The eighteenth century arguably boasts a more remarkable group of significant musical figures, and a more engaging combination of genres, styles and aesthetic orientations, than any century before or since, yet huge swathes of its musical activity remain under-appreciated. The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Music provides a comprehensive survey, examining little-known repertories, works and musical trends alongside more familiar ones. Rather than relying on temporal, periodic and composer-related phenomena to structure the volume, it is organized by genre; chapters are grouped according to the traditional distinctions of music for the church, music for the theatre and music for the concert room that conditioned so much thinking, activity and output in the eighteenth century. A valuable summation of current research in this area, the volume also encourages readers to think of eighteenth-century music less in terms of overtly teleological developments than of interacting and mutually stimulating musical cultures and practices, thus pointing to ways in which eighteenth-century music studies will evolve in the future.

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MUSIC

EDITED BY
SIMON P. KEEFE
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The eighteenth century perhaps boasts a more remarkable coterie of totemic musical figures, and a more engaging combination of genres, styles and aesthetic orientations, than any century before or since. Modern Western audiences probably esteem more profoundly the collective accomplishments of great eighteenth-century musical figures than comparable accomplishments of great figures from both earlier and later. Yet huge swathes of its musical activity remain under-appreciated by musicians of all kinds – performers, composers, students and scholars (including eighteenth-century specialists) alike. The traditional dividing point at 1750 has been both scourge and inspiration, validating Bach and Handel, then Haydn and Mozart, as supreme practitioners of the late Baroque and high Classical styles, respectively, while implicitly or explicitly relegating others to an ill-defined periphery. Indeed, many eighteenth-century histories from recent times treat the Baroque and Classical periods in discrete volumes. Whatever the merits of an approach determined by a mid-century partition, the sense of musical continuity across the century as a whole is invariably lost as a result, as is the inter-generic and intra-generic ebb and flow of musical development. By rejecting Baroque and Classical periodizations as a means of organizing this volume – though not adopting a censorious approach to the use of the culturally embedded terms


themselves – it is hoped that eighteenth-century musical activities will be portrayed as richer, more diverse and more complex than is often the case in single- or multi-authored historical volumes. By eschewing a chronological approach across the volume as a whole, we encourage our reader to think less in terms of overtly teleological developments than of interacting and mutually stimulating musical cultures and practices.

Great men may have ensured the century’s special place in our collective musical consciousness, but organizing a history primarily around their achievements would be no less problematic than structuring it around Baroque and Classical periods and ideals. Fundamentally, such an approach would run counter to the spirit of the eighteenth century, when the composer as a valorized, single-minded creative artist played second fiddle to the composer as a more down-to-earth provider of music, at least until notions of ‘genius’ came to the fore in late-eighteenth-century German-speaking countries.3

Instead of relying on temporal, periodic and composer-related phenomena, then, we organize our volume by genre; chapters are grouped according to traditional distinctions of music for the church, music for the theatre and music for the concert room that conditioned so much thinking, activity and output in the eighteenth century. As a counterbalance – and potential respite for those reading from cover to cover – we include ‘interludes’ on topics relevant to all genres (listening, thinking and writing; and performance), as well as a ‘prelude’ and ‘postlude’ on musical orientations and predilections in general at either end of the century (and, with an eye on historical continuity, a little earlier and later as well).

Complete comprehensiveness in the treatment of any given musical period is, of course, a historical chimera. But it remains our aspiration to cover as much ground as realistically possible in a single volume on eighteenth-century music, above all ground that has typically received less than its fair share of coverage in English-language publications, in an attempt to portray eighteenth-century musical life in a balanced, broad-based fashion. Thus, entire chapters (opera in Sweden and the serenata, for example) and sections of chapters (sacred music in Iberia and Latin America, the zarzuela, Harmoniemusik and so on) are devoted to areas that have generally been under-researched in comparison to traditional loci of scholarly focus, and numerous musicians illuminated who are often consigned to the dimly lit background. Nor are momentous musical monuments by compositional giants marginalized as a result. An approach that foregrounds norms of the day ultimately helps to explain the greatness of individual composers rather than to detract from it. At any rate, it is hoped that our volume will

3 On the latter point see, in particular, Mary Sue Morrow, German Music Criticism in the Late Eighteenth Century: Aesthetic Issues in Instrumental Music (Cambridge, 1997).
bring to life for the twenty-first-century reader the extraordinary diversity of eighteenth-century musical activities.

I am very grateful to David Wyn Jones for his planning of the volume and his solid advice throughout, both of which played a crucial role in bringing the project to fruition. I also record my thanks to the volume’s contributors, and to Vicki Cooper and her team at Cambridge University Press, for their patience, tolerance and good humour. My wife, Celia Hurwitz-Keefe, and children, Abraham and Madeleine, have long endured my fascination with all things eighteenth century, and have willingly – and generously – shared much of it.

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