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Musicking – conversing – writing: towards a cultural perspective on music listening in eighteenth-century Britain

Ina Knoth

Ina Knoth is a postdoctoral lecturer at Hamburg University working on a book project on music listening in England, c. 1670–1750. She studied musicology in Weimar, as well as English literature and economics in Jena. As a recipient of a Georg Christoph Lichtenberg scholarship she finished her dissertation on Paul Hindemith's 'Harmonie der Welt' in Oldenburg in 2014. She has published on Hindemith, English music culture around 1700, as well as on the history and sociology of German musicology.

Abstract

The listening sense is the predominant but not the only sense with the help of which musicians as well as all kinds of 'bystanders' experience music. However, sensual perception doesn't leave an easy trace for historians. The task of tracking transformations from listening experiences to their written testimonies is a challenge which has to be revisited within any individual cultural frame. In this context, English accounts of music listening from the first half of the eighteenth century are particularly demanding due to their brevity. This chapter reflects on this challenge and proposes new solutions for how to read these accounts. Following methodological approaches by Christopher Small ('musicking') to overcome traditional lines between 'the performer' and 'the listener', as well as reflecting on tacit sensual knowledge, it outlines ways to understand music listening in Britain in the eighteenth century.

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Introduction

‘I believe, dear madam, you will be tired of my account of music, which does not describe so well as it sounds.’

[footnote] [2] Letter 12 April 1735, in Mary Delany, *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville*, *Mrs. Delany*, vol. 1, ed. Lady Llanover (London: Richard Bentley, 1861), pp. 533–534. [/footnote]

These words by Mary Pendarves (later Delany),

[footnote] [3] Mary Granville, born in 1700, married Alexander Pendarves in 1718. Her husband died in 1725. In 1743, she married the Irish clergyman Dr Patrick Delany and later became best known as Mary Delany for her work with paper-cut flowers and in musicology as a loyal Handel supporter. Since all the quotations from her letters in this chapter are from the time before her second marriage, I will stick to the historically correct name Mary Pendarves. [/footnote]

addressed to her mother in 1735, point to a familiar problem when dealing with testimonies of music listening: how is it possible to transform aural impressions into language? At the same time, written accounts are succinct summaries of sensual experiences and therefore a central source for music listening history, as the [Listening Experience Database \(LED\)](#) project justly points out. However, these testimonies need to be ‘decoded’. While it is obvious that any such account has to be evaluated based on its ideological premises and the type of writing (private letter, official report, personal diary, and so on), descriptions of music listening experiences in British diaries and letters from the first half of the eighteenth century present a further and severe challenge: namely, their brevity. Often, these descriptions are restricted to the date of the event, names of performers and composers and a succinct judgement such as ‘very good’, ‘charming’ or ‘poorly performed’. At first sight they seem to be formulaic and can be discouraging to work with in order to uncover modes of listening or even listening experiences.

[footnote] [4] See William Weber, ‘Did People Listen in the 18th Century?’, *Early Music* 25(4), 1997, p. 683. This problem was also addressed in the 2017 LED proceedings, by Helen Barlow and David Rowland (eds), *Listening to music: people, practices and experiences* (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2017), [http://ledbooks.org/proceedings2017/](http://ledbooks.org/proceedings2017), accessed 13 August 2018. In this publication see David Rowland’s ‘Introduction’, as

well as the contributions on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, which were concerned with rare exceptions to the rule: Janine Wiesecke, 'Samuel Pepys and his experiences of music at Restoration theatres' and Donald Burrows, 'Eighteenth-Century musical listeners as revealed in the papers of James Harris'. [/footnote]

In my chapter, I will propose a method for reading them as worthwhile sources for a cultural history of music listening in Britain in the eighteenth century. Tracing the three practices named in my title – namely musicking, conversing, and writing – I will point out interrelations between the focus of sensual attention during listening situations and the written word of personal accounts in diaries and letters.

Music listening – a joint venture of the senses

Music listening has gained a lot of attention in historical studies over the last decades. It has become common to treat 'music listening' as a general term not only focusing on strictly physiological listening, but also on the perception of, for instance, musical performances in their multisensory dimension.

[footnote] [5] The most prominent influences were presented by performance studies; see, for example, Erika Fischer-Lichte and Christoph Wulf (eds), *Theorien des Performativen* (Berlin: Akad.-Verlag, 2001). [/footnote]

Furthermore, music listening has become understood as a practice highly defined by its social context.

[footnote] [6] See from the seminal work by James Johnson, *Listening in Paris. A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) to the spectrum of papers in a major, as yet unpublished conference in Berlin, 'The Art of Listening. Trends und Perspektiven einer Geschichte des Musikhörens', 12–14 July 2012, Radialsystem V Berlin. [/footnote]

Taking this general definition of music listening as my starting point, I will focus on the interplay of the senses during listening processes, as described or at least hinted at in personal accounts.

