

‘Mockmusick’ and survival of antimasque traditions in the Restoration theatre

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My aim in this paper is to show how combinations of unusual or non-musical instruments described as accompanying entrances in Jacobean and Caroline antimasques became re-used as a device in the public theatre of the Restoration and early 18th century. To demonstrate the changing context and function of this music I shall inevitably drag stage-related matters with me:– the authors, genres, subject matter, settings and scenery, and (of course) dance too.

Andrew Sabol, in the introduction to his edition *Four Hundred Songs and Dances from the Stuart Masque* (1978), writes that ‘the grotesqueness of the antimasquers was frequently underscored by unusual instrumentation’. Examples he cites include three entrances from masques by Ben Jonson:¹

- the entrance of the witches in the masque called *Queens* (1609), who ‘with a kind of hollow and infernall musique came forth ... All with spindells, timbrells, rattles, or other *veneficall* [poisonous] instruments, making a confused noyse, with strange gestures’;
- the entrance of a sphinx dancing to ‘a strange Musique of wilde Instruments’ in *Love Freed from Ignorance* (1611); and
- the entrance of Comus ‘the God of cheere’, to a ‘wild Musique of *Cimbals, Flutes, & Tabers*’, in *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (1618).

(*Queens* was the first masque to have a formalised antimasque.)

Sabol’s examples of unusual instruments all coincide with entrances at the beginning of the entertainments; the sounds must have startled the audiences and heightened the atmosphere at the appearance of the grotesques. In the case of *Queens* we have some surviving dance music relating to the entrance, in three concordances called respectively ‘The First Witches Dance’, ‘The Witches’ Dance in the Queen’s Masque’, and ‘The Witch’.²

Sabol assumes that the witches’ entrance in *Queens* was done with the spindells, timbrells and rattles to that dance music. There is no mention of unusual instruments in the scores, but that may be because they are later arrangements, not linked to the original production. A more telling argument against Sabol’s assumption is Jonson’s full description of the entrance. After the ‘confused noyse, with strange gestures’, Jonson describes the witches’ apparel, and only then writes of ‘These eleven Witches beginning to daunce ...’. Surely, then, the witches entered with just the

‘hollow and infernall musique’ of their ‘veneficall instruments’ – there seems little doubt that they are holding them – and then danced their first witches’ dance to the regular band, either with or without their instruments? This would give the timbrells etc. a function similar to that of, say, trumpets playing a flourish or fanfare to announce royalty. The noises simply herald an entrance with an appropriate signal – the kind of aural scene-setting that was a familiar device in the public theatre where there was no scenery. The issue does not arise with Comus or the sphinx, because there is no music surviving which can be associated with the start of the antimasques, and in any case their entrances are followed by speeches.

I shall now examine another example cited by Sabol. It takes us forward twenty years to the middle of Charles I’s reign and comes from his penultimate masque before the onset of civil war, William Davenant’s *Britannia Triumphans*, performed in 1638. Jonson had died the year before, and Davenant had succeeded to his stipend, in the royal appointment we now call poet laureate.

The published libretto of *Britannia Triumphans* describes how, in the opening antimasque, Merlin enters and casts a spell:

The whole Scene was transformed into a horrid Hell, the further part terminating in a flaming precipice, and the neerer parts expressing the Suburbs [surrounding area], from whence enter the severall Antimasques.

The first group of antimasquers is described as

Mockmusick of 5. persons. *One with a Violl, the rest with Taber and pipe, Knackers and bells, Tongs and key, Gridiron and shoing horne.*

The expression ‘mockmusick’ as one word, unless it is a typographical error, implies a distinct genre.

The remaining five groups of antimasquers include a ballad-singer and his audience; some street vendors together with the master of two baboons and an ape; a mountebank ‘in the habit of a grave Doctor’ together with a zany and harlequin and ‘two pale wenches presenting their urinals [urine samples], and hee [the mountebank] distributing his printed receipts [prescriptions] out of a Budget [sack]’;³ four ‘old fashioned Parasiticall Courtiers’; and finally a group of ‘rebellious leaders in warre’, Cade, Kett, Jack Straw and their soldiers. The inclusion of rebellious leaders among the antimasquers presumably alludes to the state of tension between King and country at the time.

