

RESEARCH REPORT

'The Ducal Musicians in the Clouds:' The Role of Music in Seventeenth-century German *Singballett*

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While much is known about music at many German courts around the turn of the eighteenth century, the musical establishment (*Hofkapelle*) of the Württemberg court (based in Stuttgart and Ludwigsburg), which was comparable in size and importance, has been neglected by musicologists. This is largely due to the fact that the Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart—the major repository for court documents—was bombed during World War II, and many assumed that the relevant archival evidence had been destroyed. In fact, a wealth of archival material—in the form of letters, employment contracts, reports, and ephemera, both manuscript and printed—has survived. This documents the everyday lives of the *Hofkapelle* members in fascinating detail and casts light on the working conditions of the musicians, their training, career expectations, salary disputes, and on the day-to-day administration of the *Hofkapelle*.

We are able, for example, to assign a more prominent position to women musicians than has been previously recognised—with the existence of professional female singers (including 'choirboys'), lutenists and a trumpeter at the court.¹ The archival sources also call for a re-evaluation of the history of the orchestra. The remnants of the extensive music collection of the keen amateur musician Crown Prince Friedrich Ludwig of Württemberg (1698-1731), now held in the Universitätsbibliothek Rostock, allow us to link the original sets of performing parts directly to the musicians, providing insights into the distribution of the forces initially

¹ See Samantha Owens, 'Professional Women Musicians in early 18th-century Germany,' *Music & Letters* 82 (2001): 32–50.

² See Samantha Owens, 'Upgrading from Consort to Orchestra at the Württemberg Court,' book chapter scheduled to appear in P. Holman & J. Wainwright, eds, *From Renaissance to Baroque* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, forthcoming [2003]).

performing this repertoire. The results produced by this synthesis of archival and musical material present valuable new evidence in the field of German baroque performance practice.²

This archival material provided much of the data for my doctoral dissertation, which took the form of a case study centred on the years between 1680 and 1721, focusing on the conditions for Württemberg court musicians and on the development of the baroque orchestra in general. While undertaking research in Stuttgart I also gathered primary source material relating to a much wider time period, a fund that continues to supply the resources for related research projects. Among the areas I have long intended to investigate more closely is the custom of staging *Singballette* to celebrate events important to individual courts, such as birthdays, namedays, visits of foreign royalty, weddings, or home-comings.³ Largely a seventeenth-century phenomenon, the *Singballett* was a brand of large-scale theatrical entertainment incorporating poetry, song, dance, music, costumes, and stage scenery, and was popular at courts throughout the Holy Roman Empire. Given its importance, it is surprising that the *Singballett* is mentioned only rarely in the writings of modern music historians. While the latest edition of *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* features a substantial article on the topic, the second edition of its English equivalent, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music & Musicians*, fails to even mention the genre.⁴ This is despite the fact that, on a purely statistical level, for every opera performed in the German-speaking lands between 1600 and 1700, around three ballets were presented.⁵

The main reason for this neglect is, of course, the paucity of surviving sources. With regard to the choreography of specific productions, tangible evidence is completely lacking, since the decades that marked the height of the *Singballett's* popularity—the 1660s to the 1680s—saw sophisticated dance notation still in the process of development in France. Music, on the other hand, does remain for three works (that can be proven, at any rate⁶), so that in the large majority of cases the sole evidence for a particular entertainment comes in the form of a printed description, or *Textbuch*, originally intended for distribution to members of the audience. For these reasons, musicologists have preferred to focus on the history of opera during the same period, while most modern studies dealing with *Singballett* are by scholars working predominantly on dance, German literature, or the nature of seventeenth-century courtly society. While their work is extremely valuable, it focuses primarily on the prose, poetry, topoi, costumes, dance, and scenic effects contained, or described, within the extant *Textbücher*, but generally fails to take fully into account the musical information provided and, on the whole, pays little expert attention to exclusively musical questions.⁷

³ For a general overview, see Sara Smart, 'Ballet in the Empire,' *Spectaculum Europaeum: Theatre and Spectacle in Europe (1580–1750)*, ed. P. Béhar, Pierre and H. Watanabe-O'Kelly (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999): 547–70.