Regarding the interplay of the senses, the cultural historian is faced with a complicated mixture of relevant phenomenological as well as cultural information which needs to be taken into account. For example, Walter J. Ong's appeal 'to think of cultures in terms of the organization of the sensorium'

[footnote] [7] Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the World. Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 6. [/footnote]

is based on the human mechanism which filters the innumerable impressions a certain experience makes on all senses. This mostly unconscious selection decides which stimuli on which senses are most consciously felt and is highly preconditioned by cultural standards – a finding which has gained ample scholarly attention and various means of methodological application.

[footnote] [8] See various publications and collections by David Howes, most recently David Howes (ed.), *Empire of the Senses. The Sensual Culture Reader* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); for further studies see, for example, Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense. Exploring the Senses in History and across Cultures* (London: Routledge, 1993); Linda Phyllis Austern (ed.), *Music, Sensation, and Sensuality* (London: Routledge, 2002); C. M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Anne C. Vila (ed.), *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Jochen Bonz, *Alltagsklänge. Einsätze einer Kulturanthropologie des Hörens* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2015). [/footnote]

On a very basic level, Ong as well as many others has concentrated on the shift from the dominance of the hearing sense to the visual sense in the Age of Enlightenment.

[footnote] [9] See Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy. The Making of Typographic Man* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1962); Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982); Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change. Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). [/footnote]

This shift is basically argued on the notion that words as the central media of knowledge communication were transferred mainly orally – as sound – up to the late Middle Ages, but that the invention of the press and the increase of literacy in the seventeenth century made reading information – understanding information through the more restricted and partial sense of sight – more important to education. Especially in works on intellectual history, these studies have contributed to a broad consensus regarding the hegemony of vision within Modernity.

[footnote] [10] For an overview see, for example, David Michael Levin (ed.), *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Berkeley et al., University of California Press, 1993, reprint 2008); Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lunbeck (eds), *Histories of Scientific Observation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011). [/footnote]

As Lawrence Sterne has pointed out, however, this does not negate the importance of the audible within Modernity but rather that it led to its disregard in scholarly work.

[footnote] [11] Lawrence Sterne, *The Audible Past. Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003). [footnote]

To address this problem, the definition of ‘knowledge’ has been notably elevated from its former scholarly restriction to intellectual knowledge. In cultural studies, definitions of ‘knowledge’ include all imaginable ways of how to do or understand things – through all senses. In this context, different scholars have pointed out how aural knowledge, defined as knowledge of how to listen to music,

[footnote] [12] There are two basic definitions of aural knowledge (‘Hör-Wissen’). On the one hand, it can mean knowledge imparted through listening. On the other hand, it can be defined as knowledge of how to listen; see Daniel Morat, Viktoria Tkaczyk and Hansjakob Ziemer, ‘Einleitung’, in Netzwerk ‘Hör-Wissen im Wandel’ (ed.), *Wissensgeschichte des Hörens in der Moderne* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), p. 2. Only the second definition is of importance to this chapter. [footnote]

is practised – as for instance in the way in which the *beau monde* of the eighteenth century listened to music sufficiently frequently to develop a routine – but largely remains inarticulate and can therefore be regarded as a form of tacit knowledge.

[footnote] [13] For an overview on aural knowledge see Netzwerk ‘Hör-Wissen im Wandel’ (ed.). *Wissensgeschichte des Hörens in der Moderne* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017). On tacit knowledge see Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (New York: Doubleday, 1966); Harry Collins, *Tacit and Explicit Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), further explained in Harry Collins, ‘Drei Arten impliziten Wissens’, in Jens Loenhoff (ed.), *Implizites Wissen. Epistemologische und handlungstheoretische Perspektiven* (Weilerswist: Velbrück, 2012); Ulrich Mosch, ‘Hörwissen als implizites Wissen. Anmerkungen zu einer aktuellen philosophischen Diskussion’ in *Positionen. Texte zur aktuellen Musik* 105 (2015). [footnote]

Furthermore, some methods have been developed to study these forms of tacit knowledge and make them explicit to a certain extent. For example, Richard Sennett, among others, underlines the importance of the body for all kinds of tacit learning and skills.

[footnote] [14] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Sophia Prinz and Hanna Katharina Göbel (eds), *Die Sinnlichkeit des Sozialen* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014). [footnote]

Accordingly, tacit knowledge even though it is inarticulate can become traceable by paying close attention to social practices.

