REVIEW

James Porter (ed.), *Defining Strains: The Musical Life of Scots in the Seventeenth Century*. Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Wien: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007. Pp. 386. €69.20, £45.00, US\$107.95. ISBN 978-3-03910-948-7.

Traditionally, the seventeenth century has not been a particularly happy or popular chapter in the story of Scotland. Occurring as it does between the more romantic eras of Renaissance and Enlightenment, it has been largely glossed over in much of the existing historiography; mentioned in passing, if at all, and then quickly and quietly swept under the rug. The bleak portrait most often painted of the period is that of a turbulent, poverty-ridden country, marked by violence, religious fanaticism, and economic and cultural failure. Generally considered a low point for both social harmony and artistic production, seventeenth-century Scotland has not, consequently, been much celebrated for its musical life.

Recent efforts have been made to paint a more balanced picture; to examine in a more sympathetic light the way the conflicts of this period affected cultural production. This is the purpose of *Defining Strains: The Musical Life of Scots in the Seventeenth Century*, which strives to present a broader and less negative view of Scottish musical life and practice in this era. Like those scholars of the Enlightenment who have begun to investigate the seventeenth century in search of its cultural origins, this collection argues that the roots of the vibrant musical life of the eighteenth century can be found in the traditions, innovations and conflicts of the seventeenth. It was from this century that a distinctive Scots melodic idiom first emerged, and those musical qualities which we now consider essentially 'Scottish' were originally formed.

While historians conventionally draw the boundaries of the historical seventeenth century very close to the chronological one, with the Union of Crowns in 1603 and the Union of the Parliaments in 1707 on either side, this volume takes 1579, the year of King James VI's regal majority, as its point of departure, so that the musical life of his Scottish reign can be considered alongside that of his English one, and the evolution of cultural patronage after his departure for London in 1603 can be assessed. 'The musical life of Scots' is intended to be as broad and inclusive a topic as possible, to incorporate Scottish musicians who went abroad alongside those who remained at home, as well as those amateurs who laboured to collect and consolidate the repertory. At the same time, it is meant to acknowledge the influence of other cultures on music in Scotland, and the interest many Scots took in the music of England, Ireland, France and Italy, which served both to enrich the native repertoire and make Scots more aware of their own musical identity.

In these thirteen essays, therefore, a range of themes and perspectives emerge. Warwick Edwards, for instance, contributes a geographical survey of the known primary musical sources associated with seventeenth-century Scotland, spanning from Aberdeen and the northeast to Glasgow and the southwest, as well as those sources of uncertain provenance or which were compiled outside of Scotland. Rob MacKillop, on the other hand, approaches his essay from the perspective of performance, discovering in the contemporary lute repertoire an awareness of continental practice as well as an appreciation of the vernacular style. The lives of key individuals such as Tobias Hume – amateur musician, composer and soldier of fortune – are made a little less obscure by Michael Rossi; and Patrick Cadell and Edward Corp separately establish the place of French and Italian music in the manuscripts of Harie Maule and his elder brother James, 4th Earl of Panmure. Corp's essay also examines the role of their expatriate cousin, David Nairne, in their acquisition, and suggests that Jacobites living in exile had an important role in the circulation of musical

manuscripts in this period. A contribution by Anne Dhu McLucas analyses each of the three editions of Aberdeen printer John Forbes's *Cantus, Songs & Fancies* - the only collection of secular music printed in Scotland through all of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; while James Porter's concluding essay explores the importance of psalms - one genre which dominated public and private music in Scotland from Reformation through Restoration and Revolution - and their place in the 'spiritual armoury' of the Covenanters.

The collection of essays in this volume is not quite comprehensive - the editor admits that important topics such as popular song and ballad, or regional music, still need to be explored more fully. But the various perspectives from which it does approach the 'long seventeenth century' make plain that the musical life of Scots in this formative period was far more complex than it has hitherto been portrayed. And while music manuscript analysis and studies of performance practice for instruments such as classical bagpipe, harp, or lute can be rather daunting to the non-specialist, the collection certainly still has as much to offer readers with a more general interest in cultural history.

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