s underlying metaphysical basis. We see one dimension of this interest in the Academy’s connections with the highly prestigious Royal Society, an organisation founded in 1660 as a collective whose mission was to improve “natural knowledge” for the good of the state. During the Academy’s earliest years, at least eight academicians are known to have been Royal Society fellows, whilst further academicians combined membership of both clubs in subsequent years, including Thomas Birch who during the 1750s was

38 [Hawkins] 1770, *An Account*, p. 23.

39 See Eggington 2014, *The Advancement of Music*, chapters 4 and 5; in particular, see pp. 160–163 for the academician Benjamin Cooke’s ideas concerning harmony and temperaments.

both an Academy director and secretary of the Royal Society.⁴⁰ As an indication of the academicians' perspectives on music this relationship reveals a conception of music that was at once both new and old. Influenced by Francis Bacon's calls for a detailed investigation of acoustical phenomena, the Royal Society in its early days had sponsored many musically-related experiments that had the effect of positioning music towards the centre of early Enlightenment science.⁴¹ We see evidence of how the worlds of natural philosophy and music interacted in the activities of the academician and prominent Cambridge mathematician, Brook Taylor. Motivated in part by his well-documented interest in music he wrote a treatise on music theory that seems to claim on one of its title-pages to have been co-written by both Pepusch and none other than Sir Isaac Newton (see figure 4.1). Whilst it is difficult to gauge the extent of any direct involvement Newton may have had in this venture, his name would nevertheless play a part in Academy-related explorations into music theory. For Taylor and other like-minded academicians, these tended to locate music's foundation in ancient Greek harmonic theory from which a continuum could be traced leading via the Renaissance to the Newtonian present.

It was in the light of such ideas that Pepusch published a paper on music theory in the Royal Society's prestigious *Philosophical Transactions*, following his election as a Royal Society fellow in 1745.⁴² The very fact that a professional musician aspired to be elected to such an organisation, and that he sought to write and publish a learned paper on music is significant in itself as evidence of ways in which Pepusch was seeking new contexts in which to raise the standing of both music and himself as a musician. Entitled "Of the various Genera and Species of Music among the Ancients", Pepusch's paper provides an indication of the theoretical position that informed the activities of some academicians. Although Pepusch's stated purpose was "to throw some Light upon the obscure Subject" of the ancient Greek system of scales, we can infer in the paper a further underlying agenda.⁴³ With the

40 The early academicians known to have been Royal Society Fellows are John Freind, John Freke, James Hamilton, 7th Earl of Abercorn, John Perceval, 1st Earl of Egmont, William Rutt, Pepusch, Henry Popple and Brook Taylor.

41 See Penelope Gouk, *Music, Science and Natural Magic in Seventeenth-Century England*, New Haven 1999, pp. 61–63, 184–191.

42 Johann Christoph Pepusch, "Of the various Genera and Species of Music among the Ancients", in *Philosophical Transactions* 44 (1746), pp. 266–274.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 268.

