

## *Introduction*

In his posthumous life of Herbert, Herbert's early biographer Izaak Walton gave the following portrait of the poet's musical activities:

His chiefest recreation was Musick, in which heavenly Art he was a most excellent Master, and, did himself compose many *divine Hymns* and *Anthems*, which he set and sung to his *Lute* or *Viol*; and, though he was a lover of retiredness, yet his love to *Musick* was such, that he went usually twice every week on certain appointed days, to the *Cathedral Church* in *Salisbury*; and at his return would say, *That his time spent in Prayer, and Cathedral Musick, elevated his Soul, and was his Heaven upon Earth*. But before his return thence to *Bemerton*, he would usually sing and play his part, at an appointed private Musick-meeting; and, to justifie this practice, he would often say, *Religion does not banish mirth, but only moderates, and sets rules to it*.<sup>1</sup>

Walton records that Herbert not only enjoyed listening to music but was also an accomplished viol-player and lutenist who composed not only poems but also musical settings for those poems. Walton's artfulness is on display in such passages, here transforming Herbert's musical interests into symbols of the poet's sanctity: he presents us with Herbert the prayerful auditor, attending choral evensong; and Herbert the sociable musician, refreshing himself and moderating excessive religiosity by participating in entertaining musical evenings in town.

Herbert inherited his interest in music from his family, who were at the centre of the musical culture of early modern London. His childhood home resounded with music: every Sunday, the Herberts sang the psalms together as a household,<sup>2</sup> and his mother, Magdalene Herbert, nurtured the musical abilities of her children. In the short period covered by her surviving household accounts (11 April to 4 September 1601), a number of musicians and dancers were paid to provide evening entertainment; and on several occasions some of the most significant names in contemporary musical circles dined in the Herbert household, including the composers John Bull and William Byrd. Byrd, living in Stonden Massey in Essex at

the time, may have stayed overnight as a guest. These household accounts give us a glimpse of only a few weeks, during which the Herberts enjoyed the company of some of the most famous names in English music-making of the day: how many more unrecorded visits might have taken place? 'It is tempting to wonder', writes Amy Charles, 'whether [Bull or Byrd] performed on the harpsichord or lute or viol when they appeared in this household in which at least two of the brothers [George and Edward] were to be known as accomplished musicians'.<sup>3</sup> 'William Heyther' (or Heather), a lay clerk at Westminster Abbey (and later Gentleman of the Chapel Royal and founder of the chair of music at Oxford University that bears his name), also dined with the family during this period; when the household began to disperse for the summer, Heather was paid forty shillings to take charge of the education of George and his brother Richard, 'perhaps partly for instruction in music', Charles speculates, 'though it is clear that George would also work on his Latin'.<sup>4</sup>

When Herbert left the family home to attend the University of Cambridge, his musical activities continued:

all, or the greatest diversion from his Study, was the practice of Musick, in which he became a great Master; and of which, he would say, 'That it did relieve his drooping spirits, compose his distracted thoughts, and raised his weary soul so far above Earth, that it gave him an earnest of the joys of Heaven, before he possess them.'<sup>5</sup>

And, according to Walton, it continued to offer solace through to the end of his days:

The *Sunday* before his death, he rose suddenly from his Bed or Couch, call'd for one of his Instruments, took it in hand, and said –

*My God, My God,  
 My Musick shall find thee,  
 And every string  
 shall have his attribute to sing.*

And having tun'd it, he play'd and sung:

*The Sundays of Mans life,  
 Thredded together on times string,  
 Make Bracelets, to adorn the Wife  
 Of the eternal glorious King;  
 On Sundays, Heavens dore stands ope;  
 Blessings are plentiful and rife,  
 More plentiful than hope.*

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Thus he sung on Earth such Hymns and Anthems, as the Angels and he,  
 and Mr. *Farrer* [Nicholas Ferrar], now sing in Heaven.<sup>6</sup>

During his life, Walton has told us, music had been Herbert's 'Heaven upon Earth'; now, as Walton's saintly Herbert prepares finally to leave earth, it is symbolically in song that he finds his fullest mode of expression. Walton's hagiographical impulses are clearly on display here, translating Herbert's music into aesthetic emblems of a godly life drawing to its end, and we may question the historical accuracy of such scenes. After all, the trope of the poet's exemplary musical death is not unique to these passages, echoing in particular Walton's account of the death of Donne.<sup>7</sup> On his final sickbed, Walton records, Donne wrote to Herbert and composed his 'Hymn to God, My God in My Sickness':

