

 Introduction

In German prose fiction of the late seventeenth century, musicians were often stereotyped as strange but intriguing Others. Consider the entry of the title character, an itinerant fiddler, in Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen's novel *Der seltsame Springinsfeld* (The Peculiar Springinsfeld, 1670). The scene is a tavern on a winter's day:

An old beggar with a wooden leg entered, driven like myself by the cold to seek the warmth of the inn stove. Hardly had he started warming himself, however, than he took out a descant violin, tuned it, came to our table and began to play, humming and chirruping so cleverly at the same time that if you had only heard and not seen him you would have assumed it was three different stringed instruments being played. He was poorly dressed for winter and looked as if he had had a bad summer into the bargain. He was scrawny, as if he had been on short commons for some time, and all his hair had fallen out, suggesting that he had some serious illness.¹

This short description – complemented by the frontispiece of the 1683 edition (Illustration 1) – encapsulates the contradictory connotations of low-status musicians, as figures who unnerve yet tantalise their audiences.

Many of Springinsfeld's characteristics would repel or terrify the ordinary German. For a start, he is a physical misfit, with his face distorted in a grimace and a wooden leg replacing the limb he lost during his military service. He is also a social misfit, a demobilised soldier who has tramped through 'the whole of Bavaria, Swabia, Franconia, the Wetterau and the

¹ 'da trat ein alter Krantz mit einem Steltzfuß zur Stuben hinein/ den die eingenommene Kälte auch gleich wie mich zum Stuben-Ofen triebe; Er hatte sich kaum ein wenig gewärmet/ als er kleine *Discant*-Geyge hervor zog/ dieselbe stimmte/ vor unsern Tisch trate und eins daher striche/ worzu er mit dem Maul so artlich humset und quickelirt/ daß einer der ihn nur gehört und nicht gesehen/ hätt glauben müssen/ es wären dreyerley Seiten-Spil untereinander gewesen; Er war zimlich schlecht auf den Winter gekleidet/ und hätte auch allem Ansehen nach keinen guten Sommer gehabt/ dann sein magere Gestalt bezeugte/ daß er sich mit den Schmalhansen betragen/ und seine ausgefallene Haar/ daß er noch darzu eine schwere Kranckheit überstehen müssen.' Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen, *Der seltsame Springinsfeld* (n.p., 1670), sig. A10v–A11r. Translation adapted from Mike Mitchell's translation *Tearaway* (Sawtry: Dedalus, 2003), p. 28.



Illustration 1 Springinsfeld, as pictured in Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen, *Deß possirlichen/ weit und breit bekanten Simplicissimi Sinnreicher und nachdencklicher Schrifftten Zweyten Theils* (1683), title page. Herzog August Bibliothek, Lo 2310:2. The motto describes Springinsfeld as ‘an image of today’s foolish world’.

Lower Palatinate,² accompanied only by his mongrel dog and his musical instruments. Here one day and gone the next, such itinerants were regarded with suspicion by townsfolk and peasants alike. Indeed, Springinsfeld's second wife, a hurdy-gurdy player, is a criminal who uses her magical powers of invisibility to steal from the nobility, seduce a young baker's boy and murder a soldier.³

Furthermore, Springinsfeld embodies the sensuality commonly associated with musicians. He plays the violin (*Geige*) not in church but in taverns, for dancing and drunken revelry. His violin music is the aural accompaniment to the pleasures of the flesh; indeed, *geigen* continues to be German slang for having sex.⁴ His sensual urges are also evident in his behaviour: his speech is 'coarse, blasphemous and rude',⁵ and his name translates literally as 'hop-in-the-field', suggesting a hot-headed personality uncontrolled by reason. These carnal associations are reinforced by his wife, the hurdy-gurdy player (*Leierin*). Springinsfeld finds her sexually rapacious, 'making such demands on me and keeping me at it so much that I forgot everything else'.⁶ In the end he cannot satisfy her appetite and, comparing her to an unbridled wild animal, he leaves her 'to graze wherever she wants, like a randy young thing'.⁷ Significantly, in German slang *Leier* denotes the vulva, and a 1716 album-book associates the instrument with whores.⁸