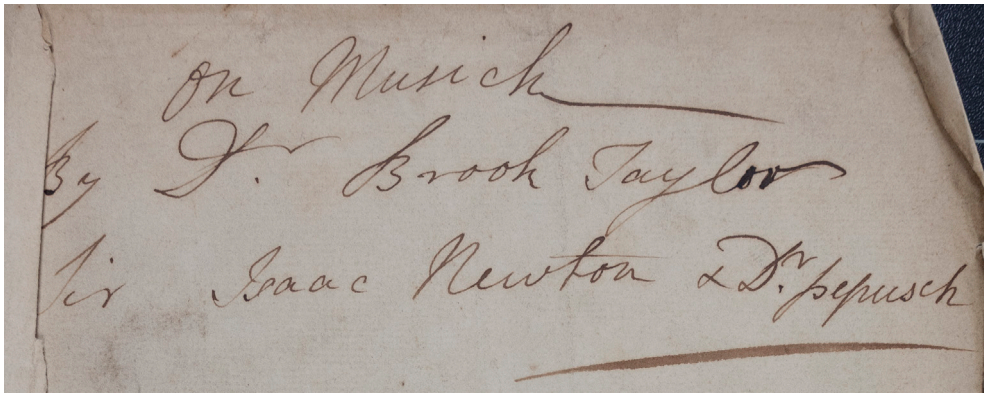


Figure 4.1: Title-page from Brook Taylor's papers on music theory, GB-Cjc TaylorB / B; reproduced by permission of the Master and Fellows of St John's College, Cambridge.

increasing use by modern-day composers of all twelve notes of the scale as key notes it had become necessary for musicians to effect minute adjustments to musical intervals, making them seem inconsistent with some of the mathematically perfect intervals described in ancient Greek harmonic theory. Pepusch invoked the seemingly obsolete Greek micro-intervals of less than a semitone to argue that they were, in reality, equivalent to the minute variations between tones and semitones deployed in “a true and accurate practice of singing” as a means to negotiate changes in key.⁴⁴ This was not simply yet another investigation into how best to divide the octave of the kind that had engrossed generations of music theorists before (and have since). At stake for Pepusch was the viability of being able to argue that the art of music, ancient and modern, had a common foundation in mathematics and nature. This paper was followed by several treatises by Academy-related musicians that sought to explain musical language in terms of natural, timeless principles through reference to ancient Greek harmonic theory, mathematics and the new science of acoustics.⁴⁵

Although, with some exceptions, the academicians were frustratingly unclear as to the precise relationship between the styles of music they admired and their theorising, there is nevertheless a clear significance to their theoretical writings. The early Academy existed in an age when writers such as Jean-Baptiste Dubos and James Harris invoked the doctrine of imitation

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 274.

⁴⁵ Others included Benjamin Cooke, William Boyce, John Keeble, Marmaduke Overend, John Travers and of course Brook Taylor.

as an aesthetic that subjected all fine arts to the same criteria.⁴⁶ In accordance with the new aesthetics, many argued that imitation in music was best achieved through simple sung melody.⁴⁷ With continental writers such as Johann Mattheson claiming that complicated harmony and counterpoint obstructed musical meaning, the academicians would have found themselves at odds with the simpler imported galant styles that increasingly delighted London audiences.⁴⁸ Indeed, it seems conceivable that at least part of the reason the Academy had sought out Steffani as their president was on account of the role he had played in countering Mattheson in the debates his ideas occasioned in Germany.⁴⁹ There, Steffani's learned advocacy of rational music founded on Greek theory and mathematical harmony had been invoked to counter Mattheson's galant ideal for clear vocal melody and expression. It was by privileging their mathematical view of harmony as both timeless product of nature, and the means to convey grave meaning that academicians rationalised their taste for learned harmony (and counterpoint). In so doing they charted a course for music that in some ways set it apart from other arts more generally. Yet, it is not fanciful to see in the academicians' attempts to rationalise harmony in terms of mathematical relationships an approach that in some ways prefigured the aesthetic of musical autonomy that later in the century would finally supersede the Aristotelian doctrine of music as an imitative art.⁵⁰

Of course, in an age of burgeoning arts criticism the earnest endeavours of the professional musicians at the Academy fell easy prey to the ridicule of men of letters whose stock in trade was satire. We see this early on in a piece entitled "Harmony in an Uproar", fictitiously attributed to one Hurlothrumbo

46 James Harris, *Three Treatises. The First concerning Art, the Second concerning Music, Painting and Poetry, the Third concerning Happiness*, London 1744 and Jean-Baptiste Dubos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, Paris 1719, translated into English by Thomas Nugent as *Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting and Music*, London 1748.

47 See John Neubauer's discussion in *The Emancipation of Music from Language. Departure from Mimesis in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics*, New Haven 1986, pp. 60–75.