In the context of these antimasquers, the ‘mockmusick’ again acts as an atmospheric signifier –

a noisy, largely unharmonious aural introduction to characters illustrating low life, deception and lawlessness in an infernal setting, with a little scatology thrown in for good measure, all presented to an audience of royalty and courtiers – the lowest of the low as perceived by the highest of the high. Shakespeare had shown the strong symbolic meaning that was attached to the concept of musical harmony or concord and its absence:

The man that hath no musicke in himselfe,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoyles.

(*The Merchant of Venice*, Act V, Scene 1)

Sir William Davenant (1606-68), the author of *Britannia Triumphans*, is a crucial figure in this paper, for he had a career that took him from the Caroline masque and theatre, through the theatrically deprived years of the Civil Wars and Interregnum, and into the Restoration. His historical significance is not just accorded with hindsight; his reputation was such that a rumour started after his death that he was an illegitimate offspring and godson of Shakespeare.⁴ As Samuel Schoenbaum writes, ‘Davenant stands at the center of the transmission of theatrical traditions’.⁵ It is well known that during the Protectorate Davenant devised and managed to put on what is regarded as England’s first opera, *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656); by producing an all-sung show he circumvented the ban on plays with spoken dialogue (the music is, however, lost). Davenant also put on during the Protectorate *The History of Sir Francis Drake* and *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru*; it seems that the anti-Spanish, and by implication anti-Catholic, propaganda in each pleased the Cromwell regime.

Shortly before the Restoration in 1660, Davenant took a lease on a tennis court in Portugal Street; he enlarged and converted it into what became known as the Lincoln’s Inn Field Theatre. It became a Theatre Royal in 1662 when Charles II granted him a patent or charter for establishing a company there. Davenant’s writing career continued, and in 1663 he put on a show called *The Play-house to be Let*. The scenario of the first act is a playhouse, empty during the summer, with the [play]housekeeper and a player being importuned by a succession of theatrical types who have entertainments they want to put on during the following season. The remaining four acts of the play comprise the pieces of those who are accepted. The public wants novelty, we are told, so we have:

- a Frenchman giving us the latest farce by Molière, spoken in English but with French accents to make it even more amusing;
- a musician who puts on a work in ‘stilo recitativo’, in other words an opera, called *The History of Sir Francis Drake*; and
- a dancing-master who produces a ballet with explanatory speeches called *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru*.

For the fifth act we have another new genre from France, burlesque, with a send-up of the Caesar and Cleopatra story in appalling doggerel verse. So, Davenant not only managed to recycle two works he had put on during the Interregnum, but also to devise a play consisting of an introduction and four unrelated acts in different genres.

(Incidentally, the dancing-master, when asked by the housekeeper and player what he intends to put on, replies ‘historical dancing’, though it turns out that what he means is historical stories told in dance or, as he puts it, ‘express in figures on the floor’.)

Both *The History of Sir Francis Drake* and *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru* owe much to traditions of exoticism in the antimasque and masque. Each work consists of six scenes, or entries as they are called, introduced by music and set in South America and the West Indies, though I think the term ‘West Indies’ means Peru. Scenery includes coco-trees, palms, monkeys and parrots. Peruvian natives are dressed in feathers, unless they are unfortunate enough to be turning on a spit and being basted by Spaniards in their cloaks, ruffs and rapiers.

