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Haydn as a London “Star:” Thoughts on Using Material Culture to Teach Eighteenth-Century Music at a Liberal Arts College

By Vanessa L. Rogers

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I. Introduction

Interdisciplinary research and teaching is usually touted as at the center of a successful liberal arts college. It is true that the wide number of committee assignments, all-college course teaching commitments, and nearly every facet of day-to-day work at such a college provides innumerable opportunities to locate one’s work outside one’s field. Lately, I have noticed that books like Neil MacGregor’s *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (which capitalized on the popularity of the British Museum exhibit and radio series) and Richard Kurin’s *The Smithsonian’s History of America in 101 Objects* have been part of campus discussions, and that there has been some encouragement towards integrating these books, and the objects in them, into classes in all disciplines.¹

These recent discussions about utilizing physical objects in the classroom put me in mind of an older trend, so-called “material culture studies,” which appeared in the latter part of the twentieth century and was for a while a much-talked about sub-discipline in anthropology, archeology, and history. A term borrowed from ethnography, “material culture” is also called “thing theory” or “materiality.” Jules Prown defines it as “the study through artifacts of the beliefs — values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions — of a

¹ The first book inspired subsequent similar titles after its appearance, and continues to do so. See for example Adrian Hon, *A History of the Future in 100 Objects* (Newbold on Stour, Warwickshire: Skyscraper, 2013) and Jerry Brotton, *A History of the World in 12 Maps* (London: Penguin, 2014). TV shows such as *Antiques Roadshow* also have been long popular with general audiences and casual history buffs. Material culture and print culture has influenced musicological writing; some examples are Clifford Davidson, *Material Culture and Musical Drama*, Early Drama, Art, and Music Monography Series 25 (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1999), Tim J. Anderson, *Making Easy Listening: Material Culture and Postwar American Recording*, Commerce and Mass Culture Series (Minneapolis and London: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2006), and Kate van Orden, *Music and the Cultures of Print* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000).

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particular community or society at a given time.”² As musicologists, we already utilize material culture when we study primary sources (especially musical scores), but it can be applied to much more. Today, the study of musical artefacts has developed far beyond manuscripts, printed music, and instruments, and also has begun to include recordings and other objects that help us to understand musical cultures and performance practice.

Why teach using objects? Firstly, it engages students. Some of the most formative moments in my undergraduate and graduate study were when professors brought early musical instruments, scores, and first editions of books to class to supplement the day’s lecture. This was a particularly memorable part of taking a class with Bruce Alan Brown, and probably had a greater influence on my final choice of research area than I might have realized. Objects also help to augment understanding of a topic socially, politically, and culturally, and can spark discussion and research ideas in a classroom.

Furthermore, a particular object can often illuminate something about the lives of ordinary people, in contrast to the extraordinary ones we usually describe in our music history classes, thereby supplying a truer historical picture. Such artifacts can tell us about the person who owned them, and maybe even what the individual thought or felt at a certain time, or as a result of a specific occasion. Finally, in my experience, teaching using ideas and artifacts of “material culture” helps students to discover new connections between the past and the present.

II: Case Study: Music Marketing and “Star” Production in 18th-Century England

As a specialist working in the theatrical world of Enlightenment-era England, I spend a week in my class on the eighteenth century discussing some of the interesting interdisciplinary research in this area. This week typically includes lectures, readings, and discussions about fame and the idea of “celebrity” in the early modern era,

² Jules David Prown, *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2001), 70.

especially as it pertains to the musical-theatrical world. We read about and discuss publicity, marketing, fan culture, and music in eighteenth-century London, and the lectures are supplemented by a myriad of images and objects that never fail to capture the students' attention.³

The publications under discussion always appear as reading and listening assignments; for example, I assign a copy of the original word-book for Handel's Dublin performance of *Messiah* (available on ECCO) along with a historically-informed performance of the piece. Thanks to the proliferation of digital resources and image databases, I create Powerpoint presentations filled with colored engravings of the era's star singers. For the musical pieces under discussion, we study newspaper advertisements, puffs/reviews of performances (if available), and the music itself. The students learn how publishers multiplied their profits by releasing "best of" collections of opera arias; they are usually drawn in by the attention-grabbing titles for the single sheet songs for the biggest hits ("Nancy, I have lost my Wig . . . as Sung by Mr. Parsley at the Amicable Society").⁴

Connections between the past and present can most easily be made by showing the students the ephemera that illuminates the "fan culture" of the era: musical playing cards, enamel boxes with scenes from operas and plays, fans (see Figure 1), high-end porcelains of singers in the costumes of their most famous characters, admissions and benefits tickets (see Figure 2), and autographs. Students easily draw parallels with their own collections of autographed concert programs, Harry Potter wands, Star Trek figurines, T-shirts from the latest musicals, and pin-ups of their middle-school obsessions Taylor Swift and Justin Bieber. It is always interesting to see students' reactions to the clothing fashions sprung by musical or theatrical culture ("Crazy Jane"

³ One possible class assignment would be to assign each student (or group of students) a particular musical object and have them write up a couple of pages about the object in the style of Neil MacGregor's *A History of the World in 100 Objects*.

