

“Players and Scrapers”: Dean Swift Goes Shopping, for Music

CLIVE PROBYN

Grave D. of S^t P—ho[w] comes it to pass
That y[ou] who know musick no more than an ass
That you [who] was found writing of Drapiers
Should lend your cathedral to players and scrapers
To act such an opera once in a year
Is offensive to every true Protestant ear
With trumpets and fiddles and organs and singing
Will sure the Pretend^r and Popery bring in.
No Protestant Prelate, His L^dship or Grace
Durst there show his right or most revnd face
How would it pollute their Crosiers and Rochets
To listen to minimms and quavers and Crochets
“The Dean to Himself on St Cecilia’s Day” (1730)¹

Jonathan Swift was the first to admit that he had little sympathy for and even less understanding of the theory and aesthetics of music-making. In addition to this, he made no secret of his contempt for what he called “the Race of People called Gentlemen Lovers of Musick.” Musical sounds, he held, however seductive to some, must always be subservient to the primary purpose of communication by rational means and through words. Anything to do with musical metaphysics had him reaching for his vitriol. His library contained no *modern* music books, yet there was plenty he could have discovered about *classical* writers on music, either through his abbreviated English translation of Louis Moréri’s *Great Historical, Geographical and Poetical Dictionary* (to which the young Swift subscribed in 1693, and which he annotated), or through Marcus Meibomius’s *Antiquae Musicae Auctores Septem* (2 vols., Amsterdam, 1652), which he bought in 1711, read carefully, and also annotated.² In Meibomius, for example, he could have read about ancient Greek harmonics and musical notation, and found out about the fourth-century Greek

¹ “The Dean to Himself on St Cecilia’s Day,” in *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 2:522. For their helpful replies to my queries during the writing of this piece, I would like to thank Andrew Carpenter, Jamie Kessler, Harry Diack Johnstone, Kerry Houston, Richard Overell and Brian Gerrard. My late colleague and friend Harold Love demonstrated triumphantly in his life and writing that music and literature are sister arts.

² Dirk F. Passman and Heinz J. Vienken, *The Library and Reading of Jonathan Swift*, Part 1: *Swift’s Library*, in *Four Volumes* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003). Moréri is item 632 in the 1745 Sale Catalogue; the two volumes of Meibomius’s *Antiquae Musicae* are item 223 and are marked as annotated by Swift around 1711: see Harold Williams, *Dean Swift’s Library* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932); *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Herbert Davis and others, 16 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1939–74), 14:2, 45; and Passman and Vienken, Part 1, 2:1219 (item 223 in Sale Catalogue).

Bacchius, or Euclid's *Elements of Music*, or Gaudentius's Greek work on Harmony, Quintilianus's third-century *Perimusikas*, and the fourth-century Greek Alypius's *Introductio Musica*. He might also have investigated music in his copy of Jacobus Gronovius's *Thesaurus Graecarum antiquitatum* (13 vols., Leiden, 1697–1701), the gift of Bolingbroke, and valued "more than all my books besides."³

There is no evidence that Swift ever took a systematic interest in music; but there is an abundance of evidence, mostly from himself, that music was one of his blindspots. In *A Cantata* (words by Swift, music by his friend Dr. John Echlin) he ridiculed the idea of music being an imitative art: if synaesthesia is possible at all, he seems to say, it only works if mind and body are comatose: "While true Lovers Eyes Weeping Sleep, Sleeping Weep, Weeping Sleep, Bo peep, bo peep, bo peep, bo peep, peep, bo bo peep."⁴ In his *Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* (1710), there is the "discreet *Composer*, who in setting a Song, changes the Words and Order so often, that he is forced to make it *Nonsense*, before he can make it *Musick*."⁵

Of course, Swift was a wordsmith and no songster, and yet there is no doubt that under his decanal administration, from 1713 until his death in 1745, there was a notable rise in the quality of St. Patrick's Cathedral musical performance. There are two moments in particular: the St. Cecilia's Day concert on Sunday 22 November 1730, and the same occasion on Monday 22 November 1731. It is almost certainly the former event that prompted Swift to write "The Dean to Himself on St Cecilia's Day," a short lampoon about his mock-dismay at the comic irony of a musically illiterate Dean handing over his cathedral to "players and scrapers." Faulkner's *Dublin Journal* for 21–24 November described the event as follows:

Yesterday was celebrated at St. Patrick's Cathedral, by Order of the Hon. The Musical Society, the *Te Deum*, with several Concertos, from the famous Corelli, in Honour of St. Cecilia; which Day has not been observ'd here, with the like Solemnity, these five and twenty Years past, so that there was a very Numerous Congregation, of the best Quality. The whole was so exactly disposed, that there was not the least Appearance of Disorder during the Performance, which lasted from Eleven in the Morning, till past Two in the afternoon: The Sermon on the Occasion, was preach'd by the Revd. Dr. Sheridan, who we hope will be prevail'd on to Print the same. In fine, nothing could give greater Life to the Beautiful and Splendid Appearance of the Ladies and Gentlemen, than the Presence of the worthy Dean SWIFT, who seem'd highly pleas'd with the decent and becoming Order, observ'd thro' the whole.⁶

³ For Gronovius (item 556 in the Sale Catalogue) see also *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. David Woolley, 5 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999–2007), 3:231.

⁴ Williams, *Poems*, 3:955–61. The song opens: "In Harmony wou'd you Excel, / Suit your Words to your Musick well, / Musick well, Musick well." See also *The Journal to Stella*, ed. Harold Williams, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), 1:320.