While paying attention to social practices in the field of music listening is not a novelty, the level at which the body and its tacit knowledge are acknowledged needs to be

intensified. The crucial co-operation between the senses and the social situation has recently been underlined by Andreas Reckwitz. According to him, the body not only harbours the senses and the tacit knowledge of how to regulate their perception, but also the social knowledge of how to use them in specific social constellations. This has its silent effect on the perception itself or, coincidentally, the experience.

[footnote] [15] Andreas Reckwitz, 'Sinne und Praktiken. Die sinnliche Organisation des Sozialen' in Sophia Prinz and Hanna Katharina Göbel (eds), *Die Sinnlichkeit des Sozialen* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014), p. 447. [/footnote]

If we want to learn more about music listening experiences, therefore, all practices which taught the body how to handle a specific music listening situation as rendered in historical sources need to be taken into account carefully.

In the field of music listening, these concepts of tacit knowledge can easily be connected to Christopher Small's concept of 'musicking'. This might seem misleading at first, since Small's definition of 'musicking' admittedly is quite broad:

To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing. [...]

[footnote] [16] Christopher Small, *Musicking. The Meaning of Performing and Listening* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), p. 9; similar ideas have been developed by Antoine Hennion, 'Music Lovers. Taste as Performance' in *Theory, Culture & Society* 18(5), 2001; Antoine Hennion, 'Playing, Performing, Listening: Making Music – or Making Music Act?' in Lee Marshall and Dave Laing (eds), *Popular Music Matters. Essays in Honour of Simon Frith* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014). [/footnote]

What this definition points out, however, is that music listening is not an isolated activity but one that normally overlaps and interacts with other music-related activities. Just as Small proposes to pay full attention to all sorts of relationships before, during and after a musical performance to analyse musicking, narrowing the task down to all activities which coincide or interact with listening as one aspect of musicking is a more complex goal than is often acknowledged – especially when it is combined with a concept of tacit knowledge which comprises a large component of memory.

[footnote] [17] See Small, 1998, pp. 13–14. [/footnote]

On the most basic level, listening to music and making music are not necessarily separate things but are often practised at the same time by the same person. Patterns of experience of practising music repetitiously while simultaneously listening to the outcome influence each other as they both feed into the ‘tacit musicking knowledge’. Accordingly, even if in a specific situation listeners might not play they will still use the tacit knowledge of how to listen to music which they gained while practising music. More specifically, as they have learned listening to a specific kind of music by playing it they are likely to handle and experience the same kind of music in a very similar way to the way in which they became accustomed by practising. This may comprise various combinations of sensual focus: for example, tactile stimuli with regard to a certain instrument, heightened attention to pitch and other musical aspects repeatedly worked on, a visual image of how one should look while playing, the idea of a social setting appropriate to a specific kind of music, and so on. If listening while practising is the dominant way in which the listeners learned to listen to music in general, when first confronted with unknown music, they are likely to try to handle it in the same way, that is, with the same kind of interplay of the senses while listening – but probably with certain moments of irritation.

Writing conversationally about music

However, the contorted situation regarding historical accounts of music listening remains: in the accounts it is in fact words that convey and abstract the bodily experience.

[footnote] [18] Following Small, personal accounts would also be a part of musicking as they are related to a musical performance. In order to be clearer in my line of argument, however, I will still differentiate between listening as musicking and conversing and writing (as musicking). [/footnote]

These words, even in brief renderings, are still likely to grant a glimpse of the tacit knowledge of which kind of interplay of the senses was used, while at the same time these words adhere to standards of verbal communication. To gain a better insight into listening experiences it is therefore possible and necessary to differentiate the aspects of sensual perception and the premises of their depiction in written accounts. Concurring with Reckwitz, however, the tacit knowledge of how to listen due to experience in practising music, for example, overlaps with tacit social knowledge of how one should listen to as well as describe certain music in order to fulfil conversational standards.

[footnote] [19] See Reckwitz, 2014, p. 447. [/footnote]

Therefore, even if a specific part of the wording might adhere to specific conversational standards, it is likely to not only depict a ‘rhetoric without consequences’ but actually hint at tacit knowledge which does influence the experience of music listening.

[footnote] [20] This factor will be especially relevant to the argument on ‘visual perception logic’, see below. [/footnote]

To get a better grasp of why and how music might be mentioned at all in letters and diaries it is noteworthy that the personal accounts of music listening still available from the first half of the eighteenth century predominantly stem from the better-off classes for which music listening has to be regarded as a part of their everyday experiences.

[footnote] [21] See William Weber, ‘Musical Culture and the Capital City. The Epoch of the *beau monde* in London, 1700–1870’ in Susan Wollenberg and Simon McVeigh (eds), *Concert Life in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Robert D. Hume, ‘The Economics of Culture in London, 1660–1740’ in *Huntington Library Quarterly* 69(4), 2006. [/footnote]

This included both visiting entertainments with musical components as well as education which, especially for women, regularly comprised singing, harpsichord practice and dancing.

