

James Gillray, Ancient Music, 1787

# The Land without Music: Satirizing Song in Eighteenth-Century England

AN EXHIBITION AT THE LEWIS WALPOLE LIBRARY, YALE UNIVERSITY, MARCH 1 TO SEPTEMBER 29, 2017

# Curated by

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Organizing curator, Cynthia Roman

The opera first Italian masters taught,
Enrich'd with songs, but innocent of thought.
Britannia's learned theatre disdains
Melodious trifles, and enervate strains;
And blushes on her injur'd stage to see
Nonsense well tun'd, and sweet stupidity.
Thomas Tickell<sup>1</sup>

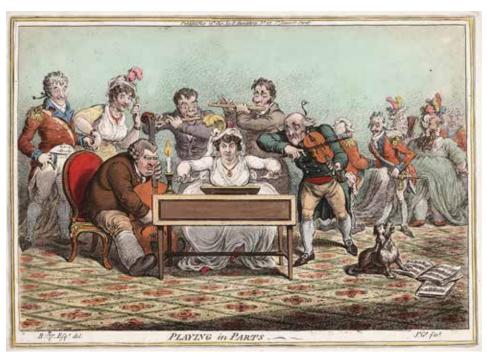
The opera begins to fill surprisingly for all those who don't love music, love noise and party, and will any night give half a guinea for the liberty of hissing — such is English harmony!

Horace Walpole<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Tickell, "To the Author of Rosamond," in Joseph Addison, *The Dramatic Works of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.* (Glasgow: Printed and sold by R. and A. Foulis, 1752), A2r.
2 Horace Walpole to Horace Mann in Florence, 23 December 1742. *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W.S. Lewis, 48 vols. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1937–83), 18:131.

IN 1904 the German critic Oscar Adolf Hermann Schmitz dismissed England as "das Land ohne Musik" – the land without music.<sup>3</sup> This often-repeated epithet bears no resemblance to even the most cursory portrait of English cultural life: from the most modest villages to the great London theaters, the air teemed with musical sound. Rather, Schmitz's barb pointed to England's meager contributions to the western musical canon during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries - no English Gluck, Mozart, or Verdi, no English operatic or symphonic tradition that could rival those that flourished on the Continent. Why? The cause was thought to be an innate lack of talent; the English, insisted the poet Heinrich Heine in an 1840 article, "have no ear, neither for the beat nor indeed for music in any form, and their unnatural passion for piano-playing and singing is all the more disgusting. There is verily nothing on earth so terrible as English musical composition, except English painting." 4 The English, critics like Heine and Schmitz suggested, were importers rather than producers – tasteless consumers and dilettantes rather than discerning, proficient practitioners.

This unflattering portrayal of English musicality (or lack thereof) did not originate with Continental critics acting in a spirit of national competitiveness; in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in print and in visual satire, the English often presented themselves as distinctly unmusical. This attitude, though by no means ubiquitous, was widespread; the diarist Samuel Pepys, for instance, insisted that there had never "been any music here [in England] better than ballads." Composer Matthew Locke believed that "though Italy was, and is the great academy of the world for



James Gillray, after anonymous artist, *Playing in Parts*, 1801

that science and way of entertainment [music], England is not." Opera impresario Owen Swiny declared that music "languished, like tender exotics, when removed into our colder region." Even the composer Henry Purcell, the "Orpheus Britannicus," subscribed to the notion of English musical inferiority. English music, he insisted, was "learning Italian, which is the best master," but, "being farther from the sun," England was "of later growth," and had to "be content to shake off [its] barbarity by degrees." The trope of the unmusical English was also popular among graphic satirists, whose depictions of English music making commonly included contorted

<sup>3</sup> Oscar A. H. Schmitz, *Das Land ohne Musik: Englische Gesellschaftsprobleme* (Munich: Georg Müller, 1914). For an English translation, see Schmitz, *The Land Without Music*, trans. H. Herzl (London: Jarrolds, 1926).

<sup>4</sup> Heinrich Heine, *Pariser Berichte*, July 29, 1840. Trans. Bryan Townsend, *The Music Salon, Blogspot*, September 9, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews (London: Bell, 1970–74), 8:56 (February 12, 1667).

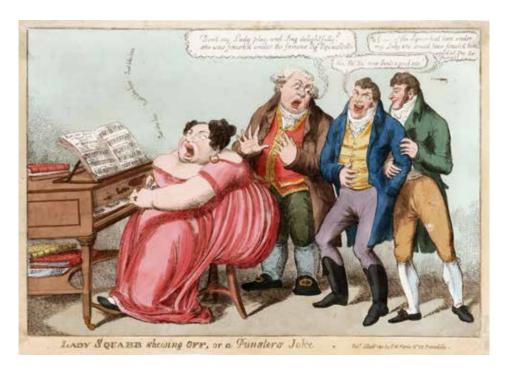
<sup>6</sup> Matthew Locke, *The English Opera, or, The Vocal Musick in Psyche* (London, 1675), preface.

