Introduction

ALISON DESIMONE AND MATTHEW GARDNER

By the first decade of the eighteenth century, professional musicians were performing with regularity in commercial contexts across Britain. These musicians, both foreign-born and native, stimulated the fervour and demand for myriad genres and styles, from virtuosic instrumental pieces such as concerti, to Italian opera, to English oratorio. While the ultimate ambition of any musician was to achieve financial and artistic success, their more immediate goal was to establish themselves within a network of leading instrumentalists, composers, other theatrical personnel, patrons, and audiences. The benefit performance became increasingly associated with music in eighteenth-century Britain, having originated in the spoken theatre late in the previous century. Musicians quickly learned how to use the benefit as a means of self-promotion, and these events held long-lasting effects throughout the eighteenth century.

The development of benefit performances in eighteenth-century Britain provided a new model from which instrumentalists, actors, singers, and composers could reap financial and professional rewards. Benefits could be given as theatre pieces, concerts, or opera performances, and as well as being for the benefit of individuals, could also be in aid of specific organizations – the charity benefit became a musical phenomenon in its own right, leading, for example, to the lasting success of Handel's *Messiah*. The association between musical performance and beneficiaries changed London's musico-theatrical landscape during the eighteenth century and London's benefit performances became a prototype for similar types of events in other European cities. By examining benefits from a musical perspective, rather than only a theatrical one, the twelve chapters in this collection present the first study of the various ways in which music became associated with the benefit system in eighteenth-century Britain.

Benefits for performers first emerged in the spoken theatre at the end of the seventeenth century as a means of compensating actors and actresses without having to pay them a substantially higher salary. To appease their stars, theatre managers extended the practice of the playwright's 'third

night' performance, after which the author of any current new play would receive the profits made from the third night's receipts.[1] The first recorded benefit performance comes from Samuel Pepys's diary in which, in 1668, he noted 'Knepp's maid comes to me, to tell me that the woman's day at the playhouse is to-day, and that therefore I must be there, to encrease their profit'.[2] Even as early as the 1660s, certain performance nights were reserved for particular beneficiaries; as Pepys alludes, in this case the company's actresses would have taken home the profits from the performance, presumably splitting them equally, after paying the theatre manager any house charges from producing the show. As the seventeenth century progressed, benefit evenings became a way for theatre companies to generate supplemental income (however modest) for those players who lacked shareholding status.[3] In 1685, actress Elizabeth Barry became the first stage performer to have an annual benefit performance included in her contract. As Colley Cibber reminisced, 'She was the first Person whose Merit was distinguish'd by the Indulgence of having an annual Benefit-Play, which was granted to her alone, if I mistake not, first in King James's time, and which became not common to others 'till the Division of this Company after the Death of King William's Queen Mary'.[4] As the seventeenth century gave way to the eighteenth, individual benefits for actors and actresses became increasingly ubiquitous, with lesser players being granted their own benefit evenings after the more renowned members of the company received theirs.[5]

By the turn of the eighteenth century, actors and actresses could choose between five different types of benefit performances. For example, a leading actor or actress could revive a famous leading role in a play, or he or she could play a new role traditionally taken by one of his or her colleagues. A second-tier actor looking to increase profits might even hire a guaranteed star to play the lead in a benefit play, thereby drawing

[1] R. D. Hume, 'The Origins of the Actor's Benefit in London', *Theatre Research International*, 9/2 (1984), p. 100.

[2] S. Pepys, *Diary*, 28 September 1668. Quoted in Hume, 'Origins of the Actor's Benefit', p. 100.

[3] Those who lacked shareholding status included women (until 1695, when Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle were offered shares in Thomas Betterton's company) and actors new to a company. New actors normally received benefits on Wednesdays and Fridays during Lent, when audiences were thin and the company's veteran actors would take time off. See Hume, 'Origins of the Actor's Benefit', p. 101.

[4] C. Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, R. Lowe (ed.), 2 vols. (London: John C. Nimmo, 1889), vol. II, p. 161.