[footnote] [22] See, for example, Michèle Lardy, ‘Had God intended Women onely as a finer sort of Cattle, he would not have made them reasonable’. ‘Nature vs Nurture: The Debate around Women’s Education’, in Manuela D’Amore and Michèle Lardy (eds), *Essays in Defence of the Female Sex. Custom, Education and Authority in Seventeenth-Century England* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012). [/footnote]

Furthermore, common social gatherings with music – such as communal singing of songs and ballads, or psalms at church – were regular occasions for music practice.

Turning to the descriptive level of eighteenth-century letters, we can first observe that news about entertainments was expected in correspondence. Second, this information was selected according to the writer’s and addressee’s specific interests. Only if either one had any interest in music were musical entertainments actually described – otherwise they would not be mentioned at all. If it was the writer who liked music, he or she normally also played some instrument himself/herself. If it was the addressee who favoured music the writer would at least know how the addressee expected to be informed about music. Accordingly, some kind of tacit musicking knowledge can be expected, more often than not with a component of bodily experience of singing or playing an instrument, in any account of music in diaries and letters. Third, any information about entertainments needed to be rendered as succinct judgements.

[footnote] [23] These conclusions are drawn from my studying a total of over 100 correspondences from the first half of the eighteenth century in archives all over England during the summer/autumn of 2017. The standards for letter communication are transferrable to those of diaries which mention music to a certain extent since only rare elaborate diaries would mention music in full sentences after all as these were often designed for friends – or even for posterity. [/footnote]

This normally led to the dominance of the visual sense in description as it was linked most closely to everyday perception, as Joseph Addison's ranking of the senses in his 'Essay on the Pleasures of the Imagination', printed in the *Spectator* in 1712, underlines.

[footnote] [24] Joseph Addison, 'Essay on the Pleasures of the Imagination', *The Spectator* Nos. 411–421, 1712; see especially No. 411, 21 June 1712: 'OUR Sight is the most perfect and most delightful of our Senses. It fills the Mind with the largest Variety of Ideas, converses with its Objects at the greatest Distance, and continues the longest in Action without being tired or satiated with its proper Enjoyments.' [/footnote]

However, the dominance of a certain sense does not only determine the focus of any description, but it also influences the way in which aspects perceived by different senses are described. Granting for now that visible objects often dominated descriptions of entertainments (even though the interplay of the senses during the experience involved more senses than only sight), even the wording of musical aspects in an account can be linked to the qualities of different senses.

I will attempt to explain this crucial point by comparing how descriptions of musical aspects can be linked to the qualities – or 'logic' – of the two prominent senses, in this case, sound and sight. First, I will try to outline characteristics of descriptions which follow the logic of aural perception in their wording: according to the ability of the ear to receive stimuli from all directions at once, accounts rooted in this kind of description logic are likely to render more general notions of phenomena that pass away swiftly – such as music. Aural perception is unlikely to recur precisely, a common experience of anyone practising an instrument. Listening trained by personal practice of music will expect variety with regard to repetition of the same musical work as well as music of the same style.

[footnote] [25] This coincides with qualities ascribed to (semi-) 'oral cultures' quite logically; see Ong, 1982; Small, 1998, p. 7. [/footnote]

At the very least, accounts following 'aural perception logic' in their wording will not describe music as if it were a fixed object.

Sight, on the other hand, perceives its objects as comparatively fixed objects, mostly concentrating on a specific aspect of it. Vision is predominantly fixed on objects which

change much more slowly than sound. Therefore, these objects do not need to be recreated to be re-experienced. This is a fundamental difference from anything experienced by hearing which ceases the moment it is heard and needs repetition in the form of re-creation to be re-experienced. Therefore, accounts of musical performances which describe aspects of sound as if they were fixed and not prone to variety follow ‘visual perception logic’ – and also point to a noticeably different quality of music experience.

This last point is best proven by way of a specific example. To illustrate both, wordings of accounts following ‘aural perception logic’ and ‘visual perception logic’, as well as comparing them, I will examine accounts of two examples of musical entertainment in England in the first half of the eighteenth century which share quite a range of similarities: they were listened to by more or less the same audience and they both offered the possibility for the perceiver to either focus on musical, textual, decorative, spatial or performative aspects: namely, ballad opera and Italian opera.

Tracing ‘aural perception logic’ in written accounts: transience and variation

John Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* had a massive public reception. It had a run of 62 performances in its first season in Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre in 1728. It was soon played in different cities and towns all over Britain and stayed in the repertoire of London’s theatres until the end of the century.