⁴ Hans-Georg Hofmann, 'Singballett,' *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 2nd ed. (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1994).

⁵ Werner Braun, 'Zur Gattungsproblematik des Singballetts,' *Gattung und Werk in der Musikgeschichte Norddeutschlands und Skandinaviens*, ed. F. Krummacher and H.W. Schwab (Kassel, 1982) 48.

⁶ See Hofmann, 'Singballett' and Paul Nettel, 'Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen Singballetts, sowie zur Öttinger und Nördlinger Musikgeschichte,' *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 6 (1923/24): 608–20. The three ballets for which music is known to survive are *Die triumphierende Liebe* (Celle, 1653), *Die freigesinte Schäferin Fillis* (Öttingen, 1671), and the *Ballet von Zusammenkunft und Wirkung derer 7. Planeten* (Dresden, 1678).

⁷ See, for example, Sara Smart's otherwise excellent *Doppelte Freude der Musen: Court Festivities in Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel 1642–1700* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1989).

The clear absence of an overall narrative sequence in *Singballette* must be acknowledged as an additional reason for the genre's recent neglect. Yet while there are generally no coherent storylines as such, in almost every case the subject of individual *Entréen* are related to the overall theme of the ballet, which thus acted as an important unifying thread. For example, in the 1665 *Ballet von Triumph der keuschen Liebe* [Ballet on the Triumph of Chaste Love], performed in Stuttgart for the wedding of Albert Ernst of Öttingen and Christina Friederica of Württemberg, a lame man learns to walk through the power of love; the guns and force of Mars, the god of war, are useless against love's arrows; and the simple love of shepherds and shepherdesses is praised as being worthy of emulation (to name but three examples).⁸ The audience was given a helping hand in deciphering the meaning of each representation through the medium of vocalists, who introduced each new part and outlined the action to come. *Singballette* usually consisted of two to five parts in total, each containing of a sequence of individual *Entréen*, and in addition to the vocal numbers and dances (generally composed by the court *Kapellmeister* and court dancing-master respectively), the *Textbuch* for the *Triumph der keuschen Liebe* also refers to purely instrumental pieces beginning each main section.

A further reason for the genre's neglect may relate to the amateur status of many of the key participants. Aside from the court musicians, the vast majority of the performers were members of the nobility displaying their skills as dancers to the assembled court and visiting dignitaries. The inclusion of the nobility marks an important distinction between *Singballett* and other forms of theatrical entertainment popular in the Empire at the time, above all, opera. In this respect, the French *ballet de cour* was undoubtedly an important antecedent, as it had been common practice for French courtiers to participate publicly for some decades.

The Württemberg court had a long tradition of large-scale musical-theatrical entertainments given to celebrate specific festive occasions. These flourished in the early decades of the seventeenth century and following the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648, particularly after the appointment of Samuel Capricornus (1628–1665) to the position of *Kapellmeister* in 1657. Although little actual music remains, the evidence supplied by the surviving *Textbücher*, primarily in the form of stage directions, prose descriptions, and occasionally as pictorial illustrations, makes it possible to reach conclusions regarding the types of music performed and its importance to the *Singballett's* overall structure.⁹ The wealth of information contained in the Württemberg *Textbücher* clearly demonstrates that the examination of a selection of *Singballett* sources drawn from a wider geographical area would be extremely beneficial, illuminating our understanding of a variety of musical questions.

Foremost among these is the history of the orchestra, an institution that emerged during the course of the seventeenth century. Our present understanding of this process is still relatively hazy, with many aspects of seventeenth-century instrumentation not fully understood. Large-

⁸ Württembergische Landesbibliothek, HBF 5706, *Ballet von Triumph der keuschen Liebe Zur Lust und Ergötzlichkeit. Präsentirt und getantzet, bey dem Fürstl. Beylager Der Durchleuchtigen Hochgebornen Fürstin und Fräulein, Fräulein Christinæ Fridericæ, Hertzogin zu Wurtemberg und Teck ... und Deß Hochgebornen Grafen und Herrn, Herrn Albrecht Ernsten, Grafen zu Oetingen, u. So gehalten worden in der Fürstlichen Residentz-Stadt Stuttgart den 28. Maij, 1665* (Stuttgart: Johann Weyrich Rößlin, 1665).