[5] Avery and Scouten note that in the spoken theatre, benefits were offered for groups of theatrical personnel. Actresses (as a group) would receive a benefit night, as would 'young actors', individual performers, the playwright, and possibly a charitable benefit as well. *LS* I, p. lxxix.

a larger audience.[6] Sometimes the beneficiary would experiment with the casting of a popular play, such as the Lincoln's Inn Fields revival of *The Fickle Shepherdess* in 1703, performed by a cast of all women;[7] on other occasions, the featured performer would advertise the appearance of a new performer.[8] With the debut of London's first daily newspaper, *The Daily Courant*, in 1702, performers could easily advertise their benefit nights. As discussed by a number of authors in this volume, these types of advertising gimmicks became an essential part of musical benefits.

The practice of the benefit thrived in eighteenth-century London, especially as the theatrical marketplace began to accommodate a variety of types of performances. The theatrical benefit translated seamlessly into the world of musicians, who often observed and imitated their colleagues in the spoken theatre. For example, the soprano Catherine Tofts was one of the first musicians to negotiate an annual benefit in her contract. Like Elizabeth Barry just twenty years prior, Tofts's 1705 contract for the season at Drury Lane stipulated that:

> she shall have a binifitt [sic] day on Tuesday the nineteenth of February next in which she shall sing, but such her singing shall not be reckoned as one of the twelve times hereby agreed on to sing she paying the charge of the House and what shall be further agreed on at the finaling of the Articles.[9]

Tofts not only demanded her benefit, but also specified the day of performance: by requesting a benefit early in the theatrical season, Tofts anticipated drawing a larger audience than she would have if her benefit occurred closer to the summer season, when wealthy audience members left London to spend the summer months outside of the hot and crowded city.[10] Tofts also made it clear that her benefit night would not replace compensation for the twelve times she was contractually obligated to sing, and she acquiesced to paying house charges, which included any expenses incurred from using the theatre that evening.[11] This contract, one of few examples that mention a musical benefit, shows how musicians adopted elements of the practice from their counterparts in the spoken theatre.

Although musical benefits mirrored the spoken theatre with regard to behind-the-scenes negotiations, the implementation and practice of

[6] The star was, presumably, compensated for his or her participation.
[7] See R. D. Hume and J. Milhous, 'Introduction to Season 1702–3', *LS* II rev., p. 71. Hume and Milhous speculate that this benefit was performed in April 1703.
[8] St. V. Troubridge, *The Benefit System in the British Theatre* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1967), p. 114.
[9] GB-Lna PRO LC 7/3, fo. 88. Contract on behalf of Mrs Tofts, 28 January 1705.
[10] Troubridge, *The Benefit System*, p. 36. [11] Ibid., p. 19.

musical benefits is altogether a different phenomenon. This is largely the case because so many musical benefits were concert evenings, rather than special performances of operas, masques, or other kinds of musico-theatrical events. A benefit performance of a play or an opera often required less organizational effort from the beneficiary; for example, Italian operas that were already in production were sometimes performed for the benefit of one of the starring singers. At the most, such evenings would have required the beneficiary, and perhaps one or two of his or her co-stars, to learn a new scene or two of music to enhance the production and make it more special.[12] Ideally, such added scenes and new music would entice audiences to the theatre even if they had already seen the opera. Revivals of operas, masques, odes, and English oratorios were also used as benefits and were especially attractive, as the work was also already in the programme for the season, but did not detract from the novelty of the season's new repertoire. Concerts, on the other hand, were usually one-night-only events that required more effort on the part of the beneficiary. Without a framework of an opera or masque – which already came with a plot, other performers, and established musical hits – concert benefits demanded that the beneficiary plan the entire evening from the ground up. While this necessitated more work, it also gave the beneficiary much more control over the evening's structure and performance. Despite some of these differences, it is imperative to remember that the origins of the musical benefit were found in the spoken theatre, and musicians adapted London's established benefit system in order to fit their unique needs and to integrate themselves more or less seamlessly into the city's musico-theatrical marketplace.

One example of the work involved in putting on a benefit concert as an individual instrumentalist involved can be found in the diary of the trumpeter John Grano, who writing in 1728 provides a rare description:

> Arose at 5 in the Morn at which time the Door was Order'd to be open'd to me in Order to Survey the Town-Hall, to have it put in Order for the Reception of the Audience I expected at Night [. . .] As soon as I came there I fell to work giving Directions and Sending for Wood to make Desks for to put the Performers' Books upon; for Candles; for Clay to Stick Candles on in Tin Sockets to nail about hoops, of which we made Sconces; and about the Desks where the Musicians Sate. The Hall was put in the Order as gave Satisfaction [. . .] When [rehearsal] was over I went into the Hall and found every thing Dispos'd as I had Order'd and, being importun'd by some of the Audience to begin, Sent for the Performers [. . .] When