⁵ Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, ed. A. C. Guthkelch and D. Nichol Smith, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 278.

⁶ The St. Patrick's St. Cecilia Day concert was inaugurated in 1726, three years before the Dublin

Such is the only first-hand description of Swift's demeanour during a musical experience. In 1731 the St. Cecilia's Day programme repeated and expanded upon the 1730 musical format, and achieved what one later commentator termed "a climax of excellence."⁷ Swift says nothing of the later event, but if he had been present we can be sure of *what* he might have heard, if not of how well he heard it. The programme may be reconstructed from a letter written by one of the 1731 concertgoers, Mary Granville (1700–1788), later Mrs. Pendarves and finally (in 1744) the second wife of Swift's friend and future Dean of Down, Dr. Patrick Delany. Mary was an opera-lover and accomplished musician, and in a letter to her sister, Anne Dewes, of 25 November 1731, she describes the previous day's event in St. Patrick's as one of "great pomp," with "the greatest crowd I ever saw" and with "a very fine organ ... accompanied by a great many instruments."

Whereas Faulkner's account of the 1730 concert, which Swift had certainly attended, indicated that it had lasted from eleven in the morning until after two in the afternoon, the 1731 event was clearly much more ambitious. Mrs. Delany was there for six hours, from ten until four (including another sermon from Sheridan⁸), after which she went to a ball at Lord Mountjoy's until one the following morning. The combined Christ Church and St. Patrick's choir and orchestra were directed by Matthew Dubourg (1707–67), erstwhile pupil of Geminiani and officially the Vice-regal Master and Composer of State Music of Dublin.⁹ If Swift stayed for the whole event, he would have heard the following programme (not necessarily in this order):

- the first, fifth and eighth of Arcangelo Corelli's twelve *concerti grossi* (i.e. Op. 6 for

Academy of Music started, according to William H. Grattan Flood, *A History of Irish Music*, 4th ed. (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1927), chap. 24. Sheridan did publish his *Sermon Preached at St. Patrick's Church, on St. Cæcilia's Day* in 1731, a 32-page historical defence of church music and its inspirational power, dedicated to the Honourable Musical Society of Dublin, "lately instituted for the improvement of *musick in churches*" (p. iv), and "considering how often, and in how prophane and scandalous a manner, the use of *church musick* hath been ridiculed, and decried by preachers and writers of every sect among us, perhaps an honest endeavour to defend the usefulness of it, would not be unseasonable" (p. v). Listening to Sheridan, Swift may have heard more than he cared to hear about musical metaphysics.

⁷ Robert Wyse Jackson, *Jonathan Swift, Dean and Pastor* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1939), 150. This is still the best general account (see pp. 142–59), but see also David B. Kesterson, "Swift and Music," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 11:1 (Spring 1969): 687–94; Joe McMinn, "Was Swift a Philistine? The Evidence of Music," *Swift Studies* 17 (2002): 59–74; and Arno Löffler, "Suit Your Words to Your Musick Well': Swift and the Poetic Harmonists," in *Swift: The Enigmatic Dean*, ed. Rudolf Freiburg, Arno Löffler and Wolfgang Zach (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1998), 99–112.

⁸ As reported in *Pue's Occurrences*, 20–23 November, and in *The Dublin Journal*, 20–23 November 1731 ("There were present the greatest Number of Nobility and Gentry of both Sexes that ever wer[e] seen upon the like Occasion").

⁹ In a joint act of political deference, Dubourg set to music Thomas Sheridan's *Ode* on the birthday of Queen Caroline, performed in Dublin Castle on 1 March 1730.

violins and cello, first published in Amsterdam, 1714), with a combined running time of about 34 minutes;

- Henry Purcell's *Te Deum Laudamus* and *Jubilate Deo* (both composed for St. Cecilia's Day, 1693, the former requiring full orchestral accompaniment), with a combined running time of about 22 minutes;
- an unidentified anthem by Purcell's mentor, John Blow, that might have been his first ode for the Musical Society of London's annual celebration of St. Cecilia, "Begin the Song" (1684), although this is only a surmise;
- a sermon by Thomas Sheridan (discussed below).

If Swift really had been no more than a tone-deaf moralist, it is ironic that his whole ecclesiastical career as Dean of St. Patrick's was framed by musical obligations. Even before his formal installation he was taking the initiative in making new choral appointments, reforming and improving the choir's corporate discipline, management and performance. He seems to have begun by initiating a survey of and planning improvements in *both* Dublin cathedrals' musical resources. Thus, on 20 October 1713, the Bishop of Kildare and Dean of Christ Church, Welbore Ellis, writes to Swift in London confirming his agreement to the joint appointment of a new Vicar Choral to the two sister cathedrals, adding: "I have given your directions to Mr Worrall for a list of the Anthems we have here, wch I shall continue to put him in mind of, till it is don. I think what you propose will be for the honour of both Churches; and ours will readily concur wth you in so good a design."¹⁰

Progress was slow, however, and in 1720 it was still (in Swift's view at least) at a low point. His standards of musical judgement, such as they were, had been set during his London years, and again they were negative. *The Journal to Stella* indicates that Swift preferred good company to a good dinner, and a walk in the park to an opera.¹¹ Nevertheless, he was repeatedly urged by his friends (not least the opera-loving Charles Ford) to attend the music-meetings at Windsor. He attended at least two rehearsals. It was not a good time for someone who hated Italian opera, but Swift managed it. In the first week of August 1711 he attended a rehearsal at which the Italian soprano Francesca Margherita de l'Épine (ca. 1680–1746) performed. Then of the Queen's Theatre, Margherita was at a point in her career when she had sung in Mancini's pasticcio *Idaspe Fedele* (the first opera to be sung in London wholly in Italian, March 1710), and was soon to appear in Gasparini's *Antioco* (December 1711) and as a male character (Goffredo) in a revival of Handel's *Rinaldo* (23 January 1712). In May of 1712 she appeared in the title role of Galliard's short-run *English* opera *Calypso and Telemachus*. Swift does not describe or identify the musical event whose rehearsal he attended, but nevertheless regretted that he had missed the "great assembly" if not the music ("I did not value it"¹²).