According to the libretto, each entry in the opera *The History of Sir Francis Drake* consists, after the introductory music, of dialogue (presumably sung in recitative), choruses and dances in no consistent order. In the ballet *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru*, on the other hand, each entry follows a more consistent format: introductory music followed by a speech, a song, and then the dance to end, the latter three all related in subject matter. The opening entry describes the innocence and freedom of the Peruvian natives before the Spaniards arrive. An introductory symphony is described as a ‘wild air suitable to the region’, and another ‘wild air’ is played in the sixth entry and breaks the usual format by occurring after the speech and before the song. The scenario by now is that the English have arrived in Peru to defeat the cruel Spanish – Davenant admits in the libretto that this never actually happened – and so we have the Spanish digging for gold and silver as slaves of the English. The libretto states that this ‘wild air’ differs from that in the first entry; again it has an introductory purpose and ‘prepares the coming in of a Spaniard out of the wood, loaden with ingots of gold and wedges of silver’. The Spaniard ‘makes his footing to the tune of the instruments’ (it is not clear if this tune is the same as the ‘wild air’), but then he tires and falls asleep, whereupon two apes and then a baboon dance to the tune, wake the Spaniard and, it says, ‘end the antic measures with driving him into the wood’. So here we have wild airs being used to herald primitive innocence on the one hand and the usual wickedness and grotesqueness on the other. Instruments are not specified, and it is probably unwise to infer from the expression ‘wild music’ applied to Comus that the term ‘wild’ always implies the use of unusual instruments.

The impact that the reopening of the London theatres had on their audiences of gentry and nobility was heightened by the introduction of scenery, and one of the most lavish and elaborately staged dramas of the Restoration was Shadwell's *Psyche* or *The English Opera* (1675), with music by Matthew Locke, much of which does survive. As the Preface states, 'The great Design was to entertain the Town with variety of Musick, curious Dances, splendid Scenes and Machines'⁶ (the complicated machinery had to be brought over from France).⁷

Thanks to the new satiric weapon of low burlesque or travesty introduced by Davenant as the last act of *The Playhouse to be Let*, we have, a few months after *Psyche*, Thomas Duffett's *Psyche Debauch'd* or *The Mock Opera*, appearing at the rival Theatre Royal in Drury Lane. Low burlesque takes a high subject matter such as Caesar and Cleopatra, or *Psyche*, and subjects it to an incongruously low treatment. The libretto of *Psyche Debauch'd* includes several scenes recalling antimasques earlier in the century, and here antimasque-type material is used to burlesque the grandiose masque-like scenes in *Psyche*. At one point musical mockery becomes part of the burlesque treatment, when children's instruments and jew's harps are used as part of a ceremonial entrance of dignitaries, sending up an Apollonian priestly ritual in *Psyche*. There is a familiar pre-Interregnum antecedent in the public theatre to this type of treatment, and that is the 'rural music' of tongs and bones in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, played for Titania and Bottom with ass's head.

To compare the two scenes in *Psyche* and *Psyche Debauch'd*, here first are the stage directions from *Psyche*:

The Scene is the Temple of Apollo Delphicus, with Columns of the Dorick Order, inrich'd with Gold, in the middle a stately Cupulo, on the top of it the Figure of the Sun ... Enter in Solemn procession, the Chief Priest Crown'd with Lawrel in a white Vestment, over that a Purple Gown, over that a Cope embroidered with Gold, over all a Lambs-skin Hood with the Wooll on: He has four Boys attending, two before, two behind, clad in Surplices, and girt with Girdles of Gold [the boys carry various offerings].

The Chief Priest makes a number of invocations with chorus responses, and then we have 'A Dance of Priests entring from each side of the Stage, with Cymbals, Bells, and Flambeaux' (the music for the dance does not survive). The Chief Priest then invokes the classical gods and goddesses, with chorus responses:

Ch. Pr. Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Saturn, Cibeles.
Respons. Be propitious to our Vows and Prayers.
Ch. Pr. Mars, Bellona, Venus, Cupido, Vulcanus.
Resp. Be propitious, &c.

In *Psyche Debauch'd* we have this:

Enter a Boy in a Surplice Dancing, follow'd by two women bearing a Chaffing dish between them, and smocking Tobacco; after them comes the Chief Priest

in a Fools-coat [dressed like a jester], his Train supported by two in like habit, two Priests in Surplices follow them; then come two Judges playing on Jewes-trumps followed by a Cardinal, playing on a Childs Fiddle; two in grave habits follow him playing on Childrens Pipes; then come a Major beating a little Drum; after him the King ...

The priests invoke a host of names, replacing the classical gods of *Psyche* with a mishmash of rebels from the past (as in *Britannia Triumphans*) and nonsense; there is a mock congregational response:

Second Priest. *James Naylor, Pope Joan, Wat. Tyler, Mall. Cutpurse, Chocorelly.*

All-Answer. Help our *Opera*, because 'tis very silly.

