

# BOOK reviews

Edited by Mark Kroll



**Mr Langshaw's Square Piano.** Madeline Goold. 364 pages. Corvo Books, 2008.  
*Reviewed by Mark Kroll.*

This delightful book is a story about the life and times of—well, not anyone you might have heard of, or even a living person, but a little Broadwood square piano made in 1807. Books have been written about great pianists, the history of the piano, and individual makers, but this is the first time I have read the biography of a single instrument. It even has a name: 10651, the number written on the underside of the piano's dustcover.

Author Madeline Goold is a lawyer who has become a recognized sculptor in her native England. After purchasing 10651 in 2004, however, she seems to have set aside her legal torts and sculpting tools to become a musicologist and archivist, with the goal of writing the life story of this newest and obviously cherished addition to her family. Goold succeeds admirably, and the thoroughness of her research is particularly impressive. She examined archives in England, the U.S., and even Barbados, and “as [the piano’s] story unfolded, a group of people, past and present, some famous but many forgotten, began to appear and before long a host of characters surged forward out of the past.” The tale told by these characters, and by the piano itself, is fascinating and informative.

The first owner of the instrument was the Lancaster organist John Langshaw (1763-1832), which Goold discovered as she pored over the Broadwood ledger books and found the 1807 entry she was looking for: “A SPF add 6 legs D.P. N10651 & case, addressed Mr J Langshaw, Organist, Lancaster—delivered at Pickford & Co. Warehouse, Paddington, and goes by their boat.” Langshaw studied music with his father (also named John), an organist of the parish church of Lancaster who also worked with Handel’s friend Christopher Smith in setting music of Corelli, Geminiani, Vivaldi, and Pergolesi on barrel

organs. Our John Langshaw eventually succeeded his father as organist at Lancaster, where he remained until his death. He composed music for voice, organ, and piano, continued the family profession of working with barrel organs, and supplemented his meager salary as a church organist by becoming an agent for Broadwood. Langshaw would eventually sell about 100 pianos for Broadwood between 1784-1832.

**It is fair to say that were it not for Goold, John Langshaw and his piano would have probably disappeared forever as a footnote in music history. We are grateful their story has now been told.**

The reader, however, discovers much more in this book than the biography of 10651’s first owner. Goold shares many intriguing details and bits of information that might seem trivial at first, but when taken together create a compelling account of the Langshaw family and of the cultural, political, and economic history of England during the 18th and 19th centuries. That said, the Langshaws were certainly a colorful bunch. For example, Pearson Langshaw, John Langshaw’s grandson, shared a bit of family lore in 1892 when he wrote that his grandfather was as passionate about books as he was about music, so much so that “on his wedding day he did not arrive at Church in time, and was sought for and found at a bookstall.” Succeeding generations of Langshaws achieved distinction outside the music profession. Great-great-grandson John Langshaw Austin became a professor of moral philosophy at Oxford, and great-great-great-grandson Tim Austin invented the Nuclear Incident Criticality Detector.

The information about the Broadwood firm is equally fascinating. Goold not only tells us that the company made “over 11,000 square pianos and 4,000 grands” by the time it built Langshaw/Goold’s piano in 1807, but also that the factory was once “protected by three dogs and a bear” and that John Broadwood’s wife Barbara “paid the washerwoman 1s 3d, bought chamber pots and soap at 1s 6d and ‘Lost at Cards 4d.’” at some point in 1769, the year of their marriage.

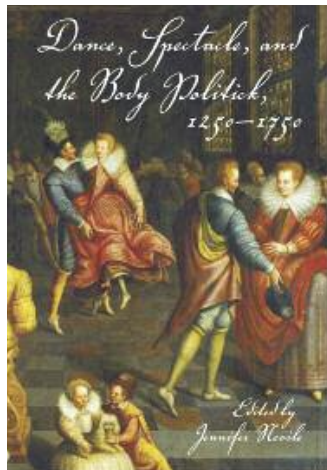
Goold’s emphasis on the important role of Broadwood pianos in English history is well placed, as she writes: “From the end of the eighteenth century until 2003... a Broadwood piano was a potent symbol of the English way of life. For 200 years, wherever the English went—and they went almost everywhere—they took their pianos with them, carrying the voice and values of their culture to every known part of the globe.” Apparently, the sun never set on the British Empire or its pianos.

The book is enhanced by a generous offering of illustrations and tables, such as a picture of the piano, a reproduction of the 1807 ledger entry, portraits of John Langshaw and other members of the family, and a Broadwood price list from 1813. It is fair to say that were it not for Goold, John Langshaw and his piano would have probably disappeared forever as a footnote in music history. We are grateful their story has now been told.