¹⁰ Woolley, *Correspondence*, 1:537. John Worrall (d. 1751) had been a minor canon of St. Patrick's since 1690, and Dean's Vicar since 1695: he became indispensable in Swift's professional and private lives.

¹¹ Williams, *Journal to Stella*, 1:200.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1:327, 332.

Another and similarly unidentified Windsor concert kept his attention for just half an hour before he walked out on “their fine stuff,” going home and cuffing the ears of his recalcitrant servant Patrick for causing him to delay his return.¹³

It is a discouraging and meagre record, but it seems that a major element in Swift’s antipathy to musical performances was determined less by the music as such and more by the social parameters of the particular events—by the kind of audience present, by its apparent lack of any moral or broader cultural purposes, and by what might be called its secular aesthetic. It is not surprising that his energies went into recruiting cathedral choristers. In April of 1726, having failed in Oxford to find “a voice” for St. Patrick’s, Swift was searching in London, using John Gay to mobilise Dr. Arbuthnot in the search, who then handed the task to his daughter Anne.¹⁴ Nanny was soon to help Gay with some of the songs in *The Beggar’s Opera*: she spoke to Dr. J. C. Pepusch several times, and wrote three or four letters, all in pursuit of Swift’s musical commission. Swift worked at a distance, keeping himself at arm’s length both from music *and* musicians.

He was not alone in deploring the contemporary fashion for Italian opera: we need only recall that *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728) had grown in John Gay’s imagination from Swift’s original suggestion for a pastoral set in Newgate prison. Was Swift secretly gratified to know that it was the German-born Pepusch, husband of the Italian-born Margherita, who had written the overture for the first demotic parody of Italian opera in English, using popular song not only to mock its highfalutin sentiments but also to displace the foreign import by a new, homegrown musical genre, the ballad opera, which was to be almost as popular in its time as *Gulliver’s Travels*? Swift probably never attended a performance of Gay’s hit, but read it in a small-print, sixpenny Dublin edition.¹⁵ In his published defence of *The Beggar’s Opera*, in *The Intelligencer* 3 (25 May 1728), Swift praises Gay’s work for everything *but* its performative/musical qualities. In the penultimate paragraph he reveals his interest in *The Beggar’s Opera* to lie in its moral and nationalistic value, not in its harmonics. If the patriotic Gulliver had talked to the intellectual dilettante Sir William Temple they could hardly have bettered this not manifestly ironic piece of xenophobic, sexual anxiety:

This *Comedy* ... exposeth with great Justice, that unnatural taste for *Italian* Musick among us, which is wholly unsuitable to our Northern *Climat*, and the *genius* of the People, whereby we are over-run with *Italian-Effeminacy*, and *Italian* Nonsense. An old Gentleman said to me, that many Years ago, when the practice of an un-

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2:375, 376.

¹⁴ “your negotiation with the singing man is in the hands of my daughter Nanny” (Woolley, *Correspondence*, 3:28 and 2:638).

¹⁵ *The Intelligencer: Jonathan Swift and Thomas Sheridan*, ed. James Woolley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 57. Swift’s copy was probably one of the several small octavo editions printed without the music in 1728 by S. Powell for George Risk, George Ewing, and William Smith in Dame’s Street, Dublin (ESTC NO32854 or TO13772).

natural Vice grew so frequent in *London*, that many were Prosecuted for it, he was sure it would be a Fore-runner of *Italian-Opera's* and Singers; and then we should want nothing but Stabbing or Poysoning, to make us perfect *Italians*.¹⁶

It has been argued that “Swift could not, and would not, distinguish between ideology and culture, between religion and aesthetics” and (a slightly different connected point) that “Swift was at his best when he hated something, or somebody.”¹⁷ There is nothing that Swift did not know about the effectiveness of an *ad hominem* argument, and his disdain for musical enthusiasts is everywhere apparent. Yet there is an important distinction to make here. Arno Löffler goes too far, I believe, in extrapolating from several of Swift’s satirical remarks that “Swift principally rejected the aesthetical foundations of music and literature, and ... he was unable to find access to the arts.”¹⁸ *Intelligencer* 3 shows Swift presenting the idea of a *particular* musical aesthetic (the taste for Italian opera) as very much an expression of a particular ideology of class and gender, and (however ludicrous this might seem to us) as a political means of assaulting and hence enervating a “manly” English culture by feminising taste as such. The rumbustiousness of *The Beggar’s Opera* is thus a fitting moral response from a nervous patriarchy, as is Swift’s assumption behind his reference to the high notes and low sexual performance of the Italian castrato/counter-tenor Nicolo Grimaldi in “Apollo: or, A Problem Solved” (1731).¹⁹ Yet the principal objections in Swift’s antagonism towards Italian opera (if indeed they were wholly serious) were commonplace by 1731 and had been raised (*avant la lettre*) by John Dennis back in 1706. Italian opera, Dennis wrote, was “not subservient to Reason ... [but] soft and effeminate ... a meer Delight of Sense.”²⁰ Such an argument sets poetry and drama in *opposition* to that which is represented by the Italian import, and is not at all an argument against the aesthetic foundations of the arts as such. Dennis’s opening words make this plain: “This small Treatise is only levell’d against those Opera’s which are entirely Musical; for those which are Drammatical may be partly defended by the Example of the Ancients.”²¹ If Swift had root-and-branch objections to music as such, he would not have devoted his time, friendships and energy to improving the musical standards in his cathedral; and there is much in Dennis’s argument about the dangerous capacity of music to dissolve self-presence that he both approved of and perhaps also feared. Swift’s protégé Thomas Sheridan