Second Priest. *Massaniello, Mosely, Jack-straw, Jantredisco, Pimponelli.*

All-Answer. Help our *Opera*, because 'tis very silly.

Antimasque-like scenes also find their way into that part of Restoration drama that we are most familiar with today, the comedies. The 'mockmusick', mountebanks, scatology and hellish setting from *Britannia Triumphans*⁸ are echoed in Ravenscroft's *The Citizen turn'd Gentleman* (1672), when Trickmore and Cureal, 'Two men of Intrigue', try to dupe Sir Simon Softhead, 'A Country Knight', by disguising themselves and four others as medical men; the plan goes awry and Sir Simon later recounts his ordeal to Trickmore, by then no longer disguised:

Sir Simon: ... Then entered such a consort of Musick, as if they had plaid a flourish for the entry of devils; but were followed by half a dozen Anticks singing, and dancing with Syringes and Glisters [enema syringes] in their hands, that they almost made me out of my wits; when[,] with much ado by the help of a Pocket Pistol, I got from 'em, they all discharg'd at me: see, am I not all beglisterfied?

Trickmore: Indeed you have an odd smell about you.

Enemas and their threat formed a prominent part in scatological humour from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.⁹

Sir Simon's remark about the music sounding as if it were playing a flourish for the entry of devils corroborates in a small way my suggestion that noise-making instruments heralded entrances of grotesques, but may not necessarily have accompanied them in subsequent dances.

Further evidence demonstrating the independence of non-musical sound effects comes from Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas*. An eighteenth-century manuscript source, which may derive from performances in the early 1700s, has a familiar aural and visual signifier – thunder and lightning – indicated before the music introducing the sorceress, and again, along with the expression 'horrid music', at the end of the scene where the furies 'sink down in the Cave'. There is no score for the 'horrid music'.¹⁰

The spectacular scenery and grotesques of the antimasque tradition also became part of those Italian operas with sorceresses and attendant spirits (what

Winton Dean calls the magic operas). As we know, Purcell's premature death in 1695 left a vacuum that was gradually filled by the increasing popularity of Italian opera on the London stage, culminating in 1711 with Handel's *Rinaldo*, his first opera for London audiences.

Rinaldo had particularly elaborate stage effects, and Act III opens with a description reminiscent in some respects of Jonson's *Oberon* at the court of James I exactly one hundred years before.¹¹ The scene reveals

a dreadful Prospect of a Mountain, horribly steep ...
Rocks and Caves, and Waterfalls, are seen upon the
Ascent, and on the Top appear the blazing Battlements
of the Enchanted Palace, Guarded by a great Number
of Spirits, of various Forms and Aspects ...¹²

The stage directions also mention 'terrible Noises and Confusion',¹³ yet, as Dean writes, there is no suggestion of the supernatural in the score.¹⁴ As with other examples so far, there is again a discrepancy between the score and the description of the scene from the libretto. Since, in the case of *Rinaldo*, we have a score for the opera itself, published shortly after its production, I would suggest again that the 'terrible noises' are unrelated to anything played by the band.

Instruments of mock music are occasionally indicated for burlesque purposes in eighteenth-century plays; my last example takes us through to the 1730s, and to Henry Carey's short burlesque afterpiece *Chrononhotonthologos* (1734), 'The most Tragical tragedy, that was ever Tragediz'd by any Company of Tragedians'. Later editions include a scene in which the eponymous king has been sleeping; he is awakened by

*A Concert of Rough Musick. viz. Salt-boxes and
Rolling-Pins, Gridirons and Tongs; Sow-Gelders
Horns, Marrowbones and Cleavers, &c. &c.*

He wakes.

Chron: What heav'nly Sounds are these that charm my
Ears!

