

Michael Kassler, ed., *The Music Trade in Georgian London*

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Reviewed by Peter Campbell

The Georgian era, from the ascent in 1714 of George I, Queen Anne's closest Protestant relative, to the death of George IV in 1830, was the period in which many elements that we might consider to be aspects of the modern music business were established as commonplace. Mass-produced printed music, shop-front music vendors, the copyright of scores, and steel-strung pianos presage the great expansion of the industry that would be seen during the subsequent industrial revolution. Indeed, many of these elements were still in evidence right to the end of the twentieth century, when they were finally overtaken by the advances of the digital age.

Little of this historical importance is evident from *The Music Trade in Georgian London*. Although the book is a hefty hardback, weighing in at close to 1.4 kilograms and printed on almost six hundred dense, semi-gloss pages (good for the excellent black-and-white illustrations, but surely unnecessary), its content is rather light on historical context, and its authors do little to situate their otherwise meticulous and fascinating research in any broader social or musical discussion. Each chapter succeeds admirably in fulfilling its stated aim, but together they enlighten only a few rather disparate aspects of the music trade. True, most of the chapters are about publishing music and making instruments (as distinct from, say, composition and performance), but there are also chapters on the invention of notation systems and developing new instruments.

The focus is on the history of a few of the companies engaged in the music printing trade, but there is little discussion of how these particular firms are connected in the market with the early endeavours of other musical business ventures, including, for example, the better-known names of English music publishing, Novello, Boosey and Chappell that all arose around 1800.¹ A more contextual discussion of printing technologies might also have added to the groundwork done by Friedrich Chrysander in his series of articles in the *Musical Times* during 1877 entitled 'A Sketch of the History of Music-Printing, from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century,'² and built on our knowledge of developments during the previous century.³

¹ Vincent Novello's company was founded in 1811. A recent study is Victoria Cooper, *The House of Novello: Practice and Policy of a Victorian Music Publisher, 1829-1866*, Music in Nineteenth-century Britain series (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2003). The firm of Boosey & Hawkes was created only in 1930 from the merger of Hawkes & Son (established in 1865) and the earlier Boosey & Company dating from at least 1792, but perhaps as early as 1765 (see Richard Wachman, 'Boosey & Hawkes up for Sale as Owner Seeks Quick £80m,' *Observer* (18 Sep. 2005), Business, Media & Cash section: 1, which claims that Boosey & Co. is 'Britain's oldest music publisher'). See also Helen Wallace, *Boosey & Hawkes: The Publishing Story* (London: Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd, 2007). Chappell & Co. was established in 1810.

² Friedrich Chrysander, 'A Sketch of the History of Music-Printing, from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century,' *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, series of seven articles appearing in No. 412 (1 June 1877): 265-68 to No. 418 (1 Dec. 1877): 584-87.

³ The works of Purcell, to take just one, leading example, make several appearances in this volume but, as Purcell died in 1695, lie outside its supposed boundaries. For early and recent discussion of aspects of music printing in the seventeenth century, see, for example: Frank Kidson, 'John Playford, and 17th-Century Music Publishing,' *Musical Quarterly* 4.4 (Oct. 1918): 516-34; Rebecca Herissone, 'Playford, Purcell, and the Functions of Music Publishing in Restoration England,' *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 63.2 (Summer 2010): 243-90.

Let me go back to the beginning, however, as there is a great deal to recommend in this book, and it is a little unfair to start only with what is not to be found. After all, Kassler makes it quite clear in his Preface that his book 'does not survey the whole trade but concentrates upon significant aspects of it' (p. xv). The first third of the volume contains carefully researched histories of the largest and most successful firm of music sellers (businesses that commissioned the manufacture of and then sold instruments, and bought or otherwise obtained musical compositions that they then engraved, printed and sold) in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The chapters by Jenny Nex (on Longman & Broderip), Michael Kassler (Broderip & Wilkinson) and David Rowland (Longman & Clementi) plot out in great detail the vicissitudes of the business venture established by James Longman in 1768. Longman's son John continued the partnership until 1801, but finally, with the retirement of Munzio Clementi in 1831, the firm ceased any tangible connection to the founder.

