LEARNING TO PERFORM

Learning to perform music using the technology and performance conventions of the time when the music was composed requires finding the primary sources from that era to create a historically informed performance. These primary resources include performance directions written by composers; contemporary method books, dictionaries, and instructional texts; first published editions; annotations left in scores by musicians from first performances; ethnomusicological transcriptions; and early accounts of musical performances.

LEARNING FROM THE COMPOSER

Italian keyboard virtuoso and composer, Girolamo Alessandro Frescobaldi (1583-1608) provides detailed performance instructions in the preface of his two-volume set of toccatas for harpsichord or organ. Instructions include when to use rubato (not keeping to strict tempo), to roll “arpeggiate” chords, and to employ musical embellishments (ornaments). Unusual for the time, possibly because of his wealth and accomplished skill as a performer, an engraved portrait of the composer is featured in the score. A translation of the preface is provided.


The translation from Frescobaldi’s “Preface” is by Carol MacClintock:


LEARNING FROM CONTEMPORARY METHOD BOOKS

A. Qin

Similar to the “how to” instructional books marketed today, Yang and Cheng compiled a six-part method book (1705) detailing how to play the qin, an ancient seven-string plucked zither. The qin was a popular instrument played by scholars including Confucius (551-479 BC). Pictured in the exhibit is a scroll entitled “Listening to the Qin” attributed to Emperor Huizong (1082-1135).

The method book includes performance directions and music for the qin. The musical notation features Chinese characters used to form symbols that specify finger movements to produce individual notes. Shown is a contemporary picture of a qin “Red Soft Thunder” from that time period.

Yang, Biaozheng, and Yunji Cheng, comps. *Qin pu da quan [Xin'an]. [Cheng yi tang]; Kangxi yi you, [1705], 6 volumes. Asian Library, M142 C5 Y15

Ji, Zhao, attr. *Listening to the Qin* (聽琴圖 Ting Qin Tu). 12th century. Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk. Palace Museum, Beijing.

### B. Violin

In 1756, Leopold Mozart (1719-1787), Wolfgang’s father, published a treatise on violin playing which remains a major reference for anyone wanting to play music from that era. It contains notes about violin performance practice, a glossary of musical terms, and chapters outlining how to play ornaments and specific rhythmic figures. The frontispiece depicts Leopold with a Baroque violin.


### C. Musical glasses – Grand Harmonicon

American Francis Hopkinson Smith patented the Glass Harmonicon on April 7, 1785. The 25 glasses were blown to the pitch of 2 octaves plus one note and played by rubbing their rims with moistened fingertips. Performance on musical glasses was most popular in the 18th century. In 1791, composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart featured the musical glasses in his Quintet K. 617.

The pages displayed show the Grand Harmonicon in its case and the arrangement of glasses for performing pieces in the key of D major. The music features tunes arranged for the instrument in the corresponding key.


### LEARNING FROM CONTEMPORARY DICTIONARIES

Sébastien de Brossard (1655-1730) published the first French music dictionary in 1701. The text offers insights into the meanings of performance terms used during the author’s lifetime. The book is opened to the definition of “H. Arpeggiato” (to play by rolling the chord upward, like played on a harp).

Brossard, Sébastien de. *Dictionaire de musique, contenant une explication des termes grecs, latins, italiens & français les plus usitez dans la musique*. Amsterdam: Aux de Estienne Roger, [17-]. Special Collections, ML108 A2 B7

In 1768, Swiss philosopher, theorist, and composer Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) published his *Dictionnaire*. In comparison to Brossard’s succinct definitions, Rousseau’s dictionary offers readers extensive explanations of terms and discussions of acoustics, music theory, performance practices, music history, and interpretation. The book is also opened to the definition of “Arpeggio, Arpège.”

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Dictionnaire de musique*. A Paris: Chez la Veuve Duchesne, 1768. Special Collections, ML100 R762
LEARNING FROM CONTEMPORARY INSTRUCTIONAL TEXTS

A. Learning Rudiments
In 1687, as a student in England engaged in music study you might have consulted John Playford’s (1623-1697) textbook to learn the rudiments of music theory. The book remained popular for more than 100 years and provides insight into late 17th century music pedagogy and performance practice.

Playford, John. *Introduction to the Skill of Musick: In Three Books*. 13th ed. [London]: Printed by E. Jones, for H. Playford, 1697. Seymour Collection, Special Collections, MT7 A2 P76

B. Learning Notational Systems

1. Figured Bass
Figured bass is a musical notation style in which numbers and symbols are used to indicate intervals, chords, and non-chord tones. During the Baroque era (1600-1750) keyboard players were expected to read figured bass to provide the harmonic structure of the music.

