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978-0-521-10691-7 - Henry Purcell: The Origins and Development of his Musical Style

Martin Adams

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This is the first book thoroughly to explore the musical style of Henry Purcell. In this comprehensive study, Martin Adams identifies music by other composers, both within England and from abroad, which influenced Purcell's compositional decisions. Using a mix of broad stylistic observation and detailed analysis, Adams distinguishes between late-seventeenth-century English style in general and Purcell's style in particular, and chronicles the changes in the composer's approach to the main genres in which he worked, especially the newly emerging ode and English opera. As a result, Adams reveals that although Purcell went through a marked stylistic development, encompassing an unusually wide range of surface changes, special elements of his style remained constant. The book will be of interest to students and scholars of music and theatre history, and of British cultural and social history.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xii
<i>Note on music examples and figures</i>	xii

### PART ONE: Stylistic development and influences

1	Early years at court and home: developments to <i>c.</i> 1680	3
2	Years of experiment: <i>c.</i> 1680 to <i>c.</i> 1685	22
3	Consolidation: <i>c.</i> 1685 to <i>c.</i> 1688	42
4	Public recognition: <i>c.</i> 1689 to <i>c.</i> 1691	55
5	'Meaning motion fans fresh our wits with wonder': <i>c.</i> 1692 to 1695	73

### PART TWO: Analytical and generic studies

6	'Clog'd with somewhat of an English vein': early instrumental music, the fantasias and sonatas	89
7	'Bassani's genius to Corelli joy'n'd': instrumental music in the odes, the anthems and on the stage	118
8	Early mastery: sacred music to <i>c.</i> 1685	164
9	Brilliance and decline: sacred music after <i>c.</i> 1685	187
10	'The energy of English words': independent songs for one or more voices	194
11	A new genre: odes to 1689	222
12	Consolidation and maturity: odes from 1689 to 1695	240

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978-0-521-10691-7 - Henry Purcell: The Origins and Development of his Musical Style

Martin Adams

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

## List of contents

13	Background and beginnings: dramatic music to 1689	272
14	'An English-man, equal with the best abroad': dramatic music from 1690 to 1691	287
15	'The pride and darling of the stage': dramatic music from 1692 to 1695	310
	<i>Notes</i>	353
	<i>Select bibliography</i>	371
	<i>Index of names and subjects</i>	376
	<i>Index of works</i>	380

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Martin Adams

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Preface

THIS BOOK WAS BORN out of a conviction which took root around 1974, during an analytical study of Purcell's fantasias, sonatas and a few late instrumental pieces, and at a time when some long-established views of Purcell were just beginning to be questioned. I was working on ground prepared by others, in particular by Michael Tilmouth's article on the sonatas, which demonstrated their close affinity with the fantasias, and by Margaret Laurie's demonstration, largely through a study of sources, that Purcell is unlikely to have written most of the music for *The Tempest* generally attributed to him. The results of my youthful delvings suggested there was much wrong with one prevalent view, which saw Purcell's development mainly in terms of progress towards an English version of the contemporary Italian style.

The core of my conviction, which this book seeks to validate, is that despite the extraordinary surface changes in Purcell's style between his mid teens and his death in 1695 aged around thirty-six, he was a deeply conservative composer, who had to struggle to reconcile the tide of the times – which he helped so strongly on its way, and which he identified primarily with Italian music – with the compositional priorities of his early music.

In the last twenty or so years others have expressed views more or less concordant with this position. But in the process, other misconceptions have sprung up, especially concerning possible influences on Purcell and aspects of chronology. Most of these arise from a failure to distinguish between levels and kinds of compositional development and influence, especially when seeking to identify specific pieces which might have inspired Purcell, when searching out the origin of a sudden stylistic innovation, and when considering the development of his own style.

This book attempts to draw such distinctions, and to show how complex was the web of native and foreign influence around Purcell. It is not intended as a

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

final proof – if such a thing were desirable or even possible – nor does it attempt to present in any detail the range and chronology of his output or the minutiae of his varied private and public fortunes. Rather it seeks to define those Purcellian features common to music as diverse as the early pavans and *The Indian Queen* (Z.630), to identify or speculate upon which foreign and native music might have inspired Purcell's choices, and to see how he reconciled that which he found attractive in such music to his distinctive compositional aspirations. The evidence is drawn mainly from an examination of his changing approach to each of the main genres in which he worked.



## Acknowledgements

THIS BOOK WOULD NEVER have seen the light of day without the help and encouragement of many people. Special thanks to Sir William Glock, who first suggested that I should write it, and who proved unfailingly encouraging to a very young, inexperienced and unproven academic. For help and inspiration in my earliest days of Purcell research I am indebted to Peter Evans and to Robert Hanson. Generous in his comments and encouragement was the late Michael Tilmouth, who read over portions of the text. Many others have offered support by showing an interest and engaging in conversations which have affected my own thinking – in this respect I must particularly thank Nigel Fortune, Kevin O’Connell, Curtis Price and various colleagues in Trinity College Dublin too numerous to single out. For generous responses to written and other queries over the years, thanks are due to Andrew Ashbee, Peter Holman, Rosamond McGuinness, Thomas Mitchell and Bill Vaughan. Many thanks to Michael Dervan for reading over, and commenting on, parts of the text.

Many library staff have been unfailing in their assistance, often above the call of duty. I am indebted to various staff from the Bodleian and Christ Church Libraries, Oxford; the Music Room and the Manuscript Department of the British Library, and the library of the Royal College of Music, London; the Barber Institute, University of Birmingham; and finally to many staff of the Library at Trinity College, Dublin.

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## Abbreviations

- MB* *Musica Britannica*, London: Stainer and Bell  
*NPS* *New Purcell Society Edition*, London: Novello (all editions after 1961, except vol. XXX – 1959)  
*PS* *Purcell Society Edition*, London: Novello

## Note on music examples and figures

MOST MUSIC EXAMPLES have been derived from modern critical editions. In the absence of a reliable modern source, seventeenth-century sources, either manuscript or printed, have been used wherever possible. In analytical diagrams, a close onto a major chord at the end of a phrase in the minor is indicated v(V), etc. The sign ~ is used to indicate harmonic instability. Wherever possible, time signatures are expressed in their original, seventeenth-century forms, e.g. 31,  $\frac{C}{31}$ ,  $\Phi$ . Unless otherwise indicated, all choruses are SATB. All music examples were typeset by TopType Music Bureau, Dublin.