¹⁶ Ibid., 65. See further, Woolley, *Correspondence*, 2:446–47: “Every body is grown now as great a judge of Musick as they were in your time of Poetry”—John Gay to Swift, 3 February 1723—and John Dennis, *An Essay on the Opera’s after the Italian Manner, which are about to be Establish’d on the English Stage: with some Reflections on the Damage which they may bring to the Publick* (London: Printed for John Nutt, 1706).

¹⁷ McMinn, “Was Swift a Philistine?”, 74.

¹⁸ Löffler, “Swift and the Poetic Harmonists,” 112.

¹⁹ Williams, *Poems*, 2:597–98 (“*Apollo* had no Beard”).

²⁰ Dennis, *An Essay on the Opera’s*, 5.

²¹ Ibid., A2^r.

brings only the good news about church music: it gives “wings to the religious soul, and hastens it’s flight to heaven.”²² Dennis had articulated the euphoric negative, which Swift also advanced in *A Tale of a Tub* and in his *Intelligencer* paper, that Italian opera brings a dangerous state of *ekstasis* simply because it puts the subject out of his senses:

These unspeakable advantages has lofty Poetry over empty sounds, and harmonious trifles, which, as the pleasure they give us is a sensual Delight, utterly independent of Reason, must do something directly opposite to this, since ’tis natural to sense to bring a Man home to himself, and confine him there, as ’tis natural to Reason to expand the Soul, if I may have leave to use the expression, and throw it out upon the Publick: And as soft and delicious Musick by soothing the Senses, and making a Man too much in Love with himself, makes him too little fond of the publick, so by emasculating [*sic*] and dissolving the mind, it shakes the very foundation of Fortitude, and is so destructive of both branches of the publick Spirit.²³

In Ireland Swift knew his own limitations well enough to search out expert advice on all matters musical. He was fortunate to have as his director of music the trusted, experienced and discreet Dean’s Vicar, Rev. John Worrall—his right-hand man in most things, including his most private and sensitive relationship with Stella, especially at the time of her final illness.²⁴ There were others. On 22 December 1713 he received Sir Gilbert Dolben’s recommendation of a singer for his choir (“He is (in Musicians language) a ready Sight-man ... both his Voice and manner are Agreeable”²⁵) and on 9 February 1720 he wrote to Edward Harley, the younger brother of Lord Treasurer Oxford: “I have the honor to be Captain of a Band of Nineteen Musicians (including Boys) which are I hear about five Less than my Friend the D. of Chandois [*sic*], and I understand Musick like a Muscovite; but my Quire is so degenerate under the Reigns of former Deans of famous Memory, that the Race of People called Gentlemen Lovers of Musick, tell me I must be very carefull in supplying two Vacancies, which I have been two Years endeavouring to do ... If you had recommended a Person to me for a Church-Living in my Gift, I would be less curious; because an indifferent Parson may do well enough, if he be honest, but Singers like their brothers the Poets must be very good, or they are good for Nothing.”²⁶

²² Sheridan, *A Sermon Preached*, 31.

²³ Dennis, *An Essay on the Opera’s*, 9.

²⁴ Woolley, *Correspondence*, 2:655–57. Swift tells Worrall twice to burn this letter after reading it.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:567.

²⁶ There were twelve in the College of Vicars, five of them priests, and from 1432 the establishment of *choristae* (boys) was 6 (Woolley, *Correspondence*, 2:324, citing H. J. Lawlor, *The Fasti of St. Patrick’s Dublin* (Dundalk: W. Tempest, 1930), 211 ff.).

In 1722 he was in touch with metropolitan choral politics, with a prospect of an exchange of musical personnel managed by Andrew Snape, Canon of Windsor.²⁷

Quality control demanded a firm managerial hand. Swift himself attended choral rehearsals in St. Patrick's with the score in front of him, and demanded clear enunciation of the words as a minimum desideratum. The original Rhenatus Harris organ of 1697 was modernised and augmented under his regime, and the cathedral Receipt Books and Chapter Minutes record substantial payments for new anthems, for "writing and pricking new musick books for ye use of ye choir," and the first subscription of nine pounds and two shillings towards Dr. Maurice Greene's *Forty Select Anthems* in score for use of the cathedral.²⁸ Swift also employed a permanent organ-tuner, Philip Hollister, who later became the proprietor of Ranelagh Pleasure Gardens, and the two main organists during his time were from the outstanding Roseingrave family of musicians, the father Daniel (organist from 1698) and his younger son Ralph.²⁹

