Harpsichord & fortepiano

Vol. 25, No. 2 Spring, 2021

Musical Instrument Research Catalog
(MIRCat)

Reviews

BOOKS

Geoffrey Lancaster, *Culliford, Rolfe and Barrow: a tale of ten pianos* (University of Western Australia Publishing, 2017), ISBN 9781742589374 (paperback)

Geoffrey Lancaster is a distinguished concert pianist and conductor, an expert in historical performance practice and Professor of Music at the Western Australia Academy of Performing Arts, Edith Cowan University. His previous publications include *The First Fleet Piano* (2015), an extensive exploration of the history of the square pianoforte that arrived in Botany Bay, Australia on board the Sirius in 1788.

Lancaster begins by presenting a brief overview of the ten known extant square pianofortes of the title that include the name Culliford on the nameboard, with estimated dates between 1795 and 1798. These dates are significant, since all fall within the period when Culliford, Rolfe and Barrow began to sell instruments to the public directly, badged under their own name. From 1786 until this time, they had been under contract to make and supply a large number of instruments solely for the firm of Longman & Broderip. Ultimately, it was their 1795 court action against the latter, when attempting to recover a longstanding bad debt, that led to Longman & Broderip's bankruptcy.

In the second chapter Lancaster proceeds to set the scene of the late 18th century environment in which square pianofortes became increasingly popular in Georgian London. No longer the sole preserve of the aristocratic elite, they became increasingly sought after by the aspiring professional classes, with pianistic ability being highly regarded as a desirable accomplishment for women. The surge in demand from this new customer base, he opines, led to the larger scale production of basic models that could be manufactured more cheaply for the mass market.

The next two core chapters of the work are devoted to a substantial biographical account of the three partners, Thomas Culliford, William Rolfe and Charles Barrow, with key events in their lives presented in the form of an extended timeline. The material reported here draws in part on findings first identified in earlier publications by Jenny Nex , George Bozarth and Margaret Debenham, as Lancaster freely acknowledges. It includes discussion of the men's earlier years, culminating in their brief bankruptcy and the dissolution of their partnership in 1798, then sets out to explore what subsequently became of each of them in later life. Of the three, William Rolfe successfully continued in business as a pianoforte maker in London. Thomas Culliford disappeared into obscurity, with scant records emerging of his presence in Compton, Hampshire from time to time. It was here that he died, in 1821. It is Lancaster's account of the third man, Charles Barrow, that is most intriguing, however. He describes primary source materials, documenting Barrow's fall from grace in 1810, following his stealthy misappropriation of funds from the Naval Pay Office over a period of seven years. Evidence is presented revealing that Barrow initially obtained employment in that department in 1803, firstly as a lowly clerk, but swiftly promoted to 'Chief Conductor and Officer for paying Contingencies' on an annual salary of £330. This was a meteoric rise, which, as the author observes, suggests some powerful influence had been brought to bear on his account. By the time his embezzlement of funds was discovered in 1810, he had spirited away a total of £5,689. 3s. 9d – a staggering amount, equivalent to almost £450,000 today. Might such dishonest behaviour have been influenced by observing James Longman's unscrupulous financial dealings at close quarters, one wonders? Lancaster also reports new evidence that reveals Barrow somehow managed to slip away unapprehended, ultimately absconding to the Isle of Man where he apparently continued to live until his death in 1826, without ever being prosecuted for his crime.

The fifth chapter then considers the firm's brief foray into the realm of music publishing, providing a list and description of their known publications. Finally, the very lengthy and lavishly illustrated concluding section of the book is devoted to a detailed appraisal of the construction and inscriptions of the ten known surviving instruments of the title.

This book is an extensively researched, monumental work of scholarship in which Geoffrey Lancaster clearly demonstrates his expert knowledge and love of these early keyboard instruments when describing their tonal and performance qualities. In Chapters 3 and 4, it would perhaps have provided a more clearly signposted pathway for the reader had the biographical material been presented as concise histories for each man, rather than as an extended timeline encompassing all three partners. That said, however, the book draws together a considerable body of primary source material that will ensure its place as a valuable source of reference for historians in the field in years to come. Additionally, the descriptions of the technical aspects of the ten extant

instruments in the final chapter will be of particular interest to those involved in the restoration of pianofortes of the period. Professor Lancaster is to be applauded for his achievement.