⁴ London: Bailey, [1785?]. British Library Music Collections G.310.(144.)

hats, Mungo costumes for masquerade balls),⁵ and the more morbid aspects of eighteenth-century fandom (consider Haydn's death mask as an object of public fascination – or, for that matter, the curious case of his missing head).⁶



Figure 1: Unmounted fan-leaf, with three large medallions, containing lettered inscriptions that tell the history of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. Hand-coloured etching. London: John Cock & J. P. Crowder, 1794. British Museum. Used with permission.

⁵ "Crazy Jane" was a fashionable sentimental ballad composed by Harriet Abrams; the song was performed in public by the actress-singer Mary Bland beginning in 1799, creating a fashion in London for a straw hat "tied with ribbon under the chin and bedecked with poppies, wheat ears and corn flowers." See Rogers and Joncus, "'United voices formed the very perfection of harmony': Music and the Invention of Harriett Abrams (c1758-1821)," in *Celebrity: The Idiom of a Modern Era*, AMS Studies in the Eighteenth Century, No. 70, ed. Baerbel Czennia (New York: AMS Press, 2013), 94. Mungo was a central character in Charles Dibdin's 1768 opera *The Padlock*; the role was performed by Dibdin himself in blackface. The popularity of this opera and the character of Mungo meant that he was the subject of prints, porcelains, puppet shows, and even a costume that was fashionable at fancy-dress balls for many years thereafter.

⁶ One of the thieves, Joseph Rosenbaum, kept Haydn's skull "on a cushion covered with white silk and draped with black satin inside a black wooden cabinet that was modeled after a Roman sarcophagus and decorated with a golden lyre" so that he could show it off to visitors. See Else Radant Landon, "Haydn's skull" in *Oxford Composer Companions: Haydn*, David Wyn Jones, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 193.

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Figure 2: Admissions tickets for musical benefits and concerts, 1778-1802. British Museum.

III. Haydn as a London "Star"

Bringing Haydn into the discussion of eighteenth-century "star" culture makes perfect sense. Haydn's two extended visits to the bustling commercial center of London were among the professional highlights of his career. His arrival in the city was celebrated in verse,⁷ his activities were followed closely by the newspapers, his portraits were painted by a number of celebrated artists, and he received daily visits and financial support from the aristocracy and the Prince of Wales (later George III). Haydn's benefit concerts were the high point of the London concert season (the concert societies' series were the most elite category of public musical activity in London) and were received with gushing adulation by the press; he was also gifted with an honorary doctorate by the University of Oxford.

The vibrant and competitive publishing industry helped to make Haydn a household name in eighteenth-century Britain during the years of his visits. As Simon McVeigh has explored in his *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn*, London entrepreneurs found many ways of using commercial marketing techniques to make the "external" musical product appeal to potential customers.⁸ Typically, handbills were printed to promote special events ("Dr. HAYDN will preside at the Pianoforte"), and advertisements were placed in all of the daily newspapers. Reviews were usually placed and paid for by theatre managers and concert impresarios. Star musicians from abroad were most ardently courted to attract the fickle British public, and the engagement of Haydn was the biggest coup of a given season.

⁷ Part of the poem by Charles Burney as repeated in the Weiss-Taruskin anthology of readings: "...Haydn! Great Sovereign of the tuneful art! / Thy works alone supply an ample chart / Of all the mountains, seas, and fertile plains, / Within the compass of its wide domains.— / Is there an Artist of the present day / Untaught by thee to think, as well as play? / Whose hand thy science has not well supplied? / Whose hand thy labours have not fortified?—..." Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Schirmer, 2008), 266-268.

⁸ See Simon McVeigh, *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), particularly the second and third parts of the book.