<sup>7</sup> Owen Swiny, dedication to Camilla: An Opera, as it is perform'd at the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane (London, 1707), A2.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Purcell, *The Vocal and Instrumental Musick of The Prophetess,* or, *The History of Dioclesian* (London: J. Heptinstall, 1691), A2r–A2v.

lips, straining throats, screeching pets, and other signifiers of cacophony. Bringing together satirical prints and texts pertaining to English music makers and listeners, this exhibition explores English attitudes toward music as lascivious, feminine, foreign, frivolous, and distinctly un-English.

Nowhere were anxieties about English musical culture more evident than in the fraught national debate over Italian opera. When English impresarios first experimented with Italian opera in the first decade of the eighteenth century, reactions from audiences and critics ran the gamut from adoration to outright ridicule. That this spectacular form of entertainment, deliciously transgressive in its exoticized flamboyance, appealed to a great many of England's elite is indisputable. Yet some English critics greeted it with scorn. Joseph Addison predicted that future generations would be "very curious to know the reason why their forefathers used to sit together like an audience of foreigners in their own country, and to hear whole plays acted before them in a tongue which they did not understand." 9 Richard Steele worried that "this way of being pleased ... and being given up to the shallow satisfaction of the eyes and ears only, seems to arise rather from the degeneracy of our understanding, than an improvement of our diversions." 10 John Dennis went so far as to write a pamphlet to "defend the English stage" against "the invasion of foreign luxury." 11 Critics satirized Italian opera from the stage as well as in print – most famously in the wildly popular ballad opera The Beggar's Opera, written by John Gay and produced by John Rich in 1728 at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Irreverently inverting hierarchies of class and genre, The Beggar's Opera features a cast of thieves, highwaymen, and women of dubious virtue, who sing melodies drawn from popular tunes juxtaposed



Charles Williams, Lady Squabb Shewing Off, or, A Punster's Joke, 1811

Isaac Cruikshank, Concert of Vocal & Instrumental Music, or, The Rising Generation of Orpheus, 1794



<sup>9</sup> Joseph Addison, in Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Gregory Smith (London: J. M. Dent, 1945), 55–56 (no. 18, March 21, 1711). 10 Richard Steele, *The Tatler*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 39 (no. 4, April 19, 1709).

<sup>11</sup> John Dennis, An Essay on the Opera's After the Italian Manner, which are about to be establishe'd on the English stage (London, 1706), 2.

with a few Italian opera arias. In lampooning Italian opera — and the ruling class who patronized it — the production struck a chord with the public, and it ran for an astonishing sixty-two performances, making, it was said, Rich very gay and Gay very rich. William Hogarth contributed to the *Beggar's Opera* phenomenon one of his earliest paintings, depicting a pivotal scene in Act III set in Newgate prison. The anti-hero Macheath, a highwayman, clad in a vibrant red coat and shackles, stands pridefully as his wife Polly Peachum (right) and lover Lucy Lockit (left) plead for his life.

This painting was not the first contribution Hogarth made to the Italian opera controversy. In 1724 he published *Masquerades and Operas*, which assails English audiences for their taste for the foreign. A devil and a fool lead a group of masqueraders into the Haymarket Opera House. The banner hanging above adapts another well-known Hogarth print of soprano Francesca Cuzzoni and castrati Senesino and Berenstadt performing in George Frideric Handel's opera *Flavio*, here with the addition of kneeling



Formerly attributed to William Hogarth, Beggar's Opera, Act III, ca. 1728

peers pouring an extravagant sum at their feet. In the foreground a woman hawks a wheelbarrow full of "waste paper," labeled with the names of English literary luminaries like Shakespeare, Jonson, Dryden, and Addison, to the indifferent crowd. Echoing critics like Addison and Steele, Hogarth mocks the English elite for spurning their own theatrical legacy in favor of foreign imports.