*Since I am coming to that holy room,  
 Where, with thy Choir of Saints, for evermore  
 I shall be made thy music, as I come  
 I tune my instrument here at the door,  
 And, what I must do then, think here before.*<sup>8</sup>

Walton offers exemplary, almost saintly accounts of these deaths, certainly; but if there is biographical embellishment on his behalf, it is not completely fanciful. As Jessica Martin notes, these aesthetic symbols of sanctity 'are not originally Walton's, however congenial he finds them. They belonged to Donne and Herbert first. That is why they are there.'<sup>9</sup> The words they quote and sing are their own,<sup>10</sup> and the practical ability and interest in music-making are already present in the life and writings of Walton's subjects.

George was not alone among his siblings in developing a proficiency in music. His brother Edward, later first Lord Herbert of Cherbury, was a skilled lutenist. He, like George, turned to music during his time at university to refresh his mind after his studies.<sup>11</sup> During continental travels, Cherbury collected music: some of the printed volumes he purchased are preserved in the library of Jesus College, Oxford;<sup>12</sup> the lute music he collected during his travels is anthologised (along with music by English composers, including eight compositions by Cherbury himself) in his manuscript lute book,<sup>13</sup> and he is known also to have written music for the viol. Examining Cherbury's poetry, we find evidence that he, like George, wrote lyrics intended for musical setting – in Cherbury's case, often with continental melodies in mind.

That there should have been this familial fascination with music – that, moreover, this fascination should be expressed in the work of George and

Edward Herbert in musico-poetic terms – should come as little surprise when their work and interests are placed in the context of their extended family, the aristocratic cousins with whom George and his family maintained strong links.<sup>14</sup> Because they were related to the Herberts of Wilton and (through the marriage of Henry Herbert, second Earl of Pembroke, to Mary Sidney) to the Sidney family, we can situate the musico-poetic practices of George and Edward Herbert within the genealogy of a much wider aesthetic sensibility.<sup>15</sup> Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, is known to have played the lute; her son William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke, is familiar not only as a poet whose verse was set by leading contemporary composers, but also as a patron of literature and music; her brother Sir Robert Sidney had singing lessons while at Christ Church, and his support of music was such that he accepted John Dowland's invitation to act as godparent to his son Robert; he would later receive from his godson the dedication of the lute miscellany *A Musicall Banquet* (London, 1610). Sir Philip Sidney, writing from abroad, encouraged his brother Robert in his musical education: 'Now sweete brother take a delight to keepe and increase your musick, yow will not beleive what a want I find of it in my melancholie times.'<sup>16</sup> Robert's daughter Mary (later Lady Mary Wroth) learnt to play the lute and the virginals, and could sing and dance.

For Sir Philip Sidney, the cultural figurehead of the family, music and poetry were exceptionally closely intertwined. Prompted by an intellectual, scholarly, and humanist agenda that looked back to the unification of word and tone in the Classical world, Sidney and his contemporaries sought to reclaim something of this quality of ancient song in early modern poetry, with the result, Gavin Alexander explains, that

The musical factor both in the production of Philip Sidney's poetry and in the development of his theory and technique cannot be overstated. There is a musical reason for his quantitative experiments, his innovative use of trochaic meters and feminine endings, and his use of simpler iambic and mixed forms. Many poems were written as contrafacta to existing tunes . . . and this activity often required rewriting the prosodic rule book.<sup>17</sup>

For Philip, the process of composing poetry was in a very fundamental way a musical act: as he famously explained in 'The Defence of Poesy', the poet 'cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the well enchanting skill of music'.<sup>18</sup>

There is, then, a substantial quantity of evidence to suggest a close-knit relationship between verse and music in the cultural lives of the Herbert-Sidney family in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries – evidence suggesting both a practical and a theoretical understanding of

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the ways in which words and music engage with each other to produce a rich and deeply felt (if intellectually prompted) intermediated aesthetic.<sup>19</sup> These poets were musicians; they could understand and conceive their creative acts in musical terms; they not only wrote poetry, but often sang it too. When they write poetry for music or poetry about music, it is upon this combined practical, theoretical, affective, and intellectual experience that they draw.

