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LESLIE RITCHIE

*WOMEN WRITING MUSIC IN LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND: SOCIAL HARMONY IN LITERATURE AND PERFORMANCE*

Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008

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Neither women nor the field of late eighteenth-century England have traditionally held a strong position in Western music history. With the output and experiences of the former seldom finding a place within a canon that tends to emphasize the great (male) composer and his *opus perfectum et absolutum*, and the latter period usually not being considered one of Britain's finer musical hours, research into these areas has generally been at best specialist and at worst limited. This is not a criticism of the valuable research that has been carried out on these topics; it merely acknowledges that some works, because of the nature of their content, must sometimes navigate a course between providing a contribution to academic diversity and achieving mainstream acceptance. If adeptly handled, such works can, by appealing to the intricacies of their topic and the perspectives of their discipline, produce an outcome that stretches boundaries whilst respecting previous work. It is a potentially perilous quest but one that – if successfully completed – can enhance the academic literature.

Leslie Ritchie has recently embarked on this journey with her *Women Writing Music in Late Eighteenth-Century England: Social Harmony in Literature and Performance*. Promoted as an interdisciplinary work, 'this book maps the socio-musical space signified by the word "harmony" in Britain during the last half of the eighteenth century, and determines the conditions governing women's participation in it' (2). Such an undertaking comes with challenges and considerations. While some are obvious, for example the attempt to understand female roles within the musical environment, most are more subtle. Key issues emerge, and the Introduction ensures they are addressed. This is achieved through a discussion of 'five aspects of women's participation in music and in writing about music' (4), an approach that allows for the early examination of vital elements, while identifying and developing the underlying issues, themes and considerations.

Principal amongst these is the work's primary focus of exploring links between music and social harmony, but for the contributions and experiences of female musicians in later eighteenth-century England to be fully scrutinized, a different understanding of traditional musicological constructs needs to be presented. Ritchie achieves this by noting that a composer-centric, repertory-based conception of music history can marginalize women; by warning that a distinction between art and popular music, and the stringent division of public versus private performance environments, can submerge female musical participation; and by proposing that the consideration of music as a separate artistic entity may not comply with the discipline's place within the wider intellectual sphere of the period. The alternatives presented here increase the emphasis upon the performers and their contribution, while also recognizing that the boundaries between performance environments, and art and popular music descriptors (together with the separation of music from other fields of cultural production) need to be flexible.

This opening clearly indicates the book's *raison d'être*, namely its focus upon ideas of harmony in the combined realms of musical (re)construction and social cohesion, concepts that 'were, if not equated, then strongly related . . . in nearly every musical treatise published in Britain during the second half of the eighteenth century' (3). Topics covered in the exploration of such connections include women's use of pastoral and nationalist musical forms to challenge 'prevailing notions of femininity' and recast 'the image of the British heroine' (222); concepts of charity and their role in guiding and governing female musical participation (87–131); the diversity of musical spaces and performance environments occupied by women (57); the place of music in female education (36–43); and correlations between 'women's pleasure in music' and 'the furtherance of social harmony' (33). This broad coverage, and the logical progression of the material, results in a well-considered approach conscious of its duty to provide insight into aspects that have



hitherto been overlooked or misunderstood, such as the work of female librettists (160–170) and the circumstances surrounding Elizabeth Sheridan's (née Linley) retirement from public performance (67–71).

Such explorations would not be possible without a strong understanding of the English performance environment of the later 1700s, together with an awareness of issues to be addressed and possible expectations to be challenged. For instance, Ritchie appreciates that time does not preserve everything and that 'surviving materials may give a limited (or even an inverse) idea of a work's popularity' (82), as a result of the natural disintegration accompanying frequent rehearsal and performance, and the relatively common practice of removing duplicates from collections. Class is also considered through an acceptance that it was 'women of the middle, genteel and upper classes who had the leisure to take music lessons, and to hear and perform music', and for whom discussion and concern about music as a form of social control was most prevalent (24). This openness about social parameters allows the author to maintain focus throughout, to provide detailed consideration and to concentrate on her chosen topic.

Ritchie also demonstrates a thorough understanding of the protocols governing the production of music and the variety of avenues through which women participated. The reader is taken through diverse patronage and promotional structures, ranging from performers acting as their own agents and the forging of relationships in the support of fellow artists, to the strategies used to attract an aristocratic audience and the different categories of performer and performance occasions (63–67). Furthermore, the divisions between metropolitan, regional, rural and even colonial musical environments are addressed. Notwithstanding the capital's immense importance in the artistic life of the nation, an avoidance of the 'London is England' approach – combined with an awareness of Britain's role as a colonial power – is noteworthy, and shows a comprehensive understanding of musical life in England, as well as the extension of this influence to British possessions abroad.