This turn to the foreign with the introduction of Italian opera in 1705 came just a decade after the death of Henry Purcell, recognized in his own day and still admired in ours as one of the greatest English composers. His death later came to be regarded as the end of an era of English compositional prowess that had begun during Elizabeth's reign. Whereas England had previously produced composers—Tallis, Byrd, Dowland, Purcell, and many others—whose music kindled admiration on the Continent, in the eighteenth century it was believed, at home as well as abroad, that those days were over. Under these circumstances, debates over Italian opera or other "imported" music were often couched in chronological as well as national terms: "ancient" versus modern music. Over the eighteenth century the ancient-or-modern music debate eclipsed the national, and inspired numerous satires. An especially provocative example is Edward Francis Burney's *Amateurs of Tye-Wig* 

William Hogarth, Masquerades and Operas, State 2, ca. 1724





Edward Francis Burney, *Amateurs* of *Tye-Wig Music*, ca. 1800–1815

*Music*, which mocks advocates of "ancient" music. Dressed in fashions, including tye-wigs, that are decades out of date, these amateurs haphazardly perform Baroque music, surrounded by portraits of esteemed composers of the late sixteenth through the mid-eighteenth centuries — Bull, Gibbons, Locke, Purcell, and Handel, among others. Scores by the "modern" composers Beethoven, Mozart, and Haydn warm the musicians from the fire grate.

In addition to mockery of English musical ineptitude and poor taste, satirists favored another rich theme in their depictions of English music making: the ancient association of music with romantic desire. One source of anxiety about music was its tendency to titillate—its potential to act as a powerful aphrodisiac even for virtuous gentlemen and ladies. It is not unusual to find musical instruments in eighteenth-century satires of illicit encounters, as in Thomas Rowlandson's depiction of members of the



Thomas Rowlandson, Work for Doctors' Commons, 1792

Doctors' Commons, a society of civil lawyers in London, keeping vigil to catch a couple in a compromising act. A lute, its lusty work done, lies forgotten on the floor as the fire roars.

If music could loosen resolve in private encounters, its powers to excite were amplified in the theater. For many operagoers, nurturing infatuations with celebrity singers, being carried to sensual heights by their arias, was part of the fun. For others, the opera – with its affecting music, its decadence, its promiscuity – posed an alarming threat to public morality. When Italian opera was first introduced in London at the beginning of the eighteenth century, critics warned of its capacity to bring about moral decay, and the concern never disappeared. More than ninety years later, the bishop of Durham, Shute Barrington, took exception to the "indecent" dress and movements of a group of dancers at the opera. Moved to action, he formally petitioned the House of Lords to issue restrictions, on the grounds that the "scandalous immorality" of the opera dancers' "most indecent attitudes" and "most wanton theatrical exhibitions" threatened to corrupt "the moral feelings of the people."12 Satirists responded with prints poking fun at the bishop's

12 Bishop of Durham's speech to the House of Lords, March 2, 1798, in William Cobbett, ed., *The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803* (London: T. C. Hansard, 1818), 33:1307.



Charles Ansell, Ecclesiastical Scrutiny, or, The Durham Inquest on Duty, 1798

#### OPPOSITE

Isaac Cruikshank, Symptoms of Lewdness, or, A Peep into the Boxes, 1794

Robert Cruikshank, A Dandy Fainting, or, An Exquisite in Fits, 1818 alarmist fixation on French opera dancers. One print, *Ecclesiastical Scrutiny*, *or*, *The Durham Inquest on Duty*, portrays Durham and two other bishops supervising the dressing of several opera dancers. Durham, seated on the left, peers through a glass at a dancer as she exchanges her petite shoe and sheer stocking for less alluring alternatives. Behind Durham, a dancer in a pink dress protests as her bodice is raised with great concentration. Beilby Porteus, bishop of London, measures the length of a petticoat, as a fully dressed danseuse on the far right rehearses a movement made awkward by her new, constrictive costume.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of eighteenth-century representations of English musical life is the lightness with which, amid these unsparing mockeries, satirists touched themes of great sensitivity. Sexual morality, effeminacy, national identity, international standing—these controversial themes contrapuntally entwine in satires of English music. Indeed, English musical inferiority is, though the most obvious, often the least cutting object of these prints' satirical edge. To depict the English as unmusical could be as implicitly boastful as it was self-deprecating, because it asserted a national character too sensible, too intellectual, too sober to permit the excesses of musical genius. If the Italians far outperformed the English when it came to innate musical ability, the







James Gillray, Operatical Reform, 1798

English, as Addison put it, had "a genius for other performances of a much higher nature, and capable of giving the mind a much nobler entertainment." 13 By 1776 Charles Burney had naturalized Italian opera into English national identity along these lines. He insisted in his influential history of music that, lacking musical talent at home, it was "no more disgraceful to a mercantile country to import it, than wine, tea, or any other production of remote parts of the world."14 It was perfectly acceptable for the English to fashion themselves, light-heartedly and with little compunction, as an unmusical people – a nation of consumers of culture as well as commodities – a land of music lovers without music of their own.

