

Kathryn Lowerre (editor). *The Lively Arts of the London Stage, 1675–1725*. Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT, 2013. ISBN 9781409455332. xv, 306 pages. £65.00

As the title suggests, this collection of essays concerns music, musical theatre, drama, dance, pantomime, and farce: the various forms of theatrical entertainment on the London stage around the turn of the 18th century. The editor has sought to highlight “theatrical and musical volatility” during this period of political turmoil, financial uncertainty, and controversy over whether or not playwriting, acting, and theatregoing all lead straight to hell.

The Lively Arts of the London Stage, from the publisher’s series *Performance in the long eighteenth century*, derives in part from a 2005 interdisciplinary conference on John Eccles and his contemporaries: six of the thirteen chapters are revised and expanded versions of papers presented at that conference. It comprises three sections, of unequal length: an opening (three chapters) centered on Congreve’s *The Judgement of Paris*; a central section (eight chapters) of essays on music, dance, and acting; and an “afterpiece” (two chapters) devoted to low comedy, farce, popular culture *ca.* 1700, and inter-theatrical competition.

The opening section is doubly focused on competition: in 1701, at Dorset Garden theatre, the composers John Eccles, Gottfried Finger, Daniel Purcell, and John Weldon presented their entries for a Prize Music competition. (The prize went to Weldon.) They had prepared settings of William Congreve’s libretto *The Judgement of Paris*, about a competition of more fateful consequence. Olive Baldwin and Thelma Wilson, in their opening essay, consider how the four composers’ settings might have been affected by the choice of singers available. Robert Rawson paints a picture of a disappointed Gottfried Finger, who finished fourth, and suggest possible reasons for his poor showing. Matt Roberson concludes the section by considering how the competition pieces were staged.

The second section is more diffuse, though with essays that implicitly relate to one another. Clearly the authors have read and thought about one another’s contributions: footnotes offer cross-references, supporting arguments, and at least one generously collegial disagreement. This section includes essays by Jennifer Cable, on the English cantata 1700–1710, a period during which composers confronted the popularity of the Italian musical style; Sean M. Parr, on

Johann Pepusch and his “secular cantata” *The Union of the Three Sister Arts* (the sister arts are music, poetry, and painting); Jennifer Thorp, with the sole essay on dancing (a stepsister art?), on “grotesque” characters in danced entertainments; Timothy Neufeldt, on the pastoral mode in relation to the Jeremy Collier controversy; Amanda Eubanks Winkler, on cross-dressing and madness in the pastoral *The Fickle Shepherdess*; Anthony Rooley, on songs in praise of Arabella Hunt and Anne Bracegirdle, with pleasing detail about the ways these two singers were portrayed; Jennifer Renee Danby, on madness portrayed by the male actors Charles Hart and Michael Mohun; and Suzana Ograjensek, who offers an astute reappraisal of Bononcini’s *Astianatte*, moving beyond the scandalous rivalry between two divas that has colored that opera’s reputation.

In the final section, Melissa Bloom Bissonette re-examines Colley Cibber’s reputation as a writer and as a businessman, and Kathryn Lowerre closes the book with an essay on song-quotation – the onstage use, improvised or scripted, of music or text from a different work – for comic or ironic effect.

Lowerre’s essay is a fitting conclusion to the book, for it reminds us of the particularity of any theatrical choice. The entire book is about the connections, rivalries, and circumstances that influence what appears onstage. Rival theatres, earlier productions, lauded performers, foreign influences, politics, economics, religion or religiosity, and fickle fashion all have their effects.

In addition to the thirteen essays (some of which might have benefited from additional proofreading), the book includes a list of figures, a list of musical examples, a list of tables, notes on the contributors, acknowledgements, and an introduction by the editor, thorough bibliographic information, and a useful though not exhaustive index.

This book is both a valuable resource and a worthy example of interdisciplinary collaboration. May it provoke fruitful discussion and discerning appreciation of the variety that was to be found on the London stage around the turn of the eighteenth century.

Ken Pierce