



REVIEW: BOOK

## Music, Dance, and Drama in Early Modern English Schools

Amanda Eubanks Winkler

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Investigating performing-arts education in early-modern Britain is a complex and often under-examined area, in part because the archival material presents several obstacles when trying to determine exactly what was performed. Of course, such challenges are shared when exploring professional dance, music and theatre productions, but in these instances it is assumed that what was performed was, first and foremost, for entertainment. Amanda Eubanks Winkler's *Music, Dance, and Drama in Early Modern English Schools* is unique because she is questioning the motivations behind performing-arts pedagogy in a school context, including what children learned and how the audience viewed their endeavours. Eubanks Winkler's focus is on the social elite, whose performing-arts education was designed to prepare young gentlemen and women to function in high society. In this way, her book differs from recent investigations, including Nicholas Baragwanath's *The Solfeggio Tradition: A Forgotten Art of Melody in the Long Eighteenth-Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), Robert O. Gjerdingen's *Child Composers in the Old Conservatories: How Orphans Became Elite Musicians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020) and my own *Venanzio Rauzzini and the Birth of a New Style in English Singing: Scandalous Lessons* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), all of which consider the development of various music-educational methods. Indeed, Eubanks Winkler does not centre her investigation on treatises and manuals, as these studies do, though chapter 4 does delve a little into publications produced by those connected to grammar schools.

While the title specifies 'English schools', I appreciate Eubanks Winkler's acknowledgment that it does not account for the singular mention of a school in Aberdeen. Space and time may have prevented Eubanks Winkler from conducting a study across other parts of the British Isles, though there is perhaps scope for future exploration considering the amount of performance taking place in Scottish grammar schools in the eighteenth century.

The author captures the difficulties of a study of this kind in her delightful Introduction, which reflects on how she came to the topic. The idea stemmed from an old school programme for *Singing in the Rain* in which her daughter had taken part. She later considered how this simple 'thin programme booklet' was the only trace of the performance having taken place, and how its design is not intended to memorialize the event (3). Rather, it is cheap ephemera that only some parental figures would save as a keepsake. Most would likely throw it away following the performance. No one assumes that such an item would ever be preserved in a library or an archive for future scholars to study, and yet this programme's early-modern equivalent is exactly what fascinates Eubanks Winkler.

The limited information such programmes provide only hints at what was performed, with no discussion of what the children were intended to learn. Nevertheless, those who have taken part in school concerts, dance shows and plays know that a multitude of transferable skills are involved

in these special, extra-curricular moments. The value of performing-arts pedagogy (both today and in the past) lies not just in its entertainment value, but in its ability to teach skills such as organization, time management, critical thinking, public speaking, socialization and problem-solving. In many ways, Eubanks Winkler's study not only comprehensively maps music, dance and drama pedagogy in early-modern English schools, but also highlights its continued importance in the twenty-first century.

Such an investigation required a new methodology, with Eubanks Winkler arguing that she needed an approach that 'copes with the gaps' in order to identify traces of early-modern school performances (3). Personal correspondence and newspaper advertisements take precedence over scores and librettos, as these latter documents provide very little information on what pupils and audiences learned from the performance. Furthermore, she points out that some early-modern pedagogical traditions persist to this day, since performers have engaged directly in learning historical practices so as to take a more informed approach towards bringing works from the past to life in the present. Indeed, the author notes that 'by re-animating' historical documentation such as scores, scripts and choreography, performers serve as a 'conduit between past and present' (6). While, to an extent, I can appreciate Eubank Winkler's position that modern performers can learn something of past performing traditions by re-enacting historical works, I feel that doing so requires a certain amount of research and commitment to a historical approach – even just to peep through the key-hole at what might have been. Playing a Bach sonata or acting a play by Aphra Behn does not necessarily mean that performers either embody or understand what was performed in the past. Rather, they are likely to adopt an approach taught through modern education methods, and acceptable to modern audiences, unless, of course, they are committed historically informed performers who are seeking a deeper insight into past traditions. The final chapter exemplifies this idea, with Eubanks Winkler describing a recent performance of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* given by schoolgirls, with restored dances. Clearly, the director, William Christie, was well versed in the history of the performance – which was first given at the girl's school of Josias Priest, dancing master at Gorges House, Chelsea – and used it to stage a production that he felt more authentically embodied that first performance. This is quite different from the now 'timeless' approach, typically performed by adults, that would lead modern audiences to assume that Christie's production is quite unlike what Purcell intended (207). As the author argues, historical knowledge can destabilize accepted tradition.