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Isaac Cruikshank, Durham Mustard too Powerful for Italian Capers, or, The Opera in an Uproar, 1807

<sup>13</sup> Addison, Spectator, 57 (no. 18, March 21, 1711).

<sup>14</sup> Charles Burney, A General History of Music: From the Earliest Ages to the Present Period (London: 1776-1789), 4:221.



#### **CHECKLIST**

All items are from The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University unless otherwise noted.

Formerly attributed to William Hogarth (1697–1764)

Beggar's Opera, Act III, ca. 1728

Oil on canvas

45.7 x 53.3 cm

LWL ptg. 107

< William Blake (1757–1827) after William Hogarth Beggar's Opera, Act III

Etching and engraving, 45.6 x 58.3 cm, sheet Published July 1, 1790, by J. & J. Boydell Folio 49 3582 File 2 ++

Charles Turner (1774–1857) after William Hogarth Portrait of George Frideric Handel Mezzotint, 50.5 x 35 cm, plate mark Published April 4, 1821, by C. Turner Portraits H235 no. 1++

William Hogarth

Masquerades and Operas

State 2

Etching and engraving, 13.4 x 18.2 cm, sheet

Published ca. 1724 by William Hogarth

Kinnaird 72K(f)

> William Hogarth

A Chorus of Singers

Etching 17.3 x 16.0 cm, trimmed to plate mark Published December 1732, by W. Hogarth Kinnaird 76K(e) Box 120 James Gillray (1756–1815)

Ancient Music

Etching and stipple with hand coloring,
42 x 55 cm, sheet

Published May 10, 1787, by S.W. Fores
787.05.10.01.2

Edward Francis Burney (1760–1848) Amateurs of Tye-Wig Music, ca. 1800–1815 Pen and ink and watercolor, 48.7 x 71.9 cm, sheet Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, Yale University, B1975.3.155

Charles Burney (1726–1814) A General History of Music Vol. 4 London, 1776–1789 53 B93 776





# THE CELEBRATED MOCK ITALIAN SONG;

As many mith unbounded Applance by Mr. FAWCETT, Mr. TAYLOR, &c.

Marrill was an opera-singer, List is alley call'd Cramboul, In his ring he ware a logger, Much be low if to musch Belogal; Sopped it in vinegating. And shake over pepperiol; Caro thes his mostic he'd open, With no pila nation.

[Sings in Hallow Style.]
In the coffee,house, Spring Garden,
Signor would no spendi familie,
At the Orange take his coffee,
Planiname drink off he;
At the har whips up a jelll,
Read then a news\_naperelli,
Nice salad, if he should eye any;

With permy o he will key any,
If it have Dandilious,
Saladiesi, heetro-tind,
Endieles, celeries,
Naphimies awiegidies,
Cute with the haife or forke,
Jaw to work-o draw as cork-o.

Flacky, glasky, Primo, brimo, Brinky, winky, Soko, joko, As he pass up Hay-Marketti, Herse in carte there he metti, Hair-hag fall was stoff 'd with hay, Hangyy-horse drag away: Look like ninol,
Lodies grinol,
I appreachl,
Cali a roachl,
To del watermane threw,
Penny si fortissime;
He steps in, step up I pote,
On his fingers door I shuts,
Squall, whip smacko,
Pasternest cracko,
Pathematical diel,
Cocksperiol,
Up Strandiel,
From Senguini
Boy pomatum

For my pature,

Turktocke. For my blocke, Of Vickeri Boy false bairly Hardsmoot Soull my nost, Me a caro, Temple Baro, Fetter Lani, Saurageni, Boy of Longman. Pretty songman, Signor fill his pockets full, Sail to Italy backing, In his superfine causino, Dere he laugh at Johnny Bull.



Sir John Hawkins (1719–1789) A General History of the Science and Practice of Music Vols. 1 & 5 London: Payne and Son, 1776 49 34

▲ Samuel Alken (1756–1815) after Thomas Rowlandson (1756–1827) *An Italian Family* 

Aquatint and etching with hand coloring, 38 x 48 cm, sheet
Published December 1785 by S. Alken
785.12.00.01++

#### < Anonymous

# The Celebrated Mock Italian Song

Etching, engraving, and stipple with hand coloring, 18.3 x 23.8 cm, plate mark
Published August 24, 1808, by Laurie &
Whittle
808.08.24.01, impression 2

#### V Thomas Rowlandson

Italian Picture Dealers Humbuging my Lord Anglaise

Etching with hand coloring, 35.4 x 25 cm, plate mark
Published May 30, 1812, by T. Rowlandson
812.05.30.01, impression 2

Isaac Cruikshank (1756?-1811?)