### **Music in *The Temple***

It is no surprise that Herbert's 'chiefest recreation' should have an impact on his verse. *The Temple* resounds with an astonishing variety of musical images: the tolling of bells, the stretching and vibrating of lute and viol strings, the raising of voices in both praise and despair. Elsewhere, the ensemble performance of the consort is complemented by the individual music of the solo singer. And music comes in many forms. At times, music can be for Herbert the 'Sweetest of sweets' ('Church-Musick', line 1); at others, it is of the most dissonant and discordant character, 'Untun'd, unstrung' ('Deniall', line 22) – and even the ostensibly a-musical sounds of sighs and groans can be transformed by Herbert's aesthetic into the finest 'musick for a king' ('Sion', line 24). We encounter the sacred music of the church; but we also hear a brasher, more secular sound-world, 'countrey-aies' ('Gratefulnesse', line 23) and the rustic pastoral songs of the shepherds, as well as a more refined, courtly music (which is not always necessarily preferable). His poems draw on forms and genres associated with liturgical music – metrical psalmody, hymns, verse anthems, antiphons – as well as on the prosody of the secular lute song.

Herbert scholarship has long been aware of the important place of music in *The Temple*. Several of the major early voices of modern Herbert criticism noted Herbert's musical tastes. In the first critical piece to pay serious attention to Herbert's music, a chapter on music in *George Herbert: His Religion & Art* (1954), Joseph Summers makes a discerning comment about the way in which changes in musical culture since Herbert's day now make certain demands upon the modern reader: 'Herbert's [musical] allusions are so much those of a familiar practitioner of early seventeenth-century music that we need a musician's aid.'<sup>20</sup> Musical culture has changed so significantly, Summers points out, that literary criticism must be reinforced with musicological study. Hollander developed these ideas in *The Untuning of the Sky* (1961). His brief but insightful discussion of *The Temple* embedded Herbert's verse in a larger narrative about the

development of ideas of music in English poetry between 1500 and 1700.<sup>21</sup> Hollander's argument describes what he sees as the divergence of literary and musical disciplines over the course of two centuries: 'music and poetry ... have become utterly different as human enterprises ... [modern] practitioners of the two arts are less able to understand each other's work, and even less acceptable to each other as audiences, than ever before. *Expertise* in one practice seems today to rule out knowledge of even the fundamentals of the other.'<sup>22</sup> Hollander may polemically overstate the case here, but it is an argument that again forcibly reminds us of the essential work that modern readers of *The Temple* need to undertake in order to regain a proper sense of the important role played by early modern musical culture in Herbert's verse. Hollander's study, however, is explicitly concerned with 'certain *beliefs* about music rather than music itself'<sup>23</sup> (my emphasis) and of how early modern English poetry expressed and employed this idea of music. Music becomes a byword for a transcendent ideal, synonymous in Herbert's verse with prayer. Herbert employs 'musical imagery to stand for personal, spiritual utterance', Hollander writes; and, citing the passage from Walton's life of Herbert that opened this introduction (above) posits the image of the cloistered poet, 'playing and singing in secluded retirement'.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, while Herbert's private music-making is certainly important, this is in fact precisely not what Walton is trying to say about music here: '*though* he was a lover of retiredness', writes Walton, '*yet* his love to Musick was such, that he went ...' (my emphasis). Walton stresses here that music specifically offsets Herbert's introspective tendencies, taking him out into the world and not retreating from it. Nevertheless, Hollander's reading of Herbert's secluded music reveals the pervasive nature of musical ideas in Herbert's verse, presenting it as a unifying and harmonising feature of Herbert's poetic, 'as if the image of music were always running along beneath the surface of all of Herbert's poems ... exercising always an informing, nourishing function ... in general, music is the substance, and often the subject, of the poems themselves'.<sup>25</sup>

Diane Kelsey McColley takes this insight into the pervasive presence of music in Herbert's verse still further to propose that Herbert's poetic language is profoundly and intrinsically musical: 'He practiced – perhaps invented – a form of language analogous to polyphonic music sung in pure intonation, in which linear arrangements of words form vertical consonances whose overtones, as well as fundamental meanings, are in tune.'<sup>26</sup> Herbert thus 'fine-tunes' his language, she suggests; he is as sensitive to the resonant properties of words as he is to their fundamental semantic