[footnote] [26] See Uwe Böker, Ines Detmers and Anna-Christina Giovanopoulos, ‘From Gay to Brecht and Beyond. Imitation and Re-Writing of *The Beggar’s Opera*, 1728 to 2004’ in Uwe Böker, Ines Detmers and Anna-Christina Giovanopoulos (eds), *John Gay’s ‘The Beggar’s Opera’, 1728–2004. Adaptations and Re-Writings* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), p. 9. [/footnote]

Shortly before it was first staged, Alexander Pope predicted in a letter to Jonathan Swift, ‘whether it succeeds or not, it will make a great noise, but whether of Claps or Hisses I know not.’

[footnote] [27] Letter [January] 1728, in George Sherburn (ed.), *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 469. [/footnote]

The noise it made, however, was not restricted to the immediate reaction of the audience as Pope suggests. Descriptions in diaries and letters point to different aspects of practical rather than intellectual reflection on the sensual experience.

Many accounts show how the listening experience was remembered with varied imitation. For example, Gertrude Savile's diary records multiple visits to the *Beggar's Opera* and follow-ups. Additionally, she used printed editions of the text and music to listen to it herself, performing it over and over again, alone as well as in social circles. For example, shortly after the first edition of the *Beggar's Opera* was published, she writes in her diary:

Mrs. Newton, Lady Palmerston, Lady Clavering and 2 Daughters (great fortunes), and 3 Mrs. Fox's here. While the 2 last were here, and Mrs.D.Enly alone in Mother's room, I read 'The Beggar's Opera' to them in intervalls, before and after supper.

[footnote] [28] Entry 15 February 1728, in Alan Saville and Marjorie Penn (eds), *Secret Comment. The Diaries of Gertrude Savile 1721–1757* (Devon: Kingsbridge History Society, 1997), p. 103. [/footnote]

The experience of the *Beggar's Opera* obviously enticed her into hearing the words aloud in a sociable atmosphere, producing the sound herself. Furthermore, she noted in her diary that she frequently practised and 'pricked' tunes from the *Beggar's Opera* on the harpsichord. Here are some examples: 'Writt morn. Play'd tunes in 'the Beggar's Opera' 2 hours after dinner;' 'Harpsichord from dark till 1/2 past 12 – 5 hours with a great deal of pleasure;' 'This day imploy'd as of late viz:- Mend Lace, Harpsichord, pricking 'Beggar's Opera';' or 'harpsichord and prick'd Tunes out of 'Beggar's Opera'.

[footnote] [29] Entries 20 February 1728; 26 February 1728; 4 February 1729; 15 February 1729, in Saville / Penn (eds), 1997, pp. 105–106; 161–162. [/footnote]

Following the logic of the hearing sense, the same event could never be reproduced exactly, but variations of all kinds were inevitable – and acceptable – when this familiar experience was repeated. This listening practice was new in its extent with respect to the *Beggar's Opera*, but it wasn't new as a (prolonged) listening practice. On the contrary, as is well known the music of the *Beggar's Opera* was mostly arranged from ballad tunes as collected and published in collections such as Thomas D'Urfey's *Pills to Purge Melancholy* (1719–20) and Playford's *Dancing Master* (various editions 1751–c. 1728).

[footnote] [30] For details on the origins of the airs see Jeremy Barlow's edition, *The Music of John Gay's 'The Beggar's Opera'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 108–116. [/footnote]

Accordingly, the ballad opera was designed and probably also listened to in a similar way to the tradition of public as well as private ballad singing which was not just a lower class practice, but probably the biggest musical mass phenomenon of its time.

[footnote] [31] See Claude M. Simpson, *The British Broadside Ballad and its Music* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1966); Natascha Würzbach, *Anfänge und gattungstypische Ausformung der englischen Strassenballade, 1550–1650* (München: Fink, 1981, English translation Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Patricia Fumerton, Anita Guerrini and Kris McAbee (eds), *Ballads and Broadside in Britain, 1500–1800* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).
[/footnote]

Singing various texts to the same tune was not only common but a main part of the associative fun any new text for an old tune created – even though the spirit of these different texts was adjusted to the tune.

[footnote] [32] See Christopher Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chapter ‘Ballads and the Meaning of Melody’, pp. 288–327. [footnote]

The music in its combination needed to be open to variation and was highly transferrable as to the singer’s qualities, instrumentation, place of performance and textual choice. These qualities of variation and their close connection to (semi-)oral cultures can most easily be linked to the qualities of the hearing sense. Savile not only joined in this general aural variation already known from ballad singing but incorporated her remembrance of the *Beggar’s Opera* in her solitary as well as social variants of domestic music (and reading). Therefore, stimuli of the sense of vision (as, for instance, the importance of a certain spatial setting would suggest) or a specified sense of touch (as, for instance, a close connection to a specific instrument would suggest) seem to have been less important to the musical experience than the versatile audible sensation as well as a general corporal involvement variably related to singing or playing the harpsichord.