Concert of Vocal & Instrumental Music, or,

The Rising Generation of Orpheus

Etching with engraving, 20 x 24.8 cm,

plate mark

Published May 12, 1794, by Laurie & Whittle

794.05.12.11

Copy after James Gillray

A Little Music, or, The Delights of Harmony
Etching and stipple with hand coloring,
16.9 x 23.3 cm, sheet
Published 1818 by John Miller and
W. Blackwood
810.00.00.72





James Gillray
after anonymous artist
Playing in Parts
Etching, aquatint, engraving, and stipple
with hand coloring, 25.6 x 36.1 cm,
plate mark
Published May 15, 1801, by H. Humphrey

Charles Williams (fl. 1797–1830) Lady Squabb Shewing Off, or, A Punster's Joke Etching with hand coloring, 25 x 38 cm, sheet Published September 6, 1811, by S.W. Fores 811.09.06.01+

#### < James Gillray

801.05.15.01+

# Here's Songs of Love & Maids Forsaken

Etching with hand coloring, 25 x 21 cm, sheet Published March 30, 1793, by H. Humphrey 793.03.30.02

# < Anonymous

### The Accomplish'd Maid

Etching and engraving with stipple engraving, 35.2 x 24.8 cm, plate mark Published May 21, 1778, by M. Darly 778.05.21.03+

Isaac Cruikshank

Symptoms of Lewdness, or, A Peep into the Boxes Etching and stipple with hand coloring, 26.8 x 37.3 cm, sheet Published May 20, 1794, by S.W. Fores 794.05.20.02+

#### > James Gillray

### An Old Encore at the Opera

Etching, roulette, and stipple with hand coloring, 24.7 x 20 cm, plate mark Published April 1, 1803, by H. Humphrey 803.04.01.01



A Stage Box Scene

Aquatint with hand coloring,  $18.5 \times 20.7 \text{ cm}$ , sheet

Published January 1, 1787, by J. Wicksteed 787.01.01.04

#### > Anonymous

#### A Side Box at the Opera

Etching, roulette, drypoint, and aquatint with hand coloring, 27.6 x 22.8 cm, plate mark
State 2

Published March 15, 1792, by S.W. Fores (first state issued April 14, 1784, by F. Wingrave) 792.03.15.03

Robert Cruikshank (1789-1856)

A Dandy Fainting, or, An Exquisite in Fits Etching with hand coloring, 25 x 35 cm, sheet Published December 11, 1818, by G. Humphrey 818,12,11.01+



James Gillray

Operatical Reform

Etching with hand coloring, 26 x 37 cm, sheet Published March 14, 1798, by H. Humphrey 798.03.14.02+

Charles Ansell (b. 1752)

Ecclesiastical Scrutiny, or, The Durham Inquest on Duty

Etching with hand coloring, 24.8 x 44.4 cm, plate mark

Published March 19, 1798, by S.W. Fores 798.03.19.01+

#### Isaac Cruikshank

Durham Mustard too Powerful for Italian Capers, or, The Opera in an Uproar Etching with hand coloring, 25.6 x 41.8 cm, sheet

Published January 1, 1807, by T. Tegg In *The Caricature Magazine, or Hudibrastic Mirror*, vol. 1.

Folio 75 W87 808









# < Henry Wigstead (d. 1800)

#### The Detection

Etching and aquatint with hand coloring, 27 x 38 cm, sheet
Published June 15, 1795, by S.W. Fores 795.06.15.03

Thomas Rowlandson

Work for Doctors' Commons

Etching with, hand coloring, 16.5 x 25 cm, plate mark

Published February 1792 by T. Rowlandson 792.02.00.02

### Thomas Rowlandson

# The Syrens

Soft-ground etching, stipple engraving, aquatint, and etching with color printed à la poupée, 25.9 x 37 cm, image
Published April 10, 1787, by E. Jackson 787.04.10.03+

# > James Watson (1740-1790)

# The Power of Music and Beauty

Mezzotint, 34.8 x 25 cm, plate mark Published ca. 1770, printed for Carington Bowles 770.00.00.26+

#### Anonymous

The Married Senator and Operatic Syren
Etching, engraving, and stipple with hand
coloring, 16.1 x 10 cm, plate mark
Published 1791
791.12.00.01

COVER Copy after James Gillray, A Little Music, or, The Delights of Harmony, 1818

Designed and set in Yale typefaces by Rebecca Martz, Office of the Yale University Printer. Edited by David Baker. Printed by GHP in West Haven, Connecticut.