⁹ While my earlier work on this topic focused primarily on productions staged during the 1680s, I have since gathered around fifteen Württemberg *Singballette Textbücher* and made an in-depth study of these, the findings of which I presented as a conference paper in 2002 (at the 25th National Conference of the Musicological Society of Australia, Newcastle).

scale courtly entertainments, such as the *Singballett*, are intimately related to the early orchestra's development since it was often upon such occasions that large numbers of instrumentalists assembled.¹⁰ References to specific instrumentation in the *Textbücher* enrich our knowledge of traditional instrumental associations with specific topoi (for example, pairing hunting horns with Diana, oboes with royalty, or flutes with sleep) and the degree to which these were standardised across Europe. For these reasons the *Singballett* deserves to be acknowledged as one of the seventeenth-century European theatrical forms that helped create the conditions leading to the introduction of new timbres into the nascent ensemble. Throughout much of the century, the designation of specific instruments was not standard practice, at least not on the music itself, so that, in many cases, it is only descriptions of performances (such as those provided by *Singballett Textbücher*) that can provide us with information regarding the types of instruments used in certain performance situations. It is therefore important that this evidence be systematically studied.

Questions of instrumentation are closely linked to those of national style; a key feature of music-making in the baroque era. References to certain dance types or set musical forms offer clues regarding the extent to which the *Singballett*, as presented at different locations (both geographically and chronologically), was influenced by contemporary English, French and, later, Italian models. Particularly important during the first half of the seventeenth century were links between the creators of German ballets and the English masque, as well as the direct influence of the many English string-playing composers residents in German-speaking lands who are known to have transmitted masque dances into the German repertory.¹¹ The *Textbuch* for the *Ballet de la patience*, performed in Tübingen for (and by) members of the Württemberg court in 1666 provides a good illustration of this.¹² Not only does it include phrases such as, 'L'ouverture du Theatre faite par un concert de toute sorte d'instrumens,' but among the participants was the Tübingen dancing-master Charles Dumanoir. The latter represents a direct link to the French court, since his brother Guillaume had been an active participant in ballets performed there, as well as leader of its famed band, the *Vingt-quatre Violons du Roi*. Peripatetic French violinist-dancing masters obviously played an important role in the transmission of French musical style within the Empire, and the fact that the certain names reappear at different German courts suggests some interesting patterns of dissemination. Closer study of a much wider range of *Textbücher* will provide fresh biographical data on many of these figures, as well as on the role of court (and visiting) musicians in these productions: as instrumentalists, dancers, actors, and singers.

The central location for the primary sources to be utilised in this study is the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel. Their holdings comprise over three hundred printed *Textbücher* dating from the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, covering a wide geographical area (and with around one third of these available online). The principal aim of this project is the completion of a book that will redress scholarly neglect of the role of music in seventeenth-century German *Singballett*. Although it is rather early to contemplate the organisation of the

¹⁰ Edmund A. Bowles, *Musical ensembles in festival books, 1500-1800: an iconographical & documentary survey* (Ann Arbor, 1989); see also his 'Music in court festivals of state: festival books as sources for performance practices,' *Early Music* 28 (2000): 421-43.

¹¹ Peter Walls, *Music in the English Courtly Masque 1604-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996) 30-31.

¹² Württembergische Landesbibliothek, HBF 2795.

book itself, it is to be expected that regional boundaries, national musical styles, or distinct typological phases in the history of the *Singballett* may be employed as broad structural divisions. From a musical perspective, then, a comprehensive study of an extensive selection of *Textbücher* has the potential to uncover hitherto neglected aspects of the *Singballett*, revealing certain European, or at least Empire-wide, musical standards.¹³ If the Württemberg examples are anything to go by, the examination of *Textbücher* from a wider geographical area will offer information on a wealth of musical topics.

¹³ Jörg Jochen Berns, 'Die Festkultur der deutschen Höfe zwischen 1580 und 1730. Eine Problemskizze in typologischer Absicht,' *Germanisch-Romanische Monatschrift* 65 (1984): 305.