In the 1730s, the St. Patrick's Cathedral singers and instrumentalists, combining with those at Christ Church Cathedral, assisted at musical events put on by the Dublin Charitable Musical Society, and Handel rehearsed and directed them in the world *première* of *Messiah* (on Tuesday 13 April 1742) in the handsome new music hall designed by Richard Cassels (or Castell) in Fishamble Street. Music was both the cause and occasion of Swift's last official bureaucratic act (28 January 1742). In defence of "the Dignity of my Station, and the Honour of my Chapter," he expressly forbade any of his "Vicars-Choral, Choiristers, or Organists to attend or assist at any publick musical Performances, without my Consent" and categorically affirmed that he had never given formal permission to "certain Vicars to assist at a club of Fiddlers in Fishamble Street." Evidently, if these men had been performing as "Songsters, Fiddlers, Pipers, Trumpeters, Drummers, Drummajors or in any Sonal Quality," it was the consequence of "Flagitious aggravations of their respective Disobedience, Rebellion, Perfidy & Ingratitude."³⁰ As in his St. Cecilia poem, Swift was perfectly capable of demonstrating a detailed knowledge of his subject even when the subject itself was antipathetic to him. And the issue here, of course, had little to do with music as such and everything to do with Swift's assertion of decanal control.

²⁷ Woolley, *Correspondence*, 2:420.

²⁸ Jackson, *Jonathan Swift, Dean and Pastor*, does not date the extracts it provides (p. 150), but Greene's *Forty Select Anthems* were not published until 1743.

²⁹ Ralph Roseingrave (d. December 1747), like his father before him, held a joint appointment in both cathedrals. Daniel (d. May 1727) was organist and vicar choral in St. Patrick's from 1698 to 1719 (after which Ralph took over), and also organist and stipendiary at Christ Church. Described by Swift as "my Organist," Ralph was also one of Swift's musical advisers: see Irvin Ehrenpreis, *Swift, the Man, his Works, and the Age*, 3 vols. (London: Methuen & Co., 1962–83), 3:352–53. The musical star of the Roseingrave family was Thomas (1690/1–1766), a student of Domenico Scarlatti in Italy.

³⁰ For the full text of this document, see *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963–65), 5:266–68.

To this record of Swift and music there is one important and slightly mysterious detail to be added. On Monday 18 September 1727, four months after Daniel Roseingrave's death, Swift was setting off from London at the end of what he knew to be his last visit to England. George I had died (11 June), news had reached Swift of Stella Johnson's last serious illness (August), and he was persuaded to cancel his planned trip to France, equipped though he was with letters of introduction from Voltaire himself. In a state of almost disabling anxiety, and actual dizziness, he travelled at breakneck speed to Chester then (22 September) to Holyhead, riding not quite 70 miles on one of the days. There he was stalled for a week by bad weather and rough seas, and rendered tetchy by dreadful food, bad wine and unsympathetic fellow travellers. He had with him a blank paper book stolen back in June from George Bubb Dodington, one of Walpole's Lords of the Treasury. Swift began to use it for what turned out to be a miscellany of some of his most vitriolic poetry about England and Ireland and an extraordinarily vivid and revealing prose diary of his battle with boredom and anxiety—diet, exercise regime, physical discomfort, and the reasons for his compulsion to write this “journal of my distresses and living at Holyhead.”

The very first item on what is now the first page, however, is both mundane and fascinating: it is a shopping list of items evidently to be purchased in London (though this is not actually stated). There are thirteen items. Eight of them are accompanied by a cross to indicate that the errand was performed successfully—buying four pairs of spectacles for a 70-year-old and one pair for a 60-year-old, and a reading glass for the Dean's Vicar, John Worrall; payment to an apothecary and to another for Pirmont water; putting two hundred pounds into stocks (probably the money received from his publisher Motte for *Gulliver's Travels*); settling the account for his London lodgings; and paying “Mr Rolt's money.” The tasks *not* performed are: the acquisition of music books (top of the list); enquiring in Fleet Street about a clock for his cathedral; acquiring fennel, broccoli and melon seeds, with details about how to plant them; business related to his grandfather's tomb at Goodrich, Herefordshire (which he seems to have visited in early April on the way to Oxford, before staying with Pope at Twickenham); and visiting the famous chemist shop of Ambrose Godfrey in Southampton Street for Hungary water and palsy drops, probably for Stella. It is the first item that is of special interest here:

Full anthems and Dr Crofts book of anthems.³¹

Swift's wording is very specific. This was evidently a special commission and it was a very special book. Not only was it beautifully and expensively produced, each page being the result of an exquisitely engraved plate, but it also carried Swift's own

³¹ National Art Library (Great Britain), Forster MS 519. A photographic reproduction and transcription of the whole page may be found in *Prose Works*, 5:334–35 (Appendix B). A transcription is added also at the end of this article.

name as a subscriber, the only music book so far known to have this distinction. He is listed by name and by ecclesiastical position: “The Reverend Dr. *Swift*, Dean of St. Patrick’s Dublin” (p. 6). Proposals for a subscription edition of *Divine Musick ... Thirty select Anthems, for two, three, four, five, six, seven and eight Parts, composed by Dr William Croft, Organist and Composer of Musick to His Majesty’s Chapel-Royal* had appeared in the *Daily Courant* for 5 April 1724.³² Subscriptions were collected by the printers/publishers “Mr [John] Walsh (who understands the Work) at the Harp in Katherine-street in the Strand and by Mr Hare at the Golden Viol in Cornhill, near the Royal Exchange.” No date of publication is given on the two title pages, and at first sight it seems to have taken Swift more than three years to catch up with his subscriber’s copy. Holles Newcastle’s permission for Croft’s copyright is dated 30 October 1724, but the commonly assumed publication date of 1724 must be incorrect (see, for example, the *ODNB* entry on Croft). January 1726 is the likely date for both volumes. The *Daily Post* of 12 January 1725 (i.e. 1726 New Style) recorded that “Last week Dr Croft had the Honour of presenting his Majesty with a Collection of Anthems of his own composing, which his Majesty receiv’d very graciously.” In the interim, between the request for subscribers and the appearance of the two volumes, the title had been changed to *Musica Sacra: or, Select Anthems in Score, Consisting of 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 Parts; To which is added the Burial-Service, as it is now occasionally perform’d in Westminster Abbey*. Croft had been a pupil of John Blow, and along with Greene and Boyce carried on the tradition of Purcell in English church music. Apart from its specific characteristics as a superb music book, *Musica Sacra* includes Croft’s version of the Burial Service, with allusive homage paid to Henry Purcell.