Savile was not an exception. Re-‘musicking’ this way was a common way of dealing with listening experiences as well as describing them. Further letters by other authors prove how even self-proclaimed followers of the Italian opera, which was ridiculed in the *Beggar’s Opera*, enticed relatives outside the city to join in musicking the piece. Mary Pendarves, for instance, one of George Frideric Handel’s most faithful supporters, sent its score to her sister in Gloucester, writing:

I desire you will introduce the Beggar’s Opera at Glocester; you must sing it everywhere but at church, if you have a mind to be like the polite world.

[footnote] [33] Letter to her sister Anne Granville, 14 March 1728, in Delany, vol. 1, 1861, p. 163. [footnote]

Likewise, Pendarves did not refrain from musicking the *Beggar’s Opera* herself:

*Yesterday Mrs. Peyton and I went to Court in the morning; I afterwards dined with the family of the Peytons and Dashwoods, and supped. [...] We were very merry, and sung the *Beggars' Opera*, talked, and wished for my mama and you, but all in vain.*

[footnote] [34] Letter to her sister Anne Granville, 29 February 1728, in Delany, vol. 1, 1861, p. 159. [/footnote]

Pendarves' challenges to spread the music by encouraging others as well as repeating it herself in social circles underline how the variation of musical realisations was a part of a prolonged, positive experience. Her mischievous remark to her sister to at least spare the church from a performance of the *Beggar's Opera* points to the influence polite manners had on musical descriptions of this kind of music – manners might be mentioned but were disregarded as to the personal practice since the experience obviously was too entertaining and widespread to be suppressed by moral considerations. On the contrary, Pendarves insinuates that listening to as well as performing the *Beggar's Opera* was in fact part of 'polite' music listening.

The recollection of the sensual experience of this kind of music as performed on stage while one could 'only' listen was nourished by imitating it with one's own body and friends as the common practice of ballad singing suggests. One listening focus this implies for the listening experience is on the difficulty of the piece, its performative challenges – necessitating a sober evaluation of one's own capacities to recreate, vary, and reproduce the music heard. This is a sensual stimulation which can potentially also be self-reflective based on one's musical skills. In summary, the listening experience these descriptions imply is quite immediate as hearing is most prominent in the interplay of senses. The experience is of an interactive nature and strongly provokes necessarily corporeal imitation. The *description* in accounts is brief. However, the brevity of the description is appropriate to its function which is based on the challenge to action. The intensity of the listening experience is prone to differ with respect to the listener's own musical skills to imitate and thereby be part of the music heard, the amount of experience already gathered with respect to ballad listening and performing, and with the specific musical performance.

Tracing 'visual perception logic' in written accounts: music as a fixed object

The musical accounts I chose as examples for wordings of 'aural perception logic' lack one point I formerly identified as specific to written conversational communication:

they did not pass judgements on the music but rather conveyed a merry atmosphere about the musical situation in general. Accounts of music listening, including judgements on the music, at times point to a slowly shifting or rather varying quality of descriptions of listening experiences. In the first half of the eighteenth century, this is traceable most easily in accounts of what is often described as the rivalry between, on the one hand, English songs like many of those from the *Beggar's Opera* and, on the other hand, Italian opera which was introduced in London in the beginning of the eighteenth century. While dealing with airs from Italian operas the same way as with ballads, by re-musicking them with the help of scores, was possible and probably practised by some – airs from operas were printed just as ballads were – there are accounts which evidence first indications of differences gradually developing between listening to Italian opera as opposed to ballad opera. By way of example, I will turn to one listener who already served as an example for listeners of the *Beggar's Opera*, Mary Pendarves.

In December 1729, almost two years after the premiere of the *Beggar's Opera*, Mary Pendarves wrote to her sister about the ongoing competition – as she conceives it – between the Italian opera and the *Beggar's Opera* as well as other ballad operas:

We are to have some old [Italian] opera revived, which I am sorry for, it will put people upon making comparisons between these singers and those that performed before, which will be a disadvantage among the ill-judging multitude. The present opera [= Handel's Lotario] is disliked because it is too much studied, and they love nothing but minuets and ballads, in short the Beggar's Opera and Hurlothrumbo are only worthy of applause.