[12] On new scenes composed for benefit operas, see DeSimone (Chapter 8) in this volume.

the Performance was over I was complimented by Several of my Friends, who was concern'd of my want of Success [. . .] Mr Graham, Mrs Graham and Mrs Thurman thank[ed] me for the Performance Particularly, and I thank'd them for there Company and the Service in procuring such a considerable part of my Audience.[13]

Grano's entry shows that his concert benefit occurred not in a playhouse, but rather in a town hall; because of the setting, it seems that Grano was responsible for furnishing the hall with the necessary musical accoutrements, such as music desks (stands), chairs, and even candles and sconces. Although this is likely due to the location of the event, it is striking that Grano oversaw even these mundane aspects of his benefit evening. Few details exist concerning what exactly was performed during this event, but Grano himself was probably in charge of selecting both the music and other performers, and organizing the rehearsal that occurred before the performance. Finally, Grano's description of the evening gives credit to three friends (Mr and Mrs Graham, and Mrs Thurman, his sister) in attendance, whose soliciting on behalf of the trumpeter helped him draw a large audience.

Such insights provide a glimpse into how benefits were performed during the eighteenth century. Grano's diary supports the idea that benefit evenings offered a chance for the musician to freelance, unencumbered by the requirements of the theatre. As David McKenty has noted, the eighteenth-century benefit was the product of new economic opportunities in which performers (in McKenty's case, actors and actresses) could achieve their own, individual successes as artists beyond typical infrastructures already in place:

> The mechanics of the system represent a true eighteenth-century laissez-faire philosophy. The individual actor was given his own plot of land to farm as well or as poorly as he desired. He was a private business man, with certain rights and opportunities. He could make a great amount of money or lose a substantial sum. The system was unfair to some, but no more so than any private enterprise. The system was a true child of its time.[14]

Each benefit was, of course, its own individual event, and therefore benefit evenings exemplified as many differences as they shared similarities. Nevertheless, they all shared the ultimate common goal of generating as much financial reward for the beneficiary as possible, whether it be an

[13] J. Ginger (ed.), *Handel's Trumpeter: The Diary of John Grano* (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1998), pp. 82–3. Date of entry: 5 September 1728.

[14] D. McKenty, 'The Benefit System in Augustan Drama', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania (1966), p. 98.

individual, institution, or charity. The late seventeenth century had seen the development of public commercial concerts in London, starting with John Banister's first advertised concert in 1672. By the eighteenth century, London had developed into the commercial centre of Europe, attracting composers, musicians, and singers from across Europe, so that in 1713 the composer and theorist Johann Mattheson could write:

> Wer bey diesen Zeiten etwas in der Music zu præstiren vermeinet / der begibt sich nach Engelland. In Italien und Franckreich ist was zu hören und zu lernen; in Engelland was zu verdienen.[15]

As Catherine Harbor has shown, the possibility to work as a freelance musician without relying solely on a court appointment, while developing commercial skills and links with publishers, are all part of the birth of music as a business in London.[16] Benefit performances and concerts played an important role in this development, offering freelance musicians the opportunity to promote themselves, while securing additional income. The financial rewards of benefit performances varied, depending on the performance type (e.g. concert or opera), the quality of the performers involved, and the standing of the beneficiary. While the cost of the putting on a performance was reflected in the ticket prices, as an opera was more expensive than a concert, the amount the beneficiary actually received could vary considerably, and detailed information, beyond the advertised price of tickets in the London newspapers, is often rare.[17] For theatre benefits, house charges would also have had to be paid by the performers before making any profit.

Previous Research

Although the benefit performance contributed to the rich and complex history of London theatre and concert life, relatively few scholarly studies address the phenomenon directly, and those that do focus almost exclusively on the theatrical benefit rather than musical benefits. Three

[15] J. Mattheson, *Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg: 1713), p. 211. 'In these times, whoever wishes to be eminent in music goes to England. In Italy and France there is something to be heard and learned; in England something to be earned'.

[16] C. Harbor, 'The Birth of the Music Business: Public Commercial Concerts in London 1660–1750', unpublished PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London (2012), pp. 4 and 104–39.