The publisher John Bland worked tirelessly to promote Haydn's first visit to England. Haydn's connection with Bland and other prominent London music publishers has been discussed at length by Nancy A. Mace and Ian Woodfield.⁹ Not only did Bland write letters and send gifts in an attempt to woo Haydn to London, he visited him personally at Eszterháza in 1789. It is significant that Bland's was the first house Haydn stayed in when he first arrived in the city in early January 1791. It was also probably Bland who dropped hints to the press that he was responsible for the London visit; planted in both the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Times* on 3 January was the following piece of information: "Yesterday arrived at Mr. BLAND's, in Holborn, the celebrated Mr. HAYDN, the composer from Vienna, accompanied by Mr. SALOMON: and we understand the public is indebted to Mr. BLAND as being the chief instrument of Mr. HAYDN's coming to England." Bland's house just happened to be over his music-shop.

The eighteenth century in Britain was the golden age of formal portraiture in the "grand manner" as well as portrait engraving. As prints were usually mezzotints made after paintings, the engraver was copying the work of another artist, but this meant that many more people would see the work of the original artist.¹⁰ Printmaking was a large commercial enterprise, and an important part of broadening a celebrity's reputation. A print such as Bland's fulfilled a variety of social and commemorative functions.

The famous Haydn portrait Bland commissioned from Thomas Hardy (see Figure 3) was "Printed & Engraved by T. Hardy" and published on 13 February 1792 "by J. Bland No. 45 Holborn." Titled "Joseph Haydn. Mus. D. Oxon," the image is taken "From an Original Picture in the Possession of J. Bland."¹¹ It is a handsome half-length portrait of the composer wearing a plain coat, frilled cravat, and a powdered wig while holding a

⁹ Nancy A. Mace, "Haydn and the London Music Sellers: Forster and Longman & Broderip," *Music & Letters*, 77/4 (Nov. 1996), 527–41, and Ian Woodfield, "John Bland: London Retailer of the Music of Haydn and Mozart," *Music & Letters*, 81/2 (May 2000), 210–244.

¹⁰ Mezzotints were cheaper to create and took less expertise to reproduce than line engravings, making them the easiest and most common form of iconographical reproduction in London during this period.

¹¹ The original portrait now hangs in the Royal College of Music.

bound score. Bland's commissioned engraving is an elegant stipple on *chine collé* (a more expensive type of printmaking than the usual mezzotint). It reflects current portrait conventions, and Haydn is pictured as younger than his years. The clothes and the pose chosen for the portrait highlight Haydn's social status as a gentleman, his elegant taste, and his musical vocation, all resulting in a powerful promotional tool for Haydn – and for Bland.

Bland soon issued engravings of the famous master from the portrait, which would have been for sale in print-shops and music shops. It was almost certainly created for sale his own music shop in Holborn, while Haydn entertained visitors just upstairs in Bland's apartments. A visitor might decide to buy an engraving (or some of the composer's music) from the music shop to commemorate his or her meeting with the composer. In addition, the engraving's appearance in the shop window would have familiarized all of London with Haydn's face, much like a billboard might today (see Figure 4). Even those music-lovers who could not purchase a ticket to one of the select concerts, or even buy one of the delicate *chine collé* engravings, would be able to study the face and comportment of one of the greatest celebrities of the era.

IV. Conclusion

Although I often sigh when my college's administration starts throwing around the trendy academic buzz-word of the moment (like "interdisciplinarity" or "material culture") I usually can retrieve something valuable from the discussion to take into my classroom. In the case of material culture, I find that utilizing it to teach music history connects with students because it helps to reveal a past that they can actually see and touch and hear. No matter how much we think we know about Haydn or the eighteenth century generally, we are still separated by a thick curtain of time and much that will always remain unknowable. Objects can transcend this distance and can help bring abstract ideas closer to our students.