Clementi's partners at that time, Frederick William Collard and his brother William Frederick, remained trading, but soon after Clementi's death only a year after his retirement, they auctioned off the printing side of the business, which was bought by Thomas Edward Purday, a past employee.⁴ The career of Purday (1791–1873) is not followed up by the authors here, but we know that he traded as a seller of song sheets in St Paul's Churchyard, and later, until 1864 from premises in Oxford St. He was the eldest son of Thomas Purday (1765–1838), minor composer, bookseller and publisher, and brother of Zenas Trivett Purday (1792–1866), who took over part of John Bland's music business in High Holborn in 1831, selling 'humorous song sheets.'⁵ Bland's periodicals are discussed in Chapter 5 of the volume under review, and two copyright cases in which Zenas Purday was defendant are referenced in Chapter 6 (pp. 384–85), but no link is made between the brothers.⁶ Although not as distinguished or arguably as important as the Longmans, this dynasty of publishers would seem worthy of a chapter in their own right.

This first part of the book presents an intricate story of several generations of music sellers in London. (Concern could also be expressed here about the use of 'England' in the title when little if any mention is made of anywhere except London. Certainly there was hardly any activity elsewhere—the other chief centers of the trade being outside England in Dublin and Edinburgh—but how the music trade operated in regional England, if it did at all, is not even discussed.) The various business partnerships are set out in painstaking detail, some useful, but much merely obscuring the narrative. While the research is of the highest scholarly standard, and the historical data uncovered is certainly valuable and worthy of record, the story being told is frequently overburdened by superfluous facts. On page 21, for example, the marriage of Francis Broderip and Anne Longman is noted. That both the bride and the officiating minister happened to be named Longman is intriguing but, for all the detail provided about births and marriages over several generations, no link to the family of James Longman is established.

It is not until page 140, in a chapter by David Rowland, that we get some interesting contextual discussion. Here we learn of the transport systems that were used to move

⁴ Their instrument business was acquired by the Chappell Piano Company in 1929, who continued to make Collard-branded pianos until 1971 (see p. 157).

⁵ See P.W. Jones and R.J. Goulden, 'Purday,' *Grove Music Online*, www.oxfordmusiconline.com, accessed 20 Dec. 2011.

⁶ A third brother, Charles Henry Purday (1799–1885), was also a music publisher. He composed the well-known tune 'Sandon' for the hymn 'Lead, Kindly Light'.

instruments around the country, and to and from the Continent. We get more fascinating—although admittedly tangential—commentary on pages 143–44 with a story about the arcane expression ‘hookey walker,’ referring to a person who tells lies, and a use of it by Dickens, who had a forebear who worked at Longman & Broderip.⁷ By page 185 we have a discussion of the agreements Clementi made with publishing houses in Paris and Leipzig for the simultaneous publishing of the same work, thereby avoiding what we today might, in some cases, call parallel importing, and the disruptions to this and to the supply of scores and instruments caused by the Napoleonic Wars. There is mention of correspondence with Haydn and Beethoven concerning the purchase and publication of new works, and, of course, Clementi’s own compositions, but these interesting passages are few and far between. Throughout the section, we also get the story of the importance of Stationers’ Hall in registering published music. That registration was used so little by publishers (Longman were the first), even when required to do so by statute, is another fascinating facet of the music-publishing story.

The middle third of the book, a single chapter of over 150 pages, is an article by John Small entitled ‘The Development of Musical Copyright.’ Small’s chapter is incredibly thorough and clearly written but, while it is obvious that copyright is an essential element of music printing, the logic here seems backwards. This is a step-by-step legal history, using music cases as a prop, whereas a story of the development of publishers’ businesses, using their court appearances as evidence, would be more in keeping with the title of the book. In the same way that, today, the legal status of web-hosted digital audio files is open to challenge, publishers were then adopting operating practices (such as reprinting works that composers had only recently published with other firms) that had not yet been circumscribed by legislation; suing for damages or injunctions to prevent further sales was the only remedy.