[17] For a more detailed account of the finances of the benefit system, see Lowerre (Chapter 1) in this volume.

published works provide a foundation for the present volume. David McKenty's dissertation 'The Benefit System in Augustan Drama'[18] and St. Vincent Troubridge's *The Benefit System in the British Theatre*[19] were the first full-length studies to address the financial and logistical aspects of benefit production from its beginnings into the nineteenth century. Published in the 1960s, both authors examine the infrastructure of benefit performances during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, focusing on theatrical benefits, with an occasional mention of music. In the 1980s, Robert D. Hume built upon this scholarship in 'The Origins of the Actor Benefit in London', which surveyed the earliest benefits and how the practice became integral to the financial inner workings of the London theatre.[20] In all three studies, musical benefits are mentioned only a handful of times. Troubridge, McKenty, and Hume offer thorough, but general, analyses of the benefit system; as the essays in this current volume show, however, closer examinations of musical benefits reveal new perspectives on the experiences of musicians in eighteenth-century London.

While in some ways musical benefits mirrored the financial and artistic qualities of benefit performances in the spoken theatre, as discussed above, they also diverged in important ways. Hume's 'Origins of the Actor Benefit', for example, demonstrates the various ways in which disenfranchised actors and actresses created financial opportunities through the benefit performance by writing their own plays and receiving the third night's profits.[21] While musicians also devised clever ways of skirting managerial rules at London's playhouses and concert halls in order to make the most money, they also had more flexibility producing their own benefits. Concerts, of course, took less time to plan than writing and rehearsing a new play from scratch; the benefit system, then, seems to have been integrated easily into musical economic and performance structures. Another important difference regarding theatrical and musical benefits centres on the participation of other actors or musicians. In the spoken theatre, a benefit play would have required the participation of the company's current roster of actors; they would have been compensated for their performance, of course, but it is likely that the beneficiary had little control over who performed in their benefit.[22] Benefit performances of operas also relied on the current company of singers. Concert benefits, however, provided opportunities for musicians to hire those they believed would

[18] McKenty, 'The Benefit System in Augustan Drama'. [19] Troubridge, *The Benefit System*.
[20] Hume, 'Origins of the Actor Benefit', pp. 99–111. [21] Ibid., pp. 103 and 108–9.
[22] McKenty, 'The Benefit System in Augustan Drama', p. 62.

help them draw the largest audiences. Many concert benefit advertisements demonstrate a diverse array of types of performers, and many concerts included superstars alongside less renowned performers. These differences bring to light new questions concerning not only the logistics of planning benefits outside of the theatres, but also those regarding the professional relationships established between musicians. The early studies of the theatrical benefit by Troubridge, McKenty, and Hume offer a wealth of practical knowledge concerning the financial implications of benefit performances and how these events were produced through collaboration between impresarios and actors. They also help to determine the unique qualities of musical benefits, and what was adapted from previous practices. Yet in focusing on the spoken theatre, they also offer a chance to explore the benefit performance from a musical perspective.

Musical benefits have been addressed in musicology; most notably, those scholars who work on concert life in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain have discussed the phenomenon as one aspect of the flourishing of public and private concert life throughout the 1700s. While Catherine Harbor has offered a broad overview of commercial concerts in London between 1660 and 1750, referring to benefit concerts as one type of performance in the commercial music business, Simon McVeigh and William Weber have each considered the benefit as an important contribution to the growing cadre of freelancing musicians during the eighteenth century.[23] McVeigh's work on the history of the individual benefit concert at the end of the eighteenth century reveals a distinct reaction against the benefit as audiences began to see such evenings less as a 'reward for the most prestigious performers for good service'[24] and more as a nuisance, a commercial distraction from more serious types of works being performed as the nineteenth century wore on.[25] Weber has also acknowledged that tastes were changing around 1800, as audience preference for a miscellaneous hodgepodge of musical styles, genres, and performers coalesced into a new appreciation for a standard canon

[23] Harbor, 'The Birth of the Music Business'. Concert life in other areas of Britain has also received attention; see for example, R. Southey, *Music-Making in North-East England During the Eighteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) and J. Burchell, *Polite or Commercial Concerts? Concert Management and Orchestral Repertoire in Edinburgh, Bath, Oxford, Manchester, and Newcastle, 1730–1799* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1996).

[24] S. McVeigh, 'The Benefit Concert in Nineteenth-Century London: From "Tax on the Nobility" to "Monstrous Nuisance"', in B. Zon (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies I* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), p. 245.