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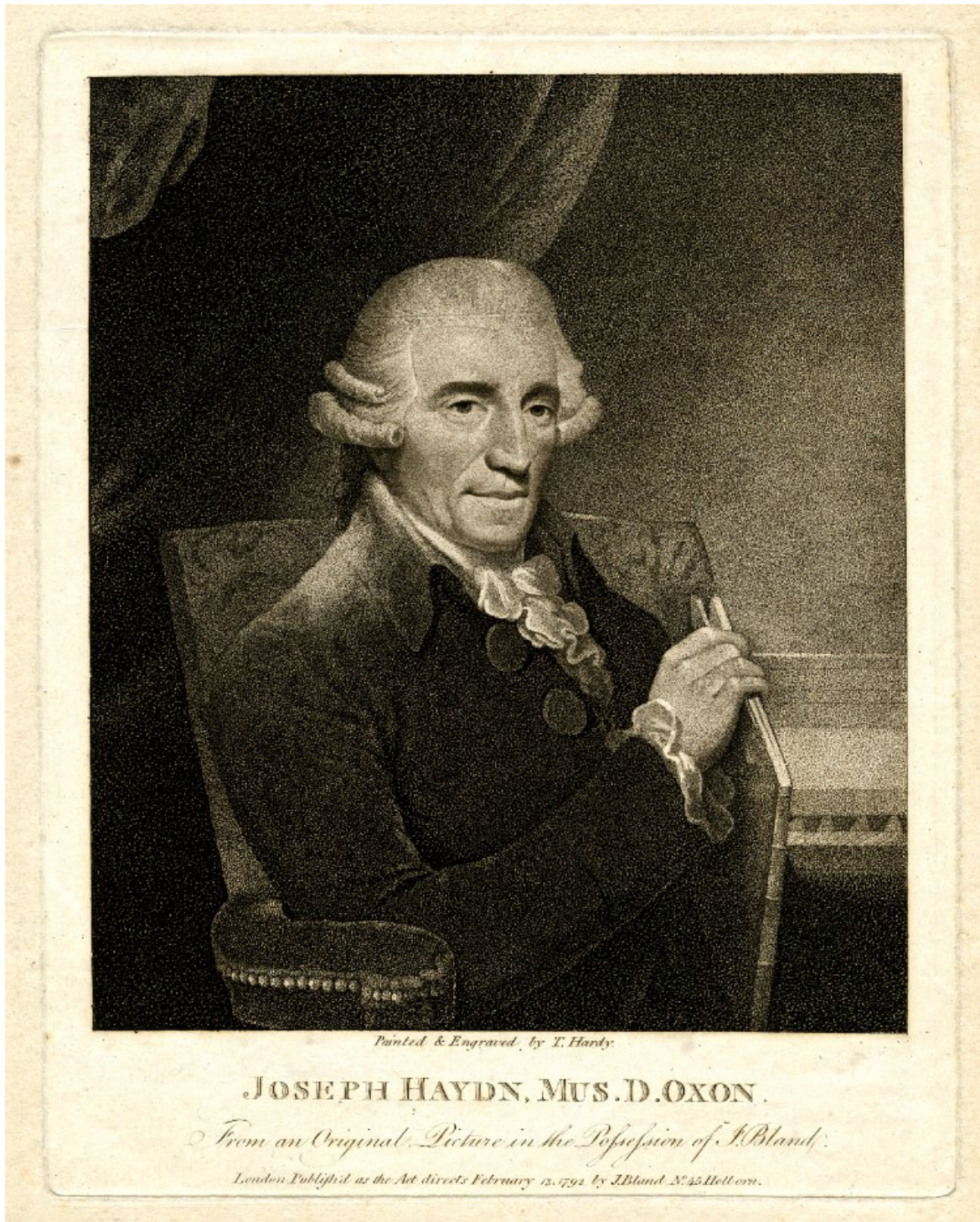


Figure 3: "Joseph Haydn, Mus. D. Oxon. From an Original Picture in the Possession of J. Bland. Printed & Engraved by T. Hardy / London Publish'd as the Act directs February 13, 1792 by J. Bland No. 45 Holborn." Stipple on *chine collé*. British Museum. Used with permission.

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Figure 4: Crowd Outside a Print-Shop. Pen and grey ink and watercolour. J. Elwood, 1790. British Museum. Used with permission.

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Abstract

Interdisciplinary research and teaching is usually touted as at the center of a successful liberal arts college. As musicologists, we already utilize tools of the ethnographic “material culture studies” (thing-theory, materiality) when we study primary sources (especially musical scores), but material culture can be applied to much more. Teaching with artefacts such as instruments, first edition books, and items from everyday life of the past engages students in discussions and paths of inquiry that inevitably lead to understanding the truer historical picture, and to new connections between the past and present. When teaching Haydn, I spend a week using artefacts and readings to establish a sense of the “star” theatrical culture in Enlightenment-era England, encouraging connections with present day souvenirs and collectables of the entertainment industry (figurines, pin-ups, autographed concert programs, etc.). Within this context, Haydn’s role as a London “star”—his celebrated arrival and continued coverage in the press—makes perfect sense. Artefacts that were used to highlight Haydn’s visits there, such as John Bland’s famous portrait engraving of the composer, help students transcend the historical distance and thereby bring a more concrete understanding of abstract ideas.