[footnote] [35] Letter 20 December 1729, in Delany, vol. 1, 1861, p. 229. *Hurlothrumbo* by Samuel Johnson was one of the most successful ballad operas following *The Beggar's Opera*; see Suzanne Aspden, 'An Infinity of Factions. Opera in Eighteenth-Century Britain and the Undoing of Society' in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 9(1), 1997, pp. 3–5. [footnote]

This description hints at a mode of listening influenced by 'visual perception logic' to some degree, in close relation to expected criticism on re-staging an 'old' opera. Pendarves expects 'the ill-judging multitude' to compare the performative qualities of the old with the new set of singers. This kind of comparison of a repeated experience, visiting the same opera at least twice, would be quite normal to any kind of listening description which is led by the characteristics of the aural sense – a quality of listening

she obviously encouraged herself in her reception of the *Beggar's Opera*. We don't know what the people Pendarves describes as 'the ill-judging multitude' would actually have done. However, bearing in mind the cultural practice of re-musicking music heard on stage, it can be argued that there were two obstacles to Handel's operas being approached with the same listening mode as described above for listening to ballad operas: First, performing practices play a role. During the first half of the eighteenth century, the use of vocal embellishments, which clearly could not easily be imitated by only moderately educated singers, increased, enlarging the gap between opera performance and private imitation. This might be one reason why a revival might have led to an artistically more demanding rendering of the same opera which, consequently, might be harder to imitate at home. Second, and in connection to this argument, it is noteworthy that Pendarves mentions that critics thought Handel's *Lotario* was 'too much studied'. While this may well mean that it was too complex or 'scientific', the practical consequence is, again, that it is also harder to imitate at home than ballads are.

[footnote] [36] Especially in the first two acts the arias of *Lotario* are embellished in a way which strongly hides regular rhythmic or thematic patterns which might have sounded imitable. At the same time, criticising art for being 'too much studied' is a polite argument within conversational norms of musical appreciation only if the performance seems to be rendered effortlessly. See Katie Halsey and Jane Slinn (eds), *The Concept and Practice of Conversation in the Long Eighteenth Century, 1688–1848* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014). [/footnote]

In short, the arguments Pendarves used to criticise the 'ill-judging multitude' can be understood as a criticism of their likely way to listen to Italian opera the same way she listens to ballad opera. Since she expected negative judgement with respect to Italian opera from this, Pendarves obviously intended to oppose this mode of listening and suggested a different attitude. The consequence is that she implicitly stylised the composition the way it was first performed as something like a fixed object which would be wronged if recreated in a varied 'revival'. Furthermore, there isn't a single notion in her diaries of singing opera songs at home. This places greater emphasis on the performance during the first listening situation (and similarly when it was repeatedly performed in the same season by the same set of singers) as opposed to her discussion of the *Beggar's Opera* where the emphasis was on varied imitations of the performance by herself as well as others.

This different kind of depiction of the experience is highly influenced by social standards of polite judgements. When discussing the *Beggar's Opera* alone, it seemed to suffice to warn her sister not to sing it in church to stay within polite boundaries.

When there is a situation of competition between two kinds of music, however, she seemed to have forgotten her joyful listening experiences of the *Beggar's Opera*.

On the whole, Pendarves seemed to listen to Italian opera differently from the way in which she listened to the *Beggar's Opera*. With Italian opera, she was opposed to variation as she was opposed to revivals. Thereby, she remembers the listening experience as a fixed impression of its first staged performance and desired no major variation. She might have only applied this line of argument to account for her partiality to Italian opera within a broader listening practice with other preferences, of course. However, concurring with Reckwitz this must have had an effect on her 'real' listening experiences, too. As Italian opera is harder to enjoy in the same way as ballad operas, she adjusted her way of listening when focused on Italian opera music.

The difference between Pendarves' description of listening to the *Beggar's Opera* and Handel's operas and the probable listening experience itself becomes even clearer in the description with which I started my chapter. The complete account is as follows:

Yesterday morning my sister and I went with Mrs. Donellan to Mr. Handel's house to hear the first rehearsal of the new opera Alcina. I think it the best he ever made, but I have thought so of so many, that I will not say positively 'tis the finest, but 'tis so fine I have not words to describe it. Strada has a whole scene of charming recitative – there are a thousand beauties. Whilst Mr. Handel was playing his part, I could not help thinking him a necromancer in the midst of his own enchantments. I believe, dear madam, you will be tired of my account of music, which does not describe so well as it sounds.