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content, attentive to the way in which ‘the partials or secondary meanings – puns, etymologies, allusions, and the like – are in tune as the partials of natural tuning are’.<sup>27</sup> McColley brings musical parallels from the solo and choral literature that he could have heard during his time at Cambridge to bear on Herbert’s poems in order to make them more richly understood. With a particular interest in the form of his poetry, her chapter on Herbert’s music ends in a generously open-ended manner with an invitation to further examination: Herbert’s musical poetic, she concludes, ‘proves a harmony in which there is always more to find’.<sup>28</sup>

The first steps towards exploring in historical detail Herbert’s practical musical culture were made by Rosemond Tuve in her important study of Herbert’s ‘A Parodie’.<sup>29</sup> In recognising that the poem was composed as a contrafactum (that is, the writing of new words to existing music, in this case a secular song by his aristocratic cousin William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke), she indicated, for the first time, something of the close interplay between Herbert’s poetic and contemporary secular musical culture, though her valuable study considers only one instance of musical influence on Herbert’s verse. Amy Charles’s extensive archival work continued in this vein, with a more decidedly biographical focus, uncovering much-needed historical detail concerning Herbert’s musical activities.<sup>30</sup>

Yet we lack both Herbert’s original musical settings and any settings that can with certainty be attributed to Herbert’s lifetime which he may have heard or performed. Confronted with this lacuna, some critics have considered Herbert’s verse within the context of both general surveys of seventeenth-century music-making, and in the more specific discussions of the major genres of the day, including lute song, sacred and secular part song and polyphony, and declamatory song.<sup>31</sup> Other critics, like Helen Wilcox, have turned instead to posthumous, near-contemporary musical settings of Herbert’s verse to look for evidence of how early modern musicians responded to Herbert’s musical aesthetic.<sup>32</sup> Wilcox’s study articulates a powerful sense of the breadth of the musical culture within which we ought properly to situate the music of *The Temple* – considered appropriate, in the years after his death, for both the elite musical aesthetic of composers like Henry Lawes, Henry Purcell, and George Jeffreys and the less sophisticated tastes of the congregational ‘shouter’ of metrical psalms. There is a need, now, to bring together this work on Herbert’s practical experiences of musical culture with a closer reading of the musical currents that run through his verse: one of the purposes of this book is to bring together these two strands of criticism – the idea of music and the



practice of music – into a fuller understanding of the hermeneutic implications of musical culture on Herbert's verse.

Such a reading is important for historical-critical reasons – it gives us a better sense for the context of Herbert's verse – but it also has important consequences for how we interpret that verse and understand its meaning. One of the pervasive emphases in critical studies of Herbert has been to stress the cloistered nature of his verse and the introspective nature of Herbert's lyric 'I'. Music played an important role in reinforcing this image, since music was often interpreted in light of an ideal in which music becomes emblematic of the soul's interior communion with God. Yet for Herbert and his contemporaries music could be both a private, isolated activity (inviting analogies with contemplation) and a participatory, sociable affair. In giving such close consideration to the idea of music during the early modern period, critical attention has thus often been distracted from the conditions in which those musical ideas were grounded and flourished, conditions that involved not only cloistered retirement but also larger ensemble performance. As a result, when we read Herbert's use of music in the context of musical culture as well as in the context of ideas about music, we find ourselves re-evaluating also the significance and meaning of the lyric first person. If the poet who sings in Herbert's verse does so in the context of a group rather than in their private chamber, how does this alter our perception of the poet's voice? How does the social and sociable context of singing and music making alter what we now take for granted about the lyric voice as such?

### Herbert and Early Modern Musical Culture

One of the purposes of this book, then, is to bring the work of musicologists and social historians interested in the study of early modern musical culture to bear on the reading of Herbert's verse. One of the major strands of this historical work, and an important influence on this book, has been the examination of not just of the elite, 'high art' musical culture that has survived in the canon of Tudor and Stuart music, but also an important reassessment of a more extensive popular, vibrant, and at times perhaps rather rough-edged musical culture.