Margaret Debenham

Peter Holman, *Before the Baton: Musical Direction and Conducting in Stuart and Georgian Britain* (Boydell Press, 2020), ISBN 978-1-78327-456-7

The scholarship of modern conducting is frequently concerned with maestros' personalities, exploring the subtle use of gesture and insightful interpretations of great music. First codified in 19th-century treaties by Berlioz and Wagner, descriptions of musical leadership in earlier periods are shrouded in false accounts that sometimes border on fantasy. Peter Holman seeks to demystify how sacred choral music and opera in the 17th and 18th centuries were led from instruments such as the organ, harpsichord or violin. It examines many aspects of choir and ensemble management, including evolutions of ensemble layout and the gradual development of directors reading from the full score. Overall, it stresses how ensemble playing was more collaborative, with responsibility for interpretation shared democratically between players. With the advent of the baton, orchestral playing became an autocracy, reflecting an appointed individual's personal vision.

Holman begins with historical developments in musical centres of Italy, Germany and France, exploring how gesture and movement may have guided musical performances. While discussing the lowly position of the *batteur de mesure* in European courts, Holman questions the widely-held belief that ensembles used an intrusive, audible beat to keep time. He forensically investigates the death of composer Jean-Baptiste Lully whose notorious self-impaling is largely the basis for this false truth.

Delving into the mirky world of cathedral politics and hierarchy of theatre management, evident is the lasting influence of Handel on sacred and secular conventions. Much of this discussion is based upon his preference to lead oratorios from the keyboard, resulting in experiments with claviorgans (harpsichord-organ hybrids) or from consoles fitted with a 'long movement'. Seemingly the methods that Handel developed became common practice well into the 19th century. British musicians were reluctant to adopt continental baton conducting, introduced by visiting German musicians such as Weber, Spohr and Mendelssohn. The careers and approaches of musicians who led from instruments other than the keyboard are also discussed. Many curiosities and characters of the British music scene are included, from Ripon Cathedral's lever-operated wooden hand – still a feature of the organ case today – to the florid recitative accompaniment of bassist and cellist Dragonetti and Lindley. Nearly all of Holman's research is focused in London and the South of England, with occasional Scottish and Irish interest through the musical life of Edinburgh and Handel's performances in Dublin, including *Messiah*.

Research into early conducting methods always proves difficult as it was a rarely documented before the 19th century. Throughout, Holman draws upon a wealth of pictorial evidence and written sources, with occasionally humorous observations. Gestures seemed confined to up-down motions or, if leading from a keyboard, indicating a pulse by 'head-banging'. Many methods described may appear cumbersome to modern conductors, but does not diminish the interpretive skill or musicianship demanded of 18th-century musicians. The dependance on skills like continuo realisation and improvisation demonstrates how well rounded musicians had to be. Although the depth of scholarship can be fairly dense, each chapter is helpfully concluded with a concise summary. Holman's postlude is a personal reflection on his own preferences as a director of early music, while paying tribute to overlooked interpreters such as Christopher Hogwood. While the main body of the book is concerned with historical research rather than a practical manual, this final chapter presents valuable advice based on several years of performance experience. Overall, this book would not only be of interest to conductors of authentic performances, but continuo players, Handel scholars and anyone interested in the history of choral music and theatre practice in Britain.

Michael Graham

Claudio Di Veroli, *Baroque Keyboard Fingering: A Method* (Lucca, 8/2020), https://www.braybaroque.ie/harps/bbbooks.html

Claudio Di Veroli dedicates the eighth edition of his Method, most appropriately, to Maria Boxall and Mark Lindley, pioneers in advocating the importance of early keyboard-fingering to historically informed performance. Most of us have drawn on their work with publications of originally fingered keyboard music adding to understanding and dissemination. The study of such fingerings in original sources, and the use of the concept of 'good' and 'bad' fingers for stronger and lesser beats, soon become instinctive, for a mild, but enlivening articulation. 'Early fingering' is now a mainstream element in teaching pre-baroque repertoire, but Di Veroli's micro-analytical approach to the subject