Finally, Springinsfeld has a sinister, even demonic power. The horns on his head not only denote that he is a cuckold, but also are a reminder that the devil was often believed to take the form of a violinist.⁹ One reason for these satanic connotations was that since medieval times, secular instrumentalists had been condemned for tempting their audiences into a life of impious sensuality. The thirteenth-century preacher Berthold von Regensburg described itinerant performers as fallen angels, 'living a life

² Grimmelshausen, *Springinsfeld*, sig. L4v.

³ *Ibid.*, Chapter 26.

⁴ Keith Spalding, *An Historical Dictionary of German Figurative Usage* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1959–2002), pp. 958–9.

⁵ Grimmelshausen, *Springinsfeld*, sig. A11v.

⁶ 'übertrib und hielte mich so streng/ daß ich anderer wohl vergas'. *Ibid.*, sig. J10r.

⁷ 'als ein junges geiles ding grasen gehen/ wo es wolte'. *Ibid.*, sig. J10v.

⁸ Lynne Tatlock, 'Engendering social order: from costume autobiography to conversation games in Grimmelshausen's *Simpliciana*' in Karl F. Otto Jr (ed.), *A Companion to the Works of Grimmelshausen* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003), pp. 269–97 (p. 283); Daniel Pfisterer's 1716 Stammbuch, facsimile as *Barockes Welttheater: ein Buch von Menschen, Tieren, Blumen, Gewächsen und allerlei Einfällen* (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1996), p. 90.

⁹ Wolfgang Laade, *Musik und Musiker in Märchen, Sagen und Anekdoten der Völker Europas* (Baden-Baden: Koerner, 1988), pp. 30–2, 152.

of sin and shame'.¹⁰ In the case of Springinsfeld, the novel implies that he can also invoke a mysterious realm of animalistic powers. His performances include the imitation of 'all kinds of animals, from the charming sylvan song of nightingales to the fearsome howling of wolves'.¹¹ Although mimicry of birdcalls was practised by many German violinists in the seventeenth century,¹² Springinsfeld's ability to emulate wolves suggests a supernatural connection with the world of beasts. Here is an echo of those legends about wandering entertainers with a sinister ability to disrupt everyday life. In the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, already circulating in the sixteenth century, an itinerant instrumentalist is a devilish figure who charms away a town's rats and then its children.¹³

Despite Springinsfeld's connotations of social disorder, rampant sensuality and demonic power, his music captivates his audience. His imitations of animal noises draw a crowd of six hundred onlookers. Doubtless his violin tunes would have been equally popular with his audiences. The Hessian cleric Aegidius Henning bemoaned the debauched lives of itinerant musicians, yet reported that rural folk relished their performances: 'As the peasants say: "How can we still be merry, if there is no *Spielmann* here?"'¹⁴ Indeed, Springinsfeld possesses an unexpected sophistication in his violin solos, which incorporate vocalisations to give the illusion that several musicians are present. Perhaps they are a low-art equivalent of how J. S. Bach's solo violin works evoke several contrapuntal lines from a single instrument.

Springinsfeld enthral audiences not simply as a musician, but also as a storyteller. Most of the novel consists of him telling his life story, from his birth as the offspring of a runaway Greek noblewoman and an Albanian tightrope walker to his adult life as a military drummer, soldier, and then crippled beggar. Here we encounter the link between musicians and storytelling that is the main theme of this monograph. Oral storytelling has many similarities with musical performance, for both require a performer to hold an audience's attention across an unfolding narrative.

¹⁰ Berthold von Regensburg, *Predigten*, ed. Franz Göbel (Regensburg: Manz, 1906), pp. 146–7.