If *two* works by Croft are implied in Swift’s shopping list (“Full anthems *and* Dr Crofts book of anthems”), the other may have been the similarly delayed “Book of Anthems” announced in the *Weekly Journal or Saturday’s Post* for 4 June 1720 as to be published “next Term.” “Full anthems” refers to a small group of anthems (ten of Croft’s are thus designated, as against his sixty verse anthems), although there is no substantial difference between the two in terms of choral writing).³³

The first volume of *Musica Sacra* contains a subscribers list of 153 individuals,

³² The copy examined is in the Library of Westminster Abbey (Music/SS/C4), kindly made available to me by Dr. Tony Trowles, Librarian, Westminster Abbey.

³³ Donald Burrows, *Handel and the English Chapel Royal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 46. For a different view, see Benett Mitchell Zon’s entry for Croft in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (available online at <http://www.oxforddnb.com> [accessed 10 March 2009]). Of Croft’s verse anthems, Burrows notes “the conservatism of his tonal designs” and “a deliberate demarcation between ‘theatre’ and ‘church’ styles” (p. 52). Both characteristics would have met with Swift’s approval, as indeed would Croft himself, described by Sir John Hawkins in *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (1776), 2:797 as a “grave and decent man” (quoted in *ODNB*). The most detailed discussion of Croft is in Robert L. Scandrell, “The Anthems of William Croft (1678–1727),” unpublished PhD thesis, Washington University, St. Louis, 1961.

including the bishops of Asaph and Hereford, and a number of corporate bodies, such as the Gentlemen of His Majesty's Chapel Royal and the Libraries of Durham, Cambridge (King's College Chapel) and Westminster. Fourteen canons/prebendaries are listed, 15 Deans/Sub-Deans, 7 booksellers (Oxford, Cambridge, York, Winton, Bath, Cornhill), 12 university Fellows/Presidents/Provosts, 1 organ builder, 8 titled persons (including the Earl of Oxford and Macclesfield, the Lord High Chancellor), and no fewer than 25 organists—notably those from Guildhall, Boston, Eton College, Durham, Hereford, Worcester, Winchester, New College Oxford, Bath, King's College Cambridge, Rochester, Peterborough, Gloucester and St. Paul's (this last in the name of Maurice Greene, Chapel Royal organist and composer). Also included are Dr. John Christopher Pepusch (musical director of the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre), Thomas Hanmer (the leader of the Hanoverian Tories under Queen Anne), Humphrey Wanley (Lord Treasurer Harley's librarian), and Swift's fellow Scriblerian and musical adviser, Dr. John Arbuthnot.³⁴

The act of subscribing could have been initiated by Swift. Croft was, after all, very well known. He had very recently died in Bath (14 August 1727) and had been buried nine days later in Westminster Abbey next to Purcell's grave, at a time when Swift was still in London, though so racked by his own deafness that he doubted he could hear even a musket being fired. As Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal from 1708, composer to Queen Anne, and organist of Westminster Abbey, Croft may have been known to Swift personally.³⁵ Yet the subscription was also as Dean, acting with and for the Chapter, and in this case the initiative could have come from either or both of the Roseingraves. Of greater importance is the publication itself and what it implies about the repertoire at St. Patrick's. Croft says in his Preface that this is "the first Essay of publishing Church-Musick in England after this manner of Printing," i.e. in score, engraved and stamped on plates, and with the parts underneath each other, complete with figured bass for the organ. The choruses in *Musica Sacra* all have the organ continuo, and, quite apart from its intrinsic importance and beauty as a publication, the subscription list alone indicates that this is a book that no English cathedral organist could do without. If one of the Roseingraves had requested it of the Dean (an experienced book-buyer, both for himself and as a proxy for others³⁶), then such a request would have been supported by the Dean's Vicar, the sixty-year-old director of music at St. Patrick's,

³⁴ Arbuthnot writes to Swift, 8 May 1729, recommending the baritone John Mason, who had performed in the King's Chapel and was subsequently appointed a vicar-choral in both Dublin cathedrals, retaining the positions until his death in 1748 (Woolley, *Correspondence*, 3:234–35).

³⁵ "One would expect Swift to buy his book of anthems out of loyalty to his dead friend": George P. Mayhew, "A Missing Leaf from Swift's 'Holyhead Journal,'" *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 41 (1959): 388–413 (395).

³⁶ Swift to Dean Sterne, 15 April 1708: "If you will not use me as your book-buyer, make use of Sir Andrew Fountain, who ... will carry over a cargo as big as you please towards the end of summer, when he and I intend my Lord Lieutenant shall come into our company without fail" (Woolley, *Correspondence*, 1:185).