In 1708, Francesco Gasparini (1661-1727) wrote one of the most important treatises on how to play figured bass. The pages displayed from the treatise show the novice musician the appropriate way to play cadences.


The portrait depicts Elisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre (1665-1729), a talented composer and musician in Louis XIV’s court, who wrote the first French opera attributed to a woman composer, *Céphale et Procris*. The opera premiered March 17, 1694, in the Paris Opéra at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal.

*Portrait of Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre* by François de Troy. Late 17th or early 18th century. (Wikimedia Commons)

The opening aria to the third act of Céphale presents a good example of unrealized figured bass, the part indicated by “Basse-Continue.” The keyboard player would have filled out the chords as indicated by the figures while the bass line would be played by the continuo group typically comprised of cello, double bass, or bass viol.


2. Shape Note
Shape note music notational systems evolved in the United States to help singers with little formal music education learn to sing music at sight. The systems worked by associating different shapes of note heads with each of the solmization syllables (fa, sol, la, mi – in the 4-note syllable system. See chart). A popular activity in early 19th-century America was participating in singing schools formed by itinerant music instructors to teach the reading of shape notes.

The two tune books opened to “Enfield” show different shape note notational systems of the same tune. The topmost score is from Little and Smith’s The Easy Instructor (1801) while the lower score features a staffless system devised by Andrew Law (1803). Law’s system fell out of favor because it was difficult to follow the melodic movement without the orientation of a staff.


Law, Andrew. The Art of Singing. Rev. ed. Cambridge: W. Hilliard, 1803. McCutchan Collection, Special Collections, MT820 L38 1803

While shape note singing on the East coast was dying out in favor of standard music notation, settlers took the shape note system with them as the population expanded westward. One of the most popular shape note tune books was Davisson’s Kentucky Harmony (1816). This first edition of the Kentucky Harmony is opened to “Idumea,” a tune performed in the Cold Mountain film soundtrack.

Davisson, Ananias. Kentucky Harmony. [Harrisonburg, Va.]: [Davisson], 1816. McCutchan Collection, Special Collections, M2116 .K48 1816

3. Shaker Letteral Notation

In 1747, the Shakers (United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing) formed in Manchester, England as a breakaway group from the Quakers. They came to America in 1774, and acquired the name “Shakers” for their ecstatic behavior during religious services. Over the years, the society founded twenty-three communities spanning from Maine to Florida and Kentucky. Their beliefs are summarized in “The American Shaker” poster.


Shaker “letteral” notation arose out of the need to quickly capture the songs received as gifts by Shaker brothers and sisters as a part of their spiritual revelations. These “spirit gifts” also included drawings (See Polly Collins “A Tree of Love”) and poetry.


The three manuscripts displayed originate from different Shaker communities in Ohio, New York, and New Hampshire. They include songs and dance tunes in letteral notation that were shared among communities. Shakers learned to be music scribes by following the rules laid out by Isaac Youngs. Scribes often indicated the vision source, such as a dream, and physical location where the gift was received.

[Shaker manuscript hymnal]. Whitewater, OH: [Shaker Society], ca. 1845. McCutchan Collection, Special Collections, ML3178 S5 S355 1845
Knowledge of letteral notation must have been widespread since it was used in print as represented by an 1852 hymnal from Canterbury, New Hampshire.

Blinn, Henry Clay and Marcia Hastings. *A Sacred Repository of Anthems and Hymns*. Canterbury, NH:[Shaker Society], 1852. McCutchan Collection, Special Collections, ML3178 S5 S33 1852

One postcard depicts an early 20th-century group of Shakers from Mount [New] Lebanon, New York, location of a manuscript source in this exhibit; the other is a derisive characterization of early 19th-century Shaker dance.


**LEARNING FROM FIRST PUBLISHED EDITIONS**

Scholars of performance practice study first editions of published scores, especially if printed during the composer’s lifetime. Assuming that the composer participated in proofing the final product, first editions may be closer to the composer’s intent than subsequent editions. So is the case with the first edition of *Armide*, the last opera written by Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687). Instrumental in the development of French opera, Lully was in the service of Louis XIV and worked with the royal music printer Ballard to set his score in print.

*Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Lully* by Paul Mignard. 17th century (Wikimedia Commons)

Lully, Jean-Baptiste. *Armide*. Paris: C. Ballard, 1686. Seymour Collection, Special Collections, M1500 L85 A7 1686x

Copying and making arrangements of full scores are ways musicians studied composition. Featured is a keyboard reduction with vocal parts of the full score of *Armide*. The unattributed arranger could have also used this score for rehearsal purposes.