Eubanks Winkler takes care to remind readers that these performances were played by children, who were learning to navigate their roles within society. Chapter 1 carefully outlines the differences between performing-arts education for boys and girls. Acting was useful in teaching rhetoric, while dance was a crucial form of exercise that enhanced one's deportment and rhetorical persuasiveness through gesture. Music not only taught discipline and good behaviour, but a boy could also be shunned as ill-bred if his musical skill was found to be sub-par. Girls would face similar scrutiny for a lack of musical skill throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While dance was also considered essential for girls, acting was a much more complex subject, with educators feeling they needed to protect girls from risqué stories for fear they may embody such deviances in real life. Indeed, this chapter introduces a running question that permeates Eubanks Winkler's study: if children embody adult scenarios and play out immoral behaviour, will they adopt such immorality into their person?

Churches used music for moral instruction through the medium of psalm singing, as explored in chapter 2. However, as examined in chapter 3, the performance of masques could be used for political means in a court setting, with children often performing them for royalty prior to and following the Restoration. Even so, Eubanks Winkler speculates that morality was still a concern, theorizing that the part of Adonis in John Blow's *Venus and Adonis* was changed to a trouser role to avoid an 'erotic exchange between student and teacher' (97).

Chapter 4 considers the multitude of publications printed during the early-modern period that provided music and dance tuition, although the author does not comprehensively examine exactly what these sources imparted. They rather serve as a record of what prominent schoolmasters may have taught, including Priest. Eubanks Winkler acknowledges that keyboard music is missing from her discussion, despite its being a significant part of education for girls. Unfortunately, although there are many publications by private music masters, there are no keyboard instruction manuals specifically associated with the schools at the heart of her investigation. Yet there are a few keyboard treatises penned by masters who were linked to boys' grammar schools, demonstrating that studying this repertory was also an important accomplishment for boys as well as girls.

The following chapters return to the question of performance and morality, with Eubanks Winkler reminding readers that productions with adult themes were regularly performed by children as part of their schooling. This is an aspect of performance history easily forgotten when examining scores and librettos, and yet questions of morality would have been very apparent to the early-modern audience who observed a production. In chapter 6 Eubanks Winkler provides an excellent example to illustrate the issue, noting that the violent, erotic production *The Libertine*, with music by Purcell, was performed by schoolgirls who possibly acted alongside male professionals or their male schoolmasters. Purcell's 'Ball Song' has, over time, become dissociated from its vulgar, theatrical origins, being upheld as 'an emblem of innocence' (191, quoting Curtis Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 114). Removed from its context, the text of the 'Ball Song' seems wholesome, simply expressing the joy of sport, play, music, dance and poetry. There are, however, clear sexual overtones – explicit double entendres such as 'pipe and play' – that demonstrate that this song is not chaste and that these meanings would have been obvious to contemporary audiences. If modern audiences and performers were aware of this song's erotic undertones, would they still consider it innocent? Eubanks Winkler suggests not, and yet the song, removed from its wider context, has become detached from its sordid history. As she shows, today, the 'Ball Song' – better known as 'Shepherds and Nymphs' – is regularly performed by schoolchildren, and assumed to be morally unproblematic. Indeed, there is a delightful recording on YouTube of the Manchester Children's Choir performing the song with the Hallé Orchestra in 1929 (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vqpqHECZtE>).

Eubanks Winkler's detailed and in-depth study has brought to light a topic that, I must confess, I had not thought of before: the role of music, dance and drama in early-modern English schools. In so doing, she expertly illuminates a little-understood area of performing-arts history that will inevitably change how scholars and performers view some of the most prominent works emerging from this era.

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