[25] McVeigh, 'The Benefit Concert in Nineteenth-Century London', pp. 247–8.

of particular composers and their great works.[26] Individual benefit concerts, which relied on a diversity of concert programming, could not easily adapt, although charity benefits seem to have continued through the nineteenth century. In addressing the decline of the individual benefit, McVeigh and Weber ask and answer important questions about the cultural necessity of such events, and how audiences, as much as performers or composers, affected London concert life.

Even since McVeigh's and Weber's work, new resources have shed additional light on various economic, social, and aesthetic aspects of musical benefit performances during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Robert D. Hume and Judith Milhous have begun their revisions to the monolithic series *The London Stage*, a collection of advertisements and other types of primary sources that mention theatrical performances.[27] Their revised edition of *Part II: 1700–1729* is available online; thus, searching for sources that mention benefits has become easier. Similarly, online collections such as The Burney Collection of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Newspapers and Eighteenth-Century Collections Online provide further digital resources that ease the challenge of searching for primary documents. Even more recently, Donald Burrows, Helen Coffey, John Greenacombe, and Anthony Hicks have been editing *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents*, a five-volume collection of primary source documents relating to Handel's life and times.[28] This extraordinary trove of sources has already revealed new details about benefit performances given by the many performers and composers who travelled in Handel's orbit. A number of musicological studies on concert life in London have benefitted from these resources and have contributed to the foundation of benefit knowledge set by Hume, McKenty, and Troubridge earlier in the twentieth century.[29] Like concert life, charity and philanthropy in eighteenth-century London have attracted attention from historians, but less so, other than in association with Handel's *Messiah* and the Foundling Hospital, for music.[30] Eighteenth-century Dublin has fared better; in

[26] W. Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[27] *LS* II rev. [28] *HCD*.

[29] For the most recent study providing a thorough overview of London's concert life with research drawn from extensive primary source research, see Harbor, 'The Birth of the Music Business' and K. Lowerre, *Music and Musicians on the London Stage, 1695–1705* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

[30] See for example, D. T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); H. Cunningham and J. Innes (eds.), *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform from the 1690s to 1850* (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp.

addition to studies of charity in the city, Tríona O'Hanlon has made a detailed assessment of music and charity at Mercer's Hospital, where benefit performances receive some attention.[31] Nonetheless, there has been no detailed stand-alone study of the relationship between charity and benefit performances of music in eighteenth-century Britain. While previous research has accomplished much by way of reconstructing the theatrical benefit, this book fills a gap by picking up where theatrical scholars left off in their consideration of the commercial mechanics of the benefit, and their analysis of the experiences of performers, composers, institutions, and audiences as they produced and witnessed these special events.

Scope and Chapter Themes

The aim of this book is to offer the first comprehensive study of music and the benefit performance in eighteenth-century Britain, thereby filling the gap in previous scholarship, which has frequently centred on the theatre and the spoken play. Concentrating primarily on the period covering the 1690s to the 1760s, the book shows through a range of examples that the benefit performance was not always a composer-focused event. The close study of benefit performances reveals new information concerning performers' networks, the economic procedures of freelancing in London, and the creative possibilities of musical collaborations. Developments of genre and style become, in this context, a by-product of the creative activities of musicians as they marketed themselves to audiences through their benefit performances. While the essays in this collection build upon prior research into the benefit performance of the eighteenth century, they also touch upon a number of themes emerging in contemporary musicology. For example, many of the authors represented here focus on how the benefit performance helped to shape performers' public images. Musicology has become especially interested in the role of the performer in constructing and contributing to musical works; examinations of benefits require less of an emphasis on individual composers, and more discussion of those

87–107; K. Hogg, 'Handel and the Foundling Museum', *Händel-Jahrbuch*, 53 (2007), pp. 121–9; R. H. Nichols and F. A. Wray, *The History of the Foundling Hospital* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935); and D. Burrows, *Handel: Messiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[31] See for example, K. Sonnelitter, *Charity Movements in Eighteenth-Century Ireland: Philanthropy and Improvement* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2016) and T. O'Hanlon, 'Music for Mercer's: The Mercer's Hospital Music Collection and Charity Music in Eighteenth-Century Dublin', unpublished PhD thesis, Conservatory of Music and Drama, Dublin (2012).