¹¹ 'übte er allerhand Thierer Geschrey/ von dem lieblichen Waldgesang der Nachtigallen an/ bis auff das forchterlich Geheul der Wölffe'. Grimmshausen, *Springinsfeld*, sig. C11v.

¹² Johann Joachim Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* (Berlin, 1752); trsl. Edward R. Reilly as *On Playing the Flute* (London: Faber, 1985), p. 337.

¹³ Wolfgang Mieder, *The Pied Piper: A Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), pp. 33–5.

¹⁴ 'Ey wie soll man doch lustig seyn können/ ist doch kein Spielmann da/ (sprechen die Bauren).' Aegidius Henning, *Des Neunhütigen und Haimbüchlenen schlimmen Bauren-Stands und Wandels* (n.p., 1684), p. 177.

And musicians were regarded as a source of particularly intriguing stories because of their unusual lifestyle and their journeys. Musicians frequently travelled as part of their training or to find work, or were perpetually itinerant as in the case of Springinsfeld. In an age when few Germans roved far beyond their home towns, travellers were considered to be one of the archetypal categories of narrator. As Walter Benjamin noted, ‘When someone goes on a trip, he has something to tell about, goes the German saying, and people imagine the storyteller as someone who has come from afar.’¹⁵ The Hungarian folklorist János Honti concurs: ‘The narrator, like every true entertainer, is necessarily a wanderer – a vagabond who does not belong anywhere.’¹⁶ Along with the other wayfarers on the roads of seventeenth-century Germany, musicians were therefore viewed with curiosity as well as suspicion by the inhabitants of towns and villages. In Johann Beer’s novel *Die kurtzweiligen Sommer-Täge* (Amusing Summer-Days, 1683), the narrator Willenhag invites vagrants such as a demobilised soldier or a wandering student into his house to tell their life stories. As Willenhag says, ‘Thus I dispelled my sadness, and I made a note of the best stories.’¹⁷

Springinsfeld is just one of many examples of musicians who appear in German literature of the late seventeenth century. This book examines the representations of singers, instrumentalists and composers in prose fiction between 1660 and 1710. It focuses on a group of novels written by musicians, in which instrumentalists and singers are the main characters. The Weissenfels singer and concertmaster Johann Beer (1655–1700) wrote at least twenty novels, many of which feature inept organists, cruel cantors and Italian singers. The instrumentalist Daniel Speer (1636–1707) wrote two novels about a military trumpeter – *Ungarischer oder Dacianischer Simplicissimus* (The Hungarian or Dacian Simplicissimus, 1683) and *Türkischer Vagant* (Turkish Vagrant, 1683) – and an account of an itinerant instrumentalist, *Simplicianischer lustig-politischer Haspel-Hannß* (The Simplician, Merry and Political Bobbin-Jack, 1684). The cantor Wolfgang Caspar Printz (1641–1717) wrote three fictional autobiographies of town instrumentalists: *Musicus vexatus . . . Cotala* (Cotala, The Vexed Musician, 1690), *Musicus magnanimus oder Pancalus* (Pancalus, The Magnanimous

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, transl. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), p. 84.

¹⁶ Linda Dégh, *Folktales and Society: Story-Telling in a Hungarian Peasant Community*, transl. Emily M. Schossberger, 2nd edn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 79.

¹⁷ ‘dadurch ich mir/ nebenst Anmerckung der besten Sachen/ zugleich meine traurige Zeit trefflich vertreiben habe’. Johann Beer, *Die kurtzweiligen Sommer-Täge* (n.p., 1683), pp. 365–6.

Musician, 1691) and *Musicus curiosus oder Battalus* (Battalus, The Inquisitive Musician, 1691). Finally, Johann Kuhnau (1660–1722) wrote *Der musicalische Quacksalber* (The Musical Charlatan, 1700), featuring an incompetent performer who makes false boasts about his ability and who acts as a foil to the attributes of a ‘true virtuoso’. Beer, Speer, Printz and Kuhnau wrote novels partly to make serious points about the status of their profession, partly to entertain readers curious about the unusual lives of musicians. Their narratives form a unique group of texts, interlacing with stories by non-musicians and with other writings by musicians, and offering many insights into the contentious status of composers and performers in the age of Johann Sebastian Bach.