Walter Woodfill's *Musicians in English Society from Elizabeth to Charles I* (1953) paid attention to the ordinary musicians who performed in the towns, court, church, and domestic sphere, presenting a wealth of material that helped us to investigate for the first time the kind of sociable, amateur music-making in which Herbert's contemporaries would have been



involved.<sup>33</sup> David Price, challenging some of Woodfill's conclusions about the prevalence of musical literacy, continued to extend our understanding of English musical culture in *Patrons and Musicians of the English Renaissance* (1981), with a particular focus on the private patronage that supported the professional life of musicians that developed in the post-Reformation period and that in turn helped to kindle and sustain a culture of amateur recreational music-making.<sup>34</sup> Importantly, for the purposes of this study, Price was struck by the vital mutual interdependence of the secular and devotional spheres. Herbert's anxieties about the proper relationship between sacred and secular art are a commonplace of Herbert criticism. To read his verse in the context of his participation in early modern musical culture throws important new light on this commonplace: we are forced to confront the ways in which music and musicians negotiated (successfully or otherwise) the contested and difficult terrain between secular and devotional art.

Nicholas Temperley's survey of the *Music of the English Parish Church* (1979) expanded our sense of liturgical music-making beyond the elite religious institutions – the cathedrals, abbeys, and royal chapels which supported ancient choral foundations – to examine the music-making that took place under the more modest auspices of the local parish church.<sup>35</sup> Temperley's study is invaluable not just for the portrait it drew of what was then a neglected area of musicological study, but also for the sense it gave of the participatory musical culture of the parish church – raising awareness of the democratic and popular singing of metrical psalmody that has since been the focus of important studies by Rivkah Zim, Hannibal Hamlin, and Christopher Marsh.<sup>36</sup>

This more recent work by historians of musical culture has continued this revisionist trend. Christopher Marsh's *Music and Society in Early Modern England* (2010) argues that 'levels of [musical] aptitude and accomplishment in early modern England were impressively high' and suggests the ubiquity of early modern musical culture at all levels of society. At the heart of Marsh's thesis is the contention that there is no simple, clear dividing line to be drawn between learned and popular culture – an argument he derives from the study of musical culture but suggests applies more broadly to all aspects of culture.<sup>37</sup> Marsh proposes as the emblem of his approach the analogy of the lute, with each of its six strings representing 'the basic socio-cultural polarities that helped individuals to understand their world and to locate themselves within it: gentle/common, male/female, old/young, clerical/lay, urban/rural, and native/foreign'.<sup>38</sup> Rejecting the idea that these are simple oppositional polarities,

Marsh proposes instead that we attempt to think in terms of a spectrum or a musical gamut. Marsh's emblem suggests a way of viewing the history of the period 'in terms of continuous dialogic tensions rather than as a series of seismic and seemingly conclusive shifts',<sup>39</sup> and allows us better to understand the pressures exerted upon the individual within society. On the one hand, Marsh writes, early modern musical culture 'marked the many divisions that separated individuals or social groups from one another . . . On the other hand, musical culture also mitigated commonplace divisions by allowing the continual interplay of conflicting tendencies and even drawing them, however temporarily, towards unity. Good music, according to a range of commentators, comprehended all things.'<sup>40</sup> Not only does Marsh's analogy of early modern culture as a lute resonate directly with Herbert's own frequent allusions to the instrument in his verse ('Stretch or contract me . . . This is but tuning of my breast/To make the musick better': 'The Temper (I)', lines 22–24); it also helps us to understand more clearly one of the key concerns of this book: to elucidate the way in which we can think about Herbert's active musical life not as an isolated, secluded practice but in terms of the individual participating in the social and cultural world around them – and, in terms of Herbert's devotional understanding of his musical practice, taking part in a divinely ordained creation that, like Marsh's musical model, Herbert understood 'comprehended all things'.

In this way, the present study contributes to the growing body of scholarship in recent decades challenging the old image of the saintly Herbert secluded from the world, acknowledging instead his interaction with the society and world in which he lived. Cristina Malcolmson, Jeffrey Powers-Beck, and Michael Schoenfeldt have all drawn renewed attention to the way in which Herbert's sacred verse is implicated and inflected by the political and cultural pressures that surrounded him: politically active on behalf of the cause of international Protestantism and participating in the literary activities of Wilton House, his poetry displays the (often manipulative) dynamics of courtly interaction.<sup>41</sup> In his role as Public Orator at the University of Cambridge, Herbert came into contact with the royal court and gave speeches before King James and other important dignitaries; he would later serve (briefly) as Member of Parliament for Wilton under the patronage of his aristocratic relation William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke. His decision to be ordained deacon in 1624 is commonly identified as the moment Herbert's 'Court-hopes' died,<sup>42</sup> but more recently this reading has been revised: Herbert owed his position at Bemerton again to the patronage of either the third Earl of Pembroke or