

Music publishing in the British Isles, 1750-1850

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Summary:

The period between 1750 and 1850 witnessed an explosion in music publishing activity in the UK, as publishers exploited a growing market of amateur musicians and the development of new printing technologies. This development had a far-reaching impact on the music profession in general, as publishing became an increasingly important element in the activities and creative decisions of composers, leading also to the codification of intellectual property rights and new economic models for the consumption and distribution of music.

This CDP will address issues relating to the social, commercial and economic contexts of music publishing in Britain, using the BL's printed music collection and related manuscript and archival sources as the basis for analysing the broader historical trends that shaped their content.

The printed music collection represents a rich body of information not only about the development of the publishing industry and the full breadth of musical genres that were disseminated, but also concerning the role and status of music in society. The core of the collection is formed of copies that were deposited by publishers via Stationers' Hall, supplemented by retrospective acquisitions.

The collection's potential as a research resource has, however, been inhibited by the lack of detailed bibliographical research on individual publishers and publishing practice during this period, as well as difficulties associated with dating individual editions (especially those not entered at Stationers' Hall). The lack of full metadata describing much of this material – especially concerning associated content such as subscription lists, dedications, and sale catalogues – also impedes research and exploitation.

The project is concerned equally with the bibliographical dimensions of the printed text and the broader historical framework in which music publishing was located. The HEI partner will contribute expertise in the study of print culture, as well as current trends in musicological and historical research more generally, while the BL will contribute expertise in bibliography, cataloguing standards, public engagement, and digital humanities techniques.

Future BL users will benefit from a range of outputs including enhanced catalogue records and accurate publication dates for the corpus of editions examined, as well as a greater understanding of publishing practice and its contexts more generally. Public engagement activities arising from the project will encompass events associated with the Beethoven anniversary in 2020.

Areas of Study:

The BL's collection of printed music is one of the largest in the world, but most items that fall within the scope of this project were acquired before 1900 and catalogued at that time in a very limited fashion. Some of this content is now being digitized in a partnership with Google Books, opening it up further to detailed exploration, but the supporting metadata remains patchy. The PhD student will be required to undertake detailed bibliographical research on a defined body of material in the collection, depending on the research angle chosen, in order to enhance the associated metadata and make it possible to undertake analysis of it.

The Library also holds important manuscript and archival collections relating to music publishers (such as the Novello Archive), composers and other individuals associated with the British publishing

industry between 1750 and 1850. These sources will help to outline a wider contextual framework for the project. Likewise, the student will benefit from full access to digitized newspaper content, which will be a rich source of advertisements and other information concerning the publishing industry, as well as published sale and auction catalogues from the period.

The history of music around the turn of the nineteenth century is traditionally focused on the biographies of major canonical composers, notably Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. In recent years, however, musicologists have increasingly engaged with a broad range of sources to study the social, economic and political contexts of musical life and the significance of music as a cultural phenomenon in this period. The emancipation of music from traditional forms of patronage and the concurrent rise in public concert life and commercial modes of dissemination – in which composers could speak directly to an anonymous ‘community of audiences’ – makes this a particularly fruitful area of study.

Comparatively little attention has been paid to the role of music publishing in these developments, beyond recognition that it helped to widen musical appreciation and represented a force in the shifting economics of musical life as a whole. This project therefore offers the potential to bring new perspectives to this period of music history, and will also draw on methodologies pioneered by book historians in considering the cultural contexts of printed artefacts.

The theme allows for a variety of different approaches, which will be agreed with the successful HE partner, but could encompass such research questions as:

- how printers, editors and publishers shaped and met the new market for printed music in Britain between 1750 and 1850
- how musical repertoires were shared and disseminated across national borders
- how foreign musical works were translated or adapted in Britain to cater for cultural tastes at home
- the development of musical taste and the popularity of particular musical genres and works reflected in publishing outputs
- the internal workings and practices of individual publishing firms
- what the formats and paratexts (e.g. dedications, subscription lists, sale catalogues) reveal about how publishers negotiated the market in order to sell music
- the changing dynamic between composer, publisher and audience and its impact on musical production and appreciation
- legal aspects and issues of copyright and authorship
- music publishing in relation to the decline in aristocratic patronage and the rise in public concert life between 1750 and 1850
- the impact of social and political change on music publishing, and the degree to which publishing was itself a vehicle for political expression

Benefits and training opportunities for the student:

The student will benefit greatly from the enhanced access to BL resources and expertise required for the successful completion of this project, beyond that which is available via Reading Room services alone.

The student will work within the Music Department and will benefit from the expertise and experience of the curatorial team. They will learn bibliographic skills, including cataloguing printed music to international standards, and will also benefit from participating in courses run by the Digital Scholarship Team (which will help to support their work on the analytical aspects of the project).

The music team is also engaged in several related research projects, which will provide further opportunities for scholarly exchange and engagement during the course of the project. These include the AHRC Networking project ‘Claimed from Stationers’ Hall’ (Royal Conservatoire of

Scotland), which seeks to identify the patterns of survival of printed music in the Legal Deposit libraries, particularly those outside London; the 'Romantic National Song Network' project (funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh at Glasgow University), which focuses on a particular genre and its cultural contexts between 1750 and 1850; and the international collaborative project *Répertoire international des sources musicales* (RISM), based in Frankfurt am Main, which is concerned exclusively with the documentation of musical sources.

In terms of public engagement opportunities, part of the student's role in the project will be to work with the BL supervisor and other relevant BL colleagues to suggest ways for the BL to engage with the Beethoven anniversary in 2020. This could include the exploitation of relevant collection items (Beethoven editions, manuscripts, correspondence) via blog posts, the website, social media; the curation of a small exhibition in the British Library's *Treasures Gallery* focused on Beethoven's reception in the UK, or a similar topic; and public events such as concerts, talks or study days relating to Beethoven materials in the BL collections.

The opportunity to give presentations about their work at study days and to contribute to music-related resources on the BL website and social media will give valuable experience in communicating their research to a wide general audience, under the guidance of the BL supervisor.