Musicologists researching the lives of Bach and his predecessors have usually ignored literary texts such as novels. Instead they focus on documentary sources – baptismal registers, financial receipts, church and court employment records – from which biographical data can be gleaned. Indeed, in 2002 the Bach-Archiv in Leipzig began an exhaustive search through the archives of central Germany for documents relating to the Bach family; the discoveries made by this project, including a previously unknown aria by Bach, prove the continuing value of archival study.¹⁸ Yet despite this accumulation of documents, ‘we probably know less about Bach’s private life than we do about that of any of the supreme artist figures of modern history’.¹⁹ To grasp how the lives of musicians such as Bach were embedded in the culture and society of their time, a broader range of texts must be investigated.

One advantage of studying novels is that they offer portraits of types of musicians who otherwise seldom appear in the historical record. Prose fiction of the period typically featured characters on the margins of society, and hence the novels include vivid accounts of vagrant fiddlers, military musicians, and the journeymen instrumentalists who tramped from one job to another. Many of these performers worked outside literate traditions – some people joked that ‘barely one in a hundred’ journeymen instrumentalists could write²⁰ – and hence they rarely left a trace in the archival documents that are the basis of most histories of German music. Other musicians appearing in novels were those who transgressed the

¹⁸ These discoveries are reported in articles by Peter Wollny and Michael Maul in the *Bach-Jahrbuch* since 2003.

¹⁹ Robert L. Marshall, ‘Toward a twenty-first-century Bach biography’, *Musical Quarterly*, 84 (2000), 497–525 (p. 499).

²⁰ Wolfgang Caspar Printz, *Musicus vexatus ... Cotala* (‘Freyberg’, 1690), p. 3.

norms of gender, such as castratos and female opera singers. Beer's *Der simplicianische Welt-Kucker* (The Simplician Telescope on the World) even tantalises the reader with the prospect that it will break the ultimate taboo about castratos, by describing the operation whereby a boy singer was castrated. Through these tales of aberrant or transgressive individuals, the novels provide a useful counterpoise to the emphasis on church and court found in most accounts of Bach's world. Instead they portray musicians with a largely secular outlook, concerned with the basics of survival and sustenance; there is virtually no reference to the theological preoccupations often stressed in studies of Bach.²¹

Yet prose fiction should not be regarded simply as a way of documenting categories of musicians not mentioned in other sources. This is the fault with the only previous book-length study of the musician novels, Herbert Riedel's 1959 dissertation.²² Riedel read the stories as literal portrayals of musical life and did not interrogate their artful rhetoric or satirical tone. But it would be more accurate to interpret the novels as distorting mirrors that draw attention to the defining characteristics of the musical profession in the period. Indeed, as Michael McKeon has argued with regard to the early English novel, prose fiction had 'an unrivalled power both to formulate, and to explain, a set of problems that are central to early modern experience'.²³ For McKeon these 'problems' include the relationship between an individual's merit and external status, and the relationship between truth and lies in prose fiction. As for the narratives written by German musicians, these debate two dilemmas fundamental to the status of music and its practitioners in Bach's age: firstly, the questions surrounding the sensory appeal of music; and secondly, the question of whether musicians should integrate within society or celebrate their status as outsiders.

Music's sensual power had been debated for centuries stretching back to the ancient Greeks. As Johann Beer remarked, '[music] bears a sceptre and crown over human feelings'.²⁴ There were widespread anxieties that music's emotional power could lead to moral corruption. In 1697 the Gotha school rector Gottfried Vockerodt used the debased lives

²¹ For an example of the theological approach, see Eric Chafe, *Analyzing Bach Cantatas* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

²² Herbert Riedel, *Die Darstellung von Musik und Musikerlebnis in der erzählenden Dichtung*, 2nd edn (Bonn: Bouvier, 1961).