[footnote] [37] Letter 12 April 1735, in Delany, vol. 1, 1861, pp. 533–534. [/footnote]

While Pendarves finds it hard to describe her impressions of the rehearsal, her description obviously is designed following 'visual perception logic'. The individual performance is nearly left out and Handel's operas are compared against each other as if they were objects. The only musical aspect she names – the recitative – is just as far away from normal vocal skills as the picture of Handel as a necromancer is from common harpsichord playing. Moreover, Pendarves turns to the subject of the opera to create this image of Handel as a necromancer in accordance with, if not as an enhancement of, the sorcerer Alcina (played and sung by Anna Maria Strada). Thereby, of the different possibilities to reflect the listening experience, she chooses visual imagery to mentally reinforce the distance between her as a listener and the spatially

as well as socially rather intimate listening situation at the composer's home. Her reception therefore is one of distant admiration – which is not characteristic of 'aural perception logic', as aural impressions are never distant at the moment of perception. One listening focus this implies is on what seems impossible to recreate, implying fascination with the unattainable. This fascination, however, is only possible if the listener creates an inner distance between the sensual impressions entering the body through the aural sense and instead draws on a more partial mode of perception – such as vision offers. The music is taken in, aurally as otherwise, but the interplay and hierarchy of the senses while listening to this kind of music has clearly been reordered.

Conclusion

There are no theoretical reflections on certain types of music listeners by English writers up to the middle of the eighteenth century.

[footnote] [38] Charles Avison in his 'Essay on Musical Expression' from 1752 might be regarded as the first one, especially due to remarks in his further discussion with William Hayes. Influences from discussions on different types of listeners on the continent such as in Jean Laurent Le Cerf, *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise*, vol. 2 (Brussels: François Foppens, 1705) to my knowledge have not been investigated systematically. [/footnote]

Personal accounts from music listeners are unlikely to fill that gap but they grant insight into other dimensions of listening experiences. Even though most of these accounts are very brief, when analysed within their 'musicking' context at least two broad modes of listening can be distinguished. They can be characterised by their describing a specific musical experience as something fixed or fleeting and on the way repetition of the experience is implied – by varied imitation or just revisiting as a listener without musical participation. Accounts rooted in 'aural perception logic' present an immediate relation to the music while 'visual perception logic' rather presents the listener as a bystander. They point to fundamental differences in listening with regard to personal involvement depending on which sense is dominant in the interplay of the senses during listening. The intensity of the listening experience in both cases seems to be defined by the listener's practical musical skills and their relation to the level of performative difficulty of the music. It is quite significant that Pendarves' descriptions of listening to the *Beggar's Opera* and Handel's operas differentiated between music which she could easily imitate and music which any humble music lover would have to leave to professional musicians.

It is important to emphasise, though, that it doesn't prove to be a historic shift from the one listening mode to the other. As the example of Mary Pendarves illustrates, the same person would listen to different kinds of music in noticeably divergent ways. Furthermore, even the examples of this chapter cannot be reduced to clear and exclusively aurally or visually characterised modes of music perception. However, they point to aural or visual accentuations in music perception. The two models, therefore, can serve as a point of orientation to differentiate intermediate or mixed modes of listening.

Both 'perception logics' lead to brief descriptions as they are both testimonies of a cultural knowledge of how to listen to music which has to be regarded as a mostly tacit knowledge. This tacit knowledge can, however, be reconstructed by bearing in mind the musical skills and practices of the listener as well as considering the amount of cultural knowledge which remained unmentioned – either because it was unconscious or because it was a matter of course.

There is still a lot to learn from specific case studies in order to gain more insight into the interplay of the senses and their effect on the listening experience in order to develop a differentiated view of music listening in eighteenth-century England. While any listener typology which has been developed, from Adorno's 'Hörertypen' to Simon Frith's grouping of three basic ways of listening, presumed a listener who is 'only' listening,

[footnote] [39] Theodor W. Adorno, *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie. Zwölf Theoretische Vorlesungen* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1968); Simon Frith, 'More than meets the ear: on listening as a social practice' in Barlow / Rowland (eds), 2017.
[/footnote]

the brevity of accounts from the eighteenth century strongly suggests that we should take more than 'just' the moment of listening into consideration.

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[footnote] [40] *The Experience of Listening to Music: Methodologies, Identities, Histories* has been Open Access funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC), grant AH/J013986/1, <https://ledbooks.org/proceedings2019> The collection has been peer reviewed, edited by David Rowland and Helen Barlow, and subsequently prepared for online publication by the Knowledge Media Institute (KMi) of The Open University. Published by: The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA. Copyright © The Open University. First published: July 2019. ISBN: 9781473028647. PDFs displaying some of the content from the online collection is available from <https://ledbooks.org/proceedings2019/getting-the-best-from-this-website/> You can experience the online publication as it was originally designed at <https://ledbooks.org/proceedings2019> View copyright information relating to the publication here: <https://ledbooks.org/proceedings2019/copyright> [footnote]

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