Lully, Jean-Baptiste. *Armide*. N.p.: 1710. Manuscript score, scribe unattributed. Seymour Collection, Special Collections, M1503 L85 A7 1710
LEARNING FROM SCORE ANNOTATIONS

Lacking video or audio recordings, primary evidence of early staged performance practice may be gleaned from markings left in the scores by the first performers. The scores displayed are from the first performances of Elektra (1909) by Richard Strauss and Porgy and Bess (1935) by George Gershwin. In both cases the score annotations show how the singers worked out and reminded themselves of how to perform the complex rhythms of their parts. Pictured are Ernestine Schumann-Heink (1861-1939) as Clytemnestra with Annie Krull as Elektra, and Abbie Mitchell (1884-1960) as Clara. Mitchell was the first to sing “Summertime” on stage in Porgy and Bess.


LEARNING FROM ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL TRANSCRIPTIONS

A. Fisk Jubilee Singers

The Fisk Jubilee Singers, an African American a cappella ensemble, was formed in 1871 to concertize and raise funds for Fisk University. The group toured widely in the United States and Europe performing the popular ballads of the day. However it was their singing of spirituals which garnered the most interest and favorable attention from the concertgoers. The Fisk Jubilee Singers were the first to bring spirituals to the concert stage.

Assisted by twenty-one year old Fisk student and piano accompanist Ella Sheppard (1851-1914), Theodore F. Seward (1835-1902) transcribed the spirituals and published a booklet sold at their 1872 concerts. The publication was so successful that a new edition, Jubilee Songs: Complete featuring 61 spirituals, was produced later that year. A copy of Jubilee Songs is opened to “Steal Away,” a spiritual that so moved Queen Victoria that she commissioned a life-size portrait of the singers during their 1873 tour.

After seven years of concertizing, the original Fisk Jubilee Singers retired in 1878 (See photograph of group). Performances of the Fisk Singers earned $150.000, which funded the building of Jubilee Hall, still standing at Fisk University.


Pike, Gustavus D. The Jubilee Singers and Their Campaign for Twenty Thousand Dollars. Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1873. Special CollectionsM1670 P64

Seward, Theodore F., George White, and Jubilee Singers. *Jubilee Songs: as Sung by the Jubilee Singers.* New York: Biglow & Main, 1884. McCutchan Collection, Special Collections, M1670 J825 1884x


**B. Maidu of California**

Ethnomusicologist Frances Densmore (1867-1957) dedicated her career to the study and collection of Native American music. These studies included the ceremonies and music of the Chippewa (Ojibwa), Teton Sioux, Pawnee, Seminole, Cheyenne, and Omaha tribes. Her last study was of the Maidu of California and based on field recordings collected in Chico, Sacramento County.

Attributed to be the widow of the last chief of the Maidu of Chico, Amanda Wilson (see photograph) was one of the most significant contributors to Densmore’s research. Her musical transcriptions, including the multi-part “Bear Dance,” were based on field recordings of Wilson. Densmore’s book also includes detailed notes describing the structure and cultural context associated with each song.


**LEARNING FROM CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS**

Contemporary accounts of performances and meetings with composers and musicians of an era offer an abundance of information about performance practice. Examples of these accounts include a book about Handel published the year after his death by his friend Mainwaring and accounts of the concerts given in London commemorating Handel twenty-five years after his death, as related by Charles Burney. Burney’s diagram of a choral and orchestral seating chart and detailed lists of instrumental and vocal performers, participating in the Handel commemorative performances, offer insight into the size and arrangement of ensemble forces used in late 18th-century performances.

Travel diaries, such as those kept by Charles Burney from his excursions across the continent, capture a snapshot of the musical activities in major European cities during the late 18th-century. Burney’s accounts also include meetings with the notable musicians and composers of the day. His diaries, published in 1771 and 1773, served as the basis for his renowned four-volume *General History of Music.*


**CGU AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICE**

Claremont Graduate University (CGU) has been in the forefront in the study of performance practice since 1988, when it launched the scholarly journal *Performance Practice Review* under the editorship of Professor Roland Jackson. The journal was published in print until 1997, and continues as a free, open access journal from 2006 to the present under the direction of Editor-In-Chief, Professor Robert Zappulla.


**JOHN LAURENCE SEYMOUR COLLECTION**

John Laurence Seymour (1893-1986) was an avid student of drama and music. He was also an accomplished pianist and composer of operas. The John Laurence Seymour Collection in Special Collections consists of over six hundred volumes of opera scores and librettos from the 17th to the 19th centuries. This exhibit includes music scores from that collection. Dr. Seymour left an endowment for the collection, enabling the library to purchase these new exhibit cases.