²³ Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 20.

²⁴ Johann Beer, *Musicalische Discurse* (Nuremberg, 1719), sig.)(2r.

of emperors Nero, Claudius and Caligula to warn of the dangerous consequences of an ‘irrational love’ of music, dancing and drama.²⁵ Given that novels of the period often peer voyeuristically into depraved lives, many revel in the stereotype of musicians as sleaze-ridden seducers. As the protagonist says in Grimmelshausen’s *Der abentheurliche Simplicissimus Teutsch* (The Strange Adventures of a German Simpleton, 1668–9): ‘My lute and song made everyone look at me, and when they did, I added such charming glances and gestures to the new love songs I’d composed myself that they caused many a pretty girl to lose her head and fall in love before she knew what had happened.’²⁶ Printz and Kuhnau, however, sought to counter such carnal associations by emphasising the rational elements of music. Printz regarded music as a craft that followed indisputable rules such as the principles of counterpoint. These principles were derived from the mathematically determined nature of consonance and dissonance, which itself was thought to reflect the harmonies of heaven.

The second major debate probed in the novels is how far musicians can integrate within society. Stereotypical figures such as Springinsfeld symbolised the musician as an outsider, set apart from the wider public by frequent travels, an unusual lifestyle and strong sensuality. Many performers stood outside the rigid system of *Stände* (orders) that structured urban society in German lands. The influential *Ständebuch* (1568) by Hans Sachs and Jost Amman depicts a hierarchy of 114 occupations, from the Pope and bishops at the top, down to jesters and pedlars at the bottom.²⁷ Sachs and Amman ranked musicians below almost all skilled crafts: singers took 100th place in their list, while even lower were organists (105th place), lutenists (106th), string players (107th), pipers (108th) and drummers (109th). The low position of instrumentalists was reinforced by the code of honour upheld by urban craftworkers, who stigmatised many musicians as dishonourable (*unehrlich* – see Chapter 3). By contrast, Printz and Kuhnau argued that musicians should be integrated into society, in recognition of the power of their art to inspire devotion and

²⁵ Gottfried Vockerodt, *Mißbrauch der freyen Künste* (Frankfurt am Main, 1697), p. 55.

²⁶ ‘meine Laute und Gesang die zwangen ein jede/ mich anzuschauen/ und wann sie mich also betrachteten/ wuste ich zu meinen neuen Bulen-Liedern/ die ich selber machte/ so anmuthige Blick und Geberden hervor zu bringen/ daß sich manches hübsches Mägdlein darüber vernarrte/ und mir unversehens hold ward’. Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen, *Der abentheurliche Simplicissimus Teutsch*, 1st edn (n.p., ‘1669’), p. 349.

²⁷ Hans Sachs and Jost Amman, *Eygentliche Beschreibung aller Stände auff Erden* (Frankfurt am Main, 1568). Facsimile with partial English translation as *The Book of Trades*, ed. Benjamin A. Rifkin (New York: Dover, 1973).

virtue. Some church and court performers indeed gained recognition and social advancement for their achievements, as is discussed in chapters 4 and 6.

The novel was an ideal forum through which musicians could address these debates about their profession. As a literary genre, prose fiction had negligible prestige; it was often regarded as encouraging vice and wasting readers' time. Thus the Protestant preacher Gotthard Heidegger complained in 1698: 'He who reads novels is reading lies.'²⁸ Yet prose fiction reached a wide audience, being read by young men and women as well as by older members of the male learned elite, and was regarded as both didactic and entertaining. And the very disreputableness of the novel gave musicians freedom to write about the darker sides of their profession, such as the dishonourable world of itinerant entertainers. Writing their prose fiction under pseudonyms, authors such as Printz, Beer and Speer could voice comments about their profession that they otherwise could not publicly utter.