Sure 'tis the Musick of the tuneful Spheres.¹⁵

The use of the term 'rough music' here, with sowgelders' horns and marrow bones and cleavers, leads me to end with a reminder that behind musical mockery in the theatre of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries lies the ritualised form of popular protest known as skimmington or rough music in England, as charivari in France, and by other terms in the rest of Europe. The skimmington was extremely noisy, involving mock instruments, rifles, fireworks, shouting, whistling, recitation of verses, plus the scattering of excrement and the burning of effigies. Guy Fawkes night is the one remnant to include a few of these elements today, but then the ritual was usually directed against couples who transgressed the behavioural or sexual norms of a community. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the most common victims seem to have been wives that were supposed to be too overbearing, and their husbands likewise for allowing themselves to be downtrodden.

Carey may have used rough music to underline his

plot. King Chrononhotonthologos has a feisty and wilful Queen, who has refused to attend him on his triumphant return from war (with the excuse of 'a sudden *Diarrhoea's* rapid Force' – again that proximity of scatology and musical mockery). She has just revealed to her servant the real reason for her non-attendance is that she has fallen in love with her husband's captive, the King of the Antipodes (who, incidentally, walks upside down and wears a crown on his feet).¹⁶ In the next scene she visits the prisoner.

Carey's mock instruments have much in common with the 'Knackers and bells, Tongs and key, Gridiron and shoeing horne' of *Britannia Triumphans*, though his saltbox belongs to representations of musical mockery in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A fictional description of a seventeenth-century skimmington comes in Part 2 of Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1663); the ritual was vividly illustrated by Hogarth in two sets of *Hudibras* prints published during the 1720s.

For further information on the subject I strongly recommend Martin Ingrams's essay 'Ridings, Rough Music and Mocking Rhymes in Early Modern England', from *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (ed. Barry Reay, 1985), and E. P. Thompson's 'Rough Music' from his collection of essays, *Customs in Common* (1991).

References

- 1 Sabol 1978, 20: the descriptions come from Jonson's manuscripts for his court masques, in the transcripts by Herford and Simpson published 1925-52.
- 2 See nos. 76, 246 and 247 in Sabol 1978.
- 3 Inspecting urine samples had been a routine method of medical diagnosis, which was at that time becoming outmoded and relegated to the quack or 'pisse-prophet'; see Porter 1997, 232.
- 4 See Schoenbaum 1970, 100-4, for an exposition of the genesis and development of this story.
- 5 Schoenbaum 1970, 105.
- 6 Cited in *The London Stage*, Pt. 1, p. lxxxviii.
- 7 *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre* (4th edition, reprinted 1985), 225.
- 8 See also *The Masque of Mountebanks* (1618), discussed by Sabol 1978, 23. Sabol points out that the songs promising cures 'are clearly in the tradition of the revivifying doctors' songs of the mummings' plays'.
- 9 See, for example, Hogarth's engraving *The Punishment Inflicted on Lemuel Gulliver* (1726). Paulson 1989, 70, writes that 'The clyster motif was prominent in a number of Brueghel's prints, for example *La Paresse*'. References to enemas occur too in images of the *commedia dell'arte*: see Lawner 1998, 110-11.
- 10 See the edition by Edward Dent and Ellen Harris (1987), 42; also the Preface and Editorial Notes for a discussion of sources for *Dido and Aeneas*.
- 11 See the eyewitness account of *Oberon*, given as Appendix A in Sabol 1978, 543.
- 12 Cited by Winton Dean, 1969, 78.
- 13 *Ibid.* 79.
- 14 *Ibid.* 78.

15 In the third edition (1744); Carey died in 1743. The scene is not included in Trussler 1969.

16 Two further examples of mock instruments mentioned or used in eighteenth-century drama include Steele's *The Funeral* (1712), 53-4, where Trim, a servant, describes his former love for a cook-maid, and runs to fetch his lute for a song in her praise; he re-enters with a pair of tongs for accompaniment instead, saying that

Dear *Cynderaxa* her self very well understood this
Instrument, I therefore always sung this Song to it,
thus.

In Fielding's *The Author's Farce* (1730), at the Court of Nonsense, Luckless, 'the Author, and Master of the show', addresses one of the characters personifying dramatic genres:

But Sir Farcical, I hear you had once an intention
to introduce a set of marrow bones and cleavers
upon the stage.

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