Perhaps the work's most admirable quality, however, is the strong connection between the later eighteenth-century English female musical experience and the contextual framework against which it existed. In her consideration of the 'hymns and songs produced for the benefit of charitable institutions for women' (89) and the musical expression of national identity and 'controls over musical sovereignty' (177), to cite two of many examples, the author consistently demonstrates a thorough understanding of the English musical environment of the later 1700s. Not surprisingly, this defaults to the female musical experience rather than the male, in keeping with the book's primary focus, but Ritchie nevertheless provides a comprehensive, well-researched and insightful contribution supported by sound research methodology and an extremely good command of primary and secondary sources.

*Women Writing Music in Late Eighteenth-Century England* undoubtedly achieves its objective of examining female adherence to, or circumvention of, the concepts of social harmony that guided and governed the period's musical practices and expectations. The quality of the work is not being questioned, yet the title does not really reflect the scope of the study. The extent to which 'English music' can be interchanged with 'British music' is complex and varied. England undoubtedly plays an important role in many a discussion on Britain, but the declared aim of *Women Writing Music in Late Eighteenth-Century England* is to map 'the socio-musical space signified by the word "harmony" in Britain' (2) and Britain is examined in the chapter on 'Women and Songs of Nation and Otherness'. This approach is both beneficial and justifiable, and resolution of the dilemma lies beyond the scope of Ritchie's undertaking, but this focus on Britain does not always align with the work's overall emphasis.

Additionally, although the book is about women writing music in late eighteenth-century Britain and the relationship with social harmony in literature and performance, this is inextricably entwined with the musical experience, whether for men or women, which is not limited just to composition, improvisation or the creation of lyrics or writings about music. Ritchie considers these aspects at length, as well as addressing other elements of the later eighteenth-century female musical experience, encompassing roles such as performer, patron, promoter, organizer and consumer. Thus the book essentially covers not only women writing music but also their 'participation in the field of musical production' (87). It is an outcome that reaches beyond what the title implies to deliver a strong result.



These issues do not detract from this valuable work. Notably, Ritchie has travelled through traditional and more recent musicological landscapes whilst encompassing valuable perspectives from non-musical disciplines. In this respect the work succeeds. Similarly, it manages to balance a contribution to two aspects of Western music history – the involvement of women and the offerings of later eighteenth-century Britain – that have sometimes been minimized, with the delivery of a product in keeping with well-established scholastic models. Although only the future will reveal the extent and nature of current and emergent trends (as well as those yet unseen), both within music research and in its relationship with other disciplines, it must be said that Ritchie has provided an illuminating insight into areas that are sometimes overlooked. Although a blind emphasis on all past music is not necessarily the best pathway for musicological research, an examination of works and experiences beyond the established canon can yield a positive result. In this case, it certainly has.

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CRAIG H. RUSSELL

*FROM SERRA TO SANCHO: MUSIC AND PAGEANTRY IN THE CALIFORNIA MISSIONS*

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Few scholarly works combine extensive documentary research with interesting, informal narrative and new performance editions. Craig Russell's new monograph, *From Serra to Sancho*, is a wonderful addition to the rich body of musicological and historical literature on the cultural aspects of the Franciscan missions in Alta California from 1769 to 1848. Russell has aimed to make his work useful for researchers and performers alike, and to remedy the lack of printed scores for the extensive repertory of California mission music: he succeeds in doing both.

The Franciscans and the music they coordinated are at the centre of Russell's narrative. At various points throughout the book he reminds us that others have ignored the friars' musical contributions in favour of their contemporary Anglo-American composers further east. Still other scholars have focused on themes such as drastic population decline, punishment and physical control. Russell does not discount these aspects of colonialism and evangelization, but he views the music of the California missions as a vehicle through which misrepresentations about mission life may be challenged. Highly coordinated efforts between Indians and missionaries over prolonged periods of time were necessary in order to produce the sophisticated sounds revealed by written documents and extant musical sources. Although Russell's purpose was not to study the musicians themselves in depth, he notes that the native inhabitants of California could alter the traditional performance of sacred music. For example, in one manuscript, Fray Florencio Ibáñez directed the addition of loud percussion to the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* sung at Pentecost (205–207).

Within the book, biographies of Franciscan musicians and the best-known Mexican composer of the period – Ignacio de Jerusalem – are coupled with extensive segments about specific musical works in different genres, representing the whole body of California mission music. Russell conducted extensive research in archives in California and Mexico, examining the notes, notational system, genre, paper, handwriting and marginalia of extant source material, and comparing them with travellers' accounts, Spanish documents (including inventories and shipping records) and the physical spaces in which this music was produced. Russell's knowledge of specific musical terms allows him to correct longstanding historical misinterpretations of some important Spanish documents that describe mission music. His more complex