John Worrall, the intended recipient of the large reading glass on Swift's shopping list, and possibly of the spectacles, too.³⁷

Swift carefully recorded his personal and official expenditure on books in annual account books (now held in the Rothschild Collection in Trinity College Cambridge and in the Forster Collection of the National Art Library), but they are there recorded only by price paid, not by title, and unfortunately the account books for the years between 1718 and 1732 are as yet unrecovered.³⁸

Although the details of the purchase of the Croft books remain unclear, the absent cross may not indicate a failed commission. The book may have been posted to him as a subscriber. There is a copy of Croft's *Musica Sacra* in the St. Patrick's Cathedral Library, but it is not likely to be the copy Swift sought in London in 1727.³⁹

Swift's *Directions for making a Birth-Day Song* (1729) has been described as "probably the most accurate and acute description not only of odes written for the royal birthday, but also of those for the New Year."⁴⁰ Yet Swift speaks only of words. He is silent on all matters relating to the beauties of music, so one is tempted to conclude that his errand would have been official rather than personal. There is a final irony in all of this, however. At a time when Dublin was "one of the musical centres of Europe," the home for some time of Geminiani and of his pupil Matthew Dubourg (Dublin concertmaster from 1728 to 1752 and the leader of the *Messiah* orchestra described by Swift as "a club of fiddlers in Fishamble Street"), Swift shunned all acquaintance with music other than a strictly controlled regime inside his own cathedral. There was a whole range of possible reasons, including Ménière's disease. But History sometimes asserts a singular and fierce logic against grey areas and plural possibilities: Swift's towering status as Irish patriot, speaking through the invented figure of M.B. Drapier, became the musical subject of many celebratory songs, catches, ballads, and political broadsides.⁴¹ The words and deeds of this virtual figure provided inspiration for the libretti to scores drawn from popular songs. But this is not enough. History demands that the great must associate with their peers, assuming that sharing the same moment in time means sharing a mutual acquaintance as well. So, we have been told, Swift received visits at the Deanery from the last of the Irish bards, the blind, itinerant harpist-composer

³⁷ Ehrenpreis suggests a birth date for Worrall of 1666, so he was about the same age as Swift. They had been students together at Trinity College Dublin.

³⁸ The nine extant account books are for 1702–3, 1703–4, 1708–9, 1709–10, 1711–12, 1712–13, 1717–18, 1732–33, 1734–35. Swift bought music on 14 November 1702 and in the first week of September 1710, probably as gifts: see Paul V. Thompson and Dorothy Jay Thompson, *The Account Books of Jonathan Swift* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1984), vii–viii, 3, 113.

³⁹ Information kindly supplied by Dr. Kerry Houston, Dublin Institute of Technology, from the St. Patrick's Cathedral Music Archive. His view is that the copy now in St. Patrick's is not the original purchase but one bought by a more recent dean.

⁴⁰ Rosamund McGuinness, *The English Court Ode* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 62.

⁴¹ See Williams, *Poems*, 3:1109–11.

Turlough O'Carolan (1670–March 1738), and also from Handel.⁴² The truths are more nuanced, resistant and complex, and they are sometimes disappointing as well. Carolan, the last of the Irish bards, *did* compose “Squire Wood’s Lamentation on the Refusal of ye Halfpence,”⁴³ thus contributing to Swift’s magnificent political campaign against the imposition of an English-made currency on Ireland; and Handel *did* praise the combined *Messiah* choirs of Christ Church and St. Patrick’s—“The Basses and Counter Tenors are very good, and the rest of the Chorus Singers (by my Direction) do exceedingly well”⁴⁴—and for each of these events a little musical credit must surely have belonged to the unmusical musical management of the Dean of St. Patrick’s.

One can be sure that Swift knew more of music than he was prepared to admit. In 1730, for example, he revised, corrected and commented upon the poems of Matthew Pilkington, “in one or two of which I have the honor to be celebrated, which cost me a guinea and two bottles of wine.”⁴⁵ Was this a hidden subscription to the young parson’s *Poems on Several Occasions*? Perhaps, but the point is that his revising eye would have read through two poems about the progress of music in Ireland. The first was by his protégé William Dunkin, and the second was Pilkington’s own verse history of music in Ireland, which vividly describes and “hears” the musical presence of Carolan:

Music henceforward more Domestick grew,
Courts the throng’d Towns, and from the Plains withdrew:
The Vagrant *Bard** his circling Visits pays,
And charms the Villages with venal Lays.
The solemn *Harp*, beneath his Shoulder plac’d,
With both his Arms is earnestly embrac’d,
Sweetly irregular, now swift, now slow,
With soft variety his Numbers flow,
The shrill, the deep, the gentle, and the strong,
With pleasing Dissonance adorn his Song;
While thro’ the Chords his Hands unweary’d range,
The Music changing as his Fingers change.⁴⁶

The same poem celebrates Dubourg’s seductive art of the violin (14–15) and the

⁴² See *Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington*, ed. A. C. Elias, Jr., 2 vols. (Athens, Ga. and London: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 1:317, 2:710. See McMinn, “Was Swift a Philistine?” 63, and his (problematical) note on Italian opera being “virtually unknown in Dublin during Swift’s lifetime.”

⁴³ See Victor Jackson, *The Monuments in St Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin* (Dublin: St. Patrick’s Cathedral, 1987), 4, 67. Jackson gives no evidence for his claim (4) that “Carolan ... visited [Swift] occasionally in the deanery.”

⁴⁴ Jackson, *Jonathan Swift, Dean and Pastor*, 159.

⁴⁵ Woolley, *Correspondence*, 3:328.

⁴⁶ “The Progress of Musick in Ireland. To Mira,” in Matthew Pilkington, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1731), 1–17 (9). The asterisk signals a footnote identifying the Bard as “Carulan.”