The chapter begins by dealing with early cases seeking rulings on such questions as whether the *Licensing Act* of 1662 and the subsequent *Copyright Act* of 1710 applied to music, whether there was indeed a common law copyright and whether or not these acts removed or strengthened such a right, and whether legislation overrode some provisions of direct royal grants, usually letters patent, over particular works (some compositions of Purcell and later of Handel fall into this last category). To a discussion of musical copyright, this is all important and necessary background, but it takes over forty pages to get to cases that fall strictly into the Georgian period. Such backtracking is warranted in order to present a comprehensive narrative, but it is symptomatic of the volume’s lack of clear focus. There is, however, around page 294, some useful and insightful discussion of the limitations of the *Copyright Act*.

Along with a chapter by Yu Lee An on the ‘Periodical Music Collections of John Bland’ sandwiched between these two larger parts, three articles by Kassler on assorted topics relating to inventions and innovations make up the remaining third of the book. First there is the story of Charles, third Earl Stanhope, who promoted a system of notation by letter-names and symbols rather than note-heads on a staff. Had his system been able to cope easily with the complexities of even modest scores, its use would have saved much paper and specialist

⁷ The reference is in *A Christmas Carol*, published in 1843. This origin at Longman’s is noted by Rowland as being reported in a slang dictionary by a Jon Bee [John Badcock] that appeared in 1823, but it also gained wider credence by being retold in the *British Conversationalist and Literary Magazine* (1859): 285; for a quite different derivation, see ‘Origin of the Phrase “Hookey Walker”,’ *Punch* 21 (1851): 270.

music engraving, but it could not, and so never found wide support.⁸ Elements of the system were probably incorporated in the later Sol-f a notation promoted by Curwen, but Stanhope's 'letter music' remains a minor sideline to mainstream music publishing. The Earl was also keen to improve keyboard instruments so that they might record on paper pieces played on them, and this is discussed in Kassler's next chapter. Like the letter music, Stanhope did not invent the concept and, although he had some success with the recording process, neither did he perfect a system that could easily be read or played back.⁹ The last chapter concerns the contribution of Jacob Vollweiler to the establishment of lithography as the pre-eminent form of music reproduction in England from about 1806. A list of all the known lithographic publications by Vollweiler in London is included, but there is no detailed information offered about how and when other publishers took up the new technology.

At the back of the volume is a list, with short summaries, of the court cases referenced in the book, and a useful Index of Persons, but no subject index. A closer reading of the index shows that in fact it includes references to the names of companies, courts, organisations (such as 'House of Lords'), positions (such as 'Chief Justice of the Court of King's Bench') and even events (such as 'Commemoration of Handel'), so the use of 'Persons' in the title is both strange and misleading.

There is much in this book that you will not find reported anywhere else. The meticulous research (and, meticulous editing, the lack of which I have noted in several of Ashgate's previous publications), evident in the level of detail presented by all authors in every chapter, is staggering, but it simply does not 'hang together' as an integrated volume. I would not be without it as a reference work for the specific subjects upon which the individual authors have focussed—particularly the history of the Longman firm and, separately, the history of music copyright—but as a stand-alone volume I wanted rather more. Along with the work of other authors on other individual publishers, perhaps a more complete and satisfying history of the music trade in Georgian England can be assembled; this volume contributes several useful but disjointed pieces of the story.

⁸ On pages 248–49, Kassler seems to belabour his point about the difficulty of setting scores of more than two staves, suggesting that the alignment would require 'a handwritten transcription of the score that showed for each page where particular letter-music type was to be positioned,' but there is no reason to think that typesetters using moveable musical type, or even the later engravers, would not also have needed this sort of preparation—runs of semiquavers in one part requiring more space to be left in other parts for them to remain aligned, for example, or even how many bars, and at what width, to place per system—before being able to commence their work.

⁹ The problem of early chapters, which contained fascinating, wonderfully researched, but surely only vaguely relevant biographical information, returns here, with several pages devoted to the various husbands and sisters (and their husbands) of a certain Mrs Lackner of Prague.