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The tercentenary of Henry Purcell's death falls in 1995, and this volume of specially commissioned essays has been collected to celebrate Purcell's music in this tercentenary year. The essays are representative of the best recent research and explore the following areas: the autograph manuscripts, Purcell's compositional technique, the relationship between Purcell and his teacher John Blow, a reassessment of Purcell's court odes, performance practice and word-setting, and eighteenth-century reception history, particularly regarding *King Arthur*. The volume is richly illustrated with music examples and photographs of important manuscripts. This is also the first collection to analyse Purcell's compositional techniques through detailed study of his manuscripts and the first to report on the discovery of two important autograph manuscripts. The book opens with an assessment of Purcell's elusive personality.

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Watercolour portrait of Henry Purcell, Royal Academy of Music

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*edited by*

CURTIS PRICE

*King Edward Professor of Music,  
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## Preface

This collection of essays is published to commemorate the tercentenary of the death of Henry Purcell on 21 November 1695. Rather than being simply an appreciation of his music, which, thankfully, no longer needs apologists, or a survey of his huge output in every genre known to late seventeenth-century England, this book offers instead a selection of the latest scholarly research. It is intended as a sequel and complement to *Henry Purcell (1659–1695): Essays on his Music*, edited by the late Imogen Holst and published thirty-six years ago to mark the tercentenary of the composer's birth. The present volume naturally measures the development of thinking about Purcell since 1959 but is by no means a replacement for the earlier book; several essays in the Holst collection are now rightly regarded as classics.

Nevertheless, the essays assembled here do generally take a different tack and go some way towards filling a perceived gap. Several years ago, I wrote that 'the most urgent *desideratum* for Purcell research is forensic study of the early manuscripts, to answer the kinds of questions tackled by the editors of the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* in the 1950s and by those presently at work on the *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe*'.<sup>1</sup> I might have mentioned several other areas in which Purcell research seemed at the time to lag behind that into the music of other Baroque composers of similar stature. No one had undertaken a comprehensive study of Purcell's compositional technique as evidenced by corrections in the autographs, working drafts and revisions of his own works – research analogous to Robert Marshall's on Bach, which appeared more than twenty years ago. Musical education and early development – subjects of great import to those working on Monteverdi, Schütz, Bach and Handel – seemed unpromising for Purcell, owing to lack of sources or, rather, to uncertainty over how to interpret the evidence. Purcell's obviously close but

1. Review of Franklin B. Zimmerman, *Henry Purcell: A Guide to Research*, in *Early Music* 17 (1989), 577.

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### *Preface*

still puzzling relationship with his teacher and friend John Blow had not been investigated without prejudice as to the direction in which their influence flowed. No one had seriously challenged Jack Westrup's generally negative assessment of Purcell's early court odes: 'the awkward gait and pompous conventionality' which, he claimed, 'involved the acquisition of a more brilliant manner, for which Purcell's training had not fully prepared him'.<sup>2</sup> And, with one notable exception,<sup>3</sup> there had been no major study of Purcell's music in light of recent developments in reception history. Advocates of historically based performance tended to derive the 'Purcellian style' uncritically from contemporaneous French practice, rather than seek guidance from internal evidence or become aware of earlier English practice and tradition. The essays in this volume help supply these desiderata and, though some are prolegomena to larger studies as yet not fully realized, or are necessarily tentative in their conclusions, each is representative of the several burgeoning areas of Purcell research. Inevitably, there is some overlap between the essays, particularly those on the autograph manuscripts and the court odes, but I have resisted the temptation to remove the common ground, preferring instead to allow the contributors to develop their own arguments fully so that each essay can stand on its own.

When planning this book a few years ago, I could not have hoped that it would include reports on two important new autograph manuscripts (see chaps. 4 and 5). The discovery of these sources would have especially pleased Peter le Huray who, sadly, did not live to finish his contribution to this volume, which is dedicated to his memory.

C.P.

2. *Purcell*, rev. edn by Nigel Fortune (London, 1980), p. 172.

3. Richard Lockett, "'Or rather our Musical Shakspeare": Charles Burney's Purcell', in *Music in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Christopher Hogwood and Richard Lockett (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 59–77.