48 See Edward Lippman, *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics*, Lincoln 1992, pp. 59–82.

49 Agostino Steffani's theoretical ideas on music were published in his *Quanta certezza habbia da suoi principii la musica et in qual pregio fosse perciò presso gli Antichi*, Hanover 1694. In Germany Steffani's treatise gained increased influence through Andreas Werckmeister's German translation of it, *Send-Schreiben, darinn enthalten wie grosse Gewissheit die Music aus ihren Principiis, und Grund-Sätzen habe*, Quedlinburg and Aschersleben 1699. See Lippman 1992, *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics*, p. 61.

50 This is explored further in Eggington 2014, *The Advancement of Music*, chapters 4 and 5.

Johnson.⁵¹ In it the “great Handel” is mocked for not having a music degree by Doctors “Pushpin” and “Blue”, both of whom absurdly suggest that their compositional achievements surpassed Handel’s on account of having “the Commencement Gown” “thrown over their Shoulders”. Clearly a jibe at Drs Greene and Pepusch, the pamphleteer goes on to quote the latter berating Handel for being “no mathematician”.⁵² It was, of course, easy to ridicule the academicians as cobwebbed pedants, devoid of spirit and invention. In an age when most professional musicians were viewed as artisans and tended not to express themselves in newspapers and periodicals, the academicians provided an easy target for those who opposed them. We see abundant criticism of a similar vein later in the century exemplified in Charles Burney’s observation that Pepusch “jumped to any conclusion that would involve a musical question in mysterious and artificial difficulty”.⁵³

V. Education at the Academy

The author of “Harmony in an Uproar” touched on a potent Academy theme when he lampooned the academicians’ fondness for academic qualifications. Although there was no course in music offered by either of the universities and few musicians had music degrees, many leading Academy-related musicians nevertheless sought and achieved music doctorates, apparently as a seal of professional competency. This educative dimension to the Academy’s interests is further evident in its “seminary for the instruction of youth in the principles of music and laws of harmony”, established following a further Academy disagreement.⁵⁴ This one involved Bernard Gates who as Master of the Choristers at the Chapel Royal had deprived the Academy of choirboys when he withdrew in 1734, having conceived “some dislike”.⁵⁵ Al-

51 Published in *The Miscellaneous Works of the Late Dr. Arbuthnot*, 2 vols., Glasgow 1751, vol. 2, pp. 18–42; the true authorship of “Harmony in an Uproar” is unknown.

52 Ibid., pp. 28, 34.

53 Charles Burney, *A General History of Music* [1776–1789], ed. F. Mercer, 2 vols., London 1935, vol. 1, p. 34. Burney, who is dismissive of Pepusch’s historicist interests throughout his *History* also quotes, for example, the French mathematician Abraham de Moivre, who having assisted Pepusch with his theorising, later described him as ‘a stupid German dog, who could neither count four, nor understand any one that did’ (Ibid., p. 988). The hostile critical reaction to Hawkins’ publication of 1776 (*A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, London 1776) can be seen in much the same light. See Percy Scholes, *Life and Activities of Sir John Hawkins*, London 1953, pp. 131–138.

54 Hawkins [1776], *A General History*, vol. 2, pp. 885–886.

55 Doane 1794, “History of the Academy of Ancient Music”, p. 77.

though the initial motivation for the seminary was to avail the Academy of choirboys for its performances this venture appears to have taken on a more substantive position at the core of the Academy's mission. With Pepusch employed as their teacher, boys learnt singing, composition and harpsichord accompaniment as well as English grammar, writing and arithmetic.⁵⁶ By combining the traditional apprenticeship model with elements of the liberal education available to choral foundation choristers the Academy offered a further dimension to its elevation of music and the music profession. Indeed, the learned aspect to the achievements of Pepusch pupils such as Cooke, Boyce, John Travers and John Keeble, all of whom enjoyed some familiarity with classical languages, reflects the role education had in instilling in student musicians the Academy's ideals for musical advancement.