Most of the novels studied in this book were written in the late seventeenth century, but they continued to be read and discussed throughout Bach's lifetime and beyond. Although literary taste had changed dramatically by the mid eighteenth century, this did not stop readers from appreciating older examples of prose fiction. The Leipzig literary theorist Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–66) owned copies of novels such as Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus*, commenting that it was among the books widely 'known and loved'.²⁹ There evidently was an ongoing demand for Printz's three novels about instrumentalists, which were originally published in 1690–1: new editions of all three books appeared in 1713–14, and further versions of *Battalus* and *Cotala* were published in 1763 and 1772 respectively.³⁰ Even in the late eighteenth century, the lending records of the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel show that the musician novels were still being read: Speer's *Haspel-Hannß* (1684) was borrowed six times between 1757 and 1787 by readers ranging from a merchant to a wigmaker.³¹

²⁸ Eberhard Lämmert (ed.), *Romantheorie 1620–1880: Dokumentation ihrer Geschichte in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1988), p. 50.

²⁹ Monique Rinere, *Transformations of the German Novel: Simplicissimus in Eighteenth-Century Adaptations* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 48–51.

³⁰ Bibliographical details in Wolfgang Caspar Printz, *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Helmut K. Krause, 3 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974–93), vol. I, pp. 527–30.

³¹ Mechthild Raabe, *Leser und Lektüre im 18. Jahrhundert. Die Ausleihbücher der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel (1714–1799)*, 4 vols. (Munich: Saur, 1989), vol. IV, pp. 511–12.

Likewise, many of the preoccupations of the novels – the desire to uphold craftsmanship, the attacks on beer fiddlers, the stories of young musicians struggling against obstructive relations – continued to be relevant to the lives of early eighteenth-century composers such as Bach. After studying the novels, it becomes clear that brief or enigmatic statements in the documents about Bach are not simply isolated gestures, but part of the broader discourses surrounding musicians. Chapter 3 shows that Bach's complaints about 'vexation' and 'hindrance' in Mühlhausen and Leipzig did not simply reflect a belligerent personality, but drew on stock arguments used by musicians to defend their profession. These arguments are encapsulated in Printz's novel *Cotala*. As J. Paul Hunter observes with reference to English fiction, the protagonist of each novel often 'seems to symbolize . . . the culture's characteristics and values'; 'the novel has always showed an extraordinary interest in *zeitgeist*'.³² In this respect, the German musician novels act as a key, decoding the language with which musicians shaped their identities.

The novels and autobiographies analysed in this book will be unfamiliar to most modern readers, on account of the inaccessibility of some of the sources and the difficulties posed by their obscure vocabulary. The novels are rich in slang, dialect and wordplay; they include the jokes of students, the coarse expressions of peasants, and the foreign coinages of pompous intellectuals. Accordingly, a primary aim of this book is to introduce these narratives, with many translated excerpts to give a flavour of the colourful originals. In addition, for readers unacquainted with the literary contexts of the period, Chapter 1 offers an introduction to the German novel in the decades around 1700. It recognises the difficulties of defining the genre in a period when prose fiction was in a state of flux. It also outlines the readership of novels, and examines the social, literary and cultural environment that encouraged musicians to write prose fiction. Finally, this chapter probes the unique quality of representation in the novels, showing how authors devised accounts that appeared lifelike yet also made satirical points.

Chapters 2 to 4 outline several ways to interpret the lives of musicians in the age of Bach, using character types from prose fiction of the period. Chapter 2 considers the representation of the musician as a picaro – a roguish, itinerant outsider – as found in the writings of Beer, Grimmelshausen and Speer. Beer suggested that musicians were in a permanently

³² J. Paul Hunter, 'Biography and the novel', *Modern Language Studies*, 9 (1979), 68–84 (p. 76).