“blended Harmony of Sound and Sense” in Nicolini’s singing (13),⁴⁷ and offers an argument that music *transcends* “the mimic Voice of *Art*” (13). Further, it compliments the compositional talents of Lorenzo Bocchi (16) and the next item in Pilkington’s collection is “An Hymn to Sleep. Set to Musick by Mr. Lorenzo Bocchi”, though not without implying that this rise in musical sophistication has come at a cost—the decline of traditional Irish music:

The first rude Lays are now but meanly priz’d,
As rude, neglected, as untun’d, despis’d:
Dead — (in Esteem too dead) the *Bards* that sung,
The *Fife* neglected, and the *Harp* unstrung. (16)

Nine years later, Laurence Whyte’s 1740 octosyllabic “Dissertation on Italian, and Irish Music” cemented a slender alliance between traditional Irish bardic music, imported Italian musicians, and Swift’s non-musical interest in Rabelaisian–Gaelic social caperings:

Sweet *Bocchi* thought it worth his while,
In doing honour to our *Isle*,
To build on *Carallan*’s Foundation,
Which he perform’d to Admiration,
On his *Pheraca*’s went to work
With long Divisions on *O Rourk*.
A *Dean* the greatest Judge of Wit,
That ever wrote amongst us yet,
Gave us a version of the Song,
Verbatim from the *Irish Tongue*.⁴⁸

By the slenderest of threads, the Dean is woven into an Italo-Gaelic-Anglo-Irish musical canon.

As we have seen, it is not difficult to demonstrate that Swift seems to have been a well-informed (that is to say, well-advised) and conscientious manager of music within the defined precincts of the Deanery and that he took his musical duties as seriously as any other item in his decanal portfolio. Nor is it difficult to track his official appearances at a small handful of concerts/rehearsals of some of the leading

⁴⁷ For Swift’s scathing comments on the Italian castrato Nicolo Grimaldi (“Nicolini”) and Valentino Urbani, see his letter to Robert Hunter (Woolley, *Correspondence*, 1:230). Nicolini had first performed in Dublin in 1711.

⁴⁸ See Laurence Whyte, *Poems on Various Subjects, Serious and Diverting, Never before Published* (Dublin, 1740), 154–59. Swift’s ability to translate Irish *verbatim* is doubtful: his poem “The Description of an *Irish-Feast*, translated almost literally out of the *Original Irish*” (1720) is a version of Hugh MacGuaran’s own literal translation into English of his Gaelic song “Pléaraca na Ruarcach,” which Carolan set to music. See Joseph C. Walker, *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards* (London, 1786), 81, and Williams, *Poems*, 1:243–47.

performers and musicians of his day, in both England and Ireland. What remains puzzling is his rigorous refusal of music as a personal and pleasurable (secular) human experience in itself. It is hard to believe that he never for a moment enjoyed a public musical event, but it is even harder to say that he did so, and for this we have a plethora of medical, physiological, psychological and even theological explanations. Swift's own reason was probably very simple: as he says in the poem used as an epigraph above, he never understood the attraction of music and therefore had no need of it. His Ménière's disease, for which there is still no known cause, has very well established symptoms—balance disorders and sound distortion, perhaps especially in those upper registers occupied by the violin and the baroque trumpet, whilst the drum may have been only too much like the sound of the several waterfalls in his head (the tinnitus of which he complained so vividly and frequently). In a public concert it would have been difficult for him to separate a single source of sound, musical or otherwise, from any circumambient context of noise; and although his musical hostility has vexed his admirers more than it vexed him, he shows only too clearly the acute social embarrassment and sense of lonely isolation it caused him. Swift endured both with an extraordinary stoicism. His world was made of words, not music, and for the latter there is no more poignant witness than Beethoven's so-called Heiligenstadt Testament:

forgive me when you see me draw back when I would gladly have mingled with you. My misfortune is doubly painful to me because I am bound to be misunderstood; for me there can be no relaxation with my fellow-men, no refined conversations, no mutual exchange of ideas, I must live alone like someone who has been banished ... But what a humiliation for me when someone standing next to me heard a flute in the distance and I *heard nothing*, or someone heard a shepherd singing and again I *heard nothing*.⁴⁹

If the former part of Beethoven's account may be applied only to Swift's last few years, the latter part describes Swift's condition for most of his adult life. There is, however, a difference: the satirist's burden was noise, the musician's sentence was silence. In both cases the results were devastating, and in both cases, perhaps, the genius lay in the pain.

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⁴⁹ I quote this statement from David Lodge's latest "autobiographical fiction," *Deaf Sentence* (London: Harvill Secker, 2008), 81–82. Lodge takes it from *Thayer's Life of Beethoven*, revised and edited by Elliott Forbes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964).

Appendix**Swift's "Shopping List" in Forster MS 519**

Memds Those onely done w^{ch} are crossed

Full anthems, and D^r Crofts book
of anthems in Fleet-street about
a Clock for S^t Patr's Cathedrall.

Spectacles for 70 years old 4 pair X

Fenocchio and Brocali original seeds, and
the whole direction about planting them.

Melon seeds, and any othr garden curiosity

Some presents fluid X

A pair of Spectacles for 60, and a large
reading glass for M^r Worrall. X

My Grandfathers tomb

Pay Pothecary in Country and town. X
and pay the Pirmont water X

To sell-buy 200^{ll} in some Stock. X

Godfry in Southampton Street, Hungary
water and palsy drops

Pay lodging. 1^l-11^s-6^d X

How to pay M^r Rolt's money X