VI. Aftermath and conclusions

While these and other musicians associated with the Academy went on to play active and influential roles in English musical culture of the later eighteenth-century, the Academy itself encountered mixed fortunes in its later years as its original mission underwent a process of dilution. A significant development occurred in February 1783 with the formation of a committee "to examine the several Laws and regulations since the institution of the Academy, and prepare a new Code as agreeable to the original intention of its Founders as the present temper of the Times would admit".⁵⁷ With the confirmation of a new constitution the following month the Academy relocated in September 1784 from the Crown and Anchor Tavern to the larger Freemasons' Hall in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. There, increased subscriber numbers and revenue enabled soloists and musicians to be engaged that would raise performance standards and thus enhance the Academy's competitiveness within the wider context of London's thriving concert life. However, with the orchestra and chorus now relegated to the status of employees, it was no longer a learned musical club, but rather a straightforward concert society aimed at attracting the paying public to its annual series of concerts. The previous fare of masses, motets, madrigals and entire oratorios was diminished to make way for a repertory deemed

56 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

more palatable to paying audiences, including glees and miscellaneous arias drawn from oratorios.⁵⁸ By the time the Academy finally dissolved in 1802 the idea of ancient music had long since been successfully appropriated and popularised by other organisations in London, most famously, through the establishment in 1776 by members of the nobility of the highly prestigious Concert of Ancient Music.⁵⁹

Notwithstanding its ultimate decline, there are many ways in which the Academy's earlier ideals for musical advancement can be seen playing a part in shaping the enhanced standing music enjoyed in England at the end of the century, as an art informed by a growing sense of its past.⁶⁰ It was, in part, through a network of musicians linked to Pepusch and the earlier Academy that aspects of its founding ethos became embedded more widely in English musical culture during the later eighteenth century. We have already seen examples of this influence in the collecting, editing and publishing projects with which Boyce and Cooke were engaged. A similar influence can be seen behind the careers of two generations of musicians who gained prominence in English musical life as academicians or as former pupils of either Pepusch, or his pupils. Amongst these can be included James Kent, James Nares, John Keeble, Thomas Linley, Samuel Arnold, James Bartleman, John Wall Callcott, Thomas Greatorex, John Stafford Smith, R. J. S. Stevens and others. Whether through their achievements as composers or editors or collectors or theorists or musical directors, all to differing degrees advanced aspects of the same historicist ethos that can be traced back to the Academy.⁶¹ Antecedents to these achievements can be perceived in the promotion by the founder academicians earlier in the century of innovations in music borne of practices already in existence elsewhere in English cultural life. We can see such antecedents in the Academy's early commitment to "searching after, examining, and hearing performed the Works of the Masters" as well as in efforts to develop theoretical strategies to establish music's metaphysical basis. Many of the early academicians' activities were in their own ways pioneering, and all of them evince the aspiration to

58 Ibid. See also Eggington 2014, *Advancement of Music*, Epilogue.

59 Weber 1992, *Rise of Musical Classics*, chapter 5.

60 For discussion of English musical culture at the end of the century and the influence on it of 'the ancient-modern quarrel' see Howard Irving, *Ancients and Moderns: William Crotch and the Development of Classical Music*, Aldershot 1999.

61 On the "Genealogy of Pepusch and his Pupils" see Cook 1982, *The Life and Works of Johann Christoph Pepusch*, p. 324.

establish for music the same basis for study, criticism and status that increasingly played a part in other arts. Due to the semi-public nature of the Academy prior to 1784, it cannot be said to have established a recognised canon of classics. Yet, its programming of old music did prove influential on later organisations, thereby helping to lay foundations for the classical music tradition that emerged in the nineteenth century. By collecting, editing, publishing and theorising the academicians sought the means to discover what was best. By placing themselves above both nobility and the paying public as arbiters of musical taste, the early academicians contributed to a process that would elevate the status not only of the art of music, but also of their profession.