*Mark Kroll, the former chair of the department of historical performance at Boston University, will direct a new Baroque Performance Institute for High-School-Aged Instrumentalists at the New England Conservatory this summer.*

**Dance, Spectacle, and the Body Politick, 1250-1750.** Jennifer Nevile, editor. 392 pages. Indiana University Press, 2008.  
*Reviewed by Richard Semmens.*

A big bite of dance history scholarship is undertaken in this study,



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and it does not seem to have been too big for Jennifer Nevile, the editor of the volume, to chew. She manages to weave an introduction into the book, and each of its six subsections make the promise of its lofty title (and the ideas it appears to embrace) seem within her grasp. Given the book's vast chronological sweep—rather more than the 500 years suggested in the title, since the very useful essay on “Plato's Philosophy of Dance” by Graham Pont increases the range substantially—it was my guess, when I embarked on my journey through its pages, that I would find some themes on spectacle or the carnivalesque that would override chronology. Or maybe there would be a sociological/anthropological approach to the embodiment of status relationships (politics) through dance that would render chronology secondary to social configurations.

With excited anticipation I dove in, expecting to find something along these lines. Although I was not disappointed, I discovered something quite different.

The book features a nice selection of generally excellent essays by some leading authorities in historical dance. Each essay offers information situated in its own time frame, and each presents a secure control of primary and secondary sources and includes a very useful list of recommended reading at its conclusion. Some essays provide tantalizing new details (John S. Powell's piece on Beauchamps and public theaters in 17th-century France and David R. Wilson's review of the *basse danse* are good examples). Some interpret well-known material in new and promising ways. Jennifer Thorp's piece on “Dance in the London Theatres c.1700-1750” makes me look forward to her important new work. Two essays review material the authors have already addressed, but nevertheless do so here in a compellingly compact way: Ken Pierce's offering on the choreo-

graphic structure of Baroque dance and Margaret M. McGowan's essay on court dancing in 16th- and 17th-century France. Only a pair of essays (not counting the deceptively erudite and versatile “Introduction and Overview” by Nevile herself) really fit the themes of bodies, politics, and spectacle announced by the title. Julia Prest's offering on politics and ballet in Louis XIV's France is pretty perfunctory. But Linda J. Tomko's essay on “Mr. Isaac's *The Pastorall* and Issues of ‘Party’” really does embrace the kind of inquiry I was expecting. Tomko's is a truly analytical study that responds with vibrancy to the themes called for by the volume's editor.

Most of the authors represented here undertake their tasks with precision and skill. Many succeed, and all should be acknowledged for their

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contribution: those not already specifically mentioned include Alessandro Arcan-geli, Katherine Tucker McGinnis, and Karen Silen. Jennifer Nevile's multiple contributions to the volume cannot be praised sufficiently; her essays on Renaissance dance are impressive, her introduction to the volume full of perception.

I suppose we must await some future in which an individual truly finds a connection among the various manifestations of social, stage, and court dancing over the ages. But I wonder if this is really important. Dance, after all, is body, is spectacle, is “political” (however we configure it). I'm just not sure that Guglielmo Ebreo (15th century), Cesare Negri (c.1535-after 1604), or Mr. Isaac (late 17th, early 18th century) shared some common agenda (let alone believed they did) when they created their splendid dances. Nevile, nevertheless, would have us believe that something like the same bodies, the same spectacles, the same kinds of politics were enacted (perhaps unintentionally) over and over again across the centuries addressed in this volume. Maybe she

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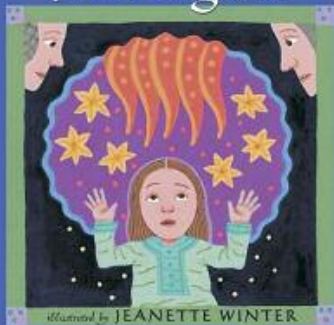


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*The Secret World  
of Hildegard*



is right. The scholars she has brought together, however, do not appear to espouse such a grandiose vision but appear more concerned with a narrower, well-informed view of dancing in a given place at a given time. Congratulations to them all, and to Nevile for bringing this impressive collection to life.

I have profited considerably from reading the offerings presented here, and I am certain others will, too. I will recommend readings from this volume to my students for years to come.

*Richard Semmens is professor of music history at the University of Western Ontario. He has taught and performed Baroque dance for many years, and his study on The Bals publics at the Paris Opera in the Eighteenth Century was published by Pendragon Press in 2004.*

**The Secret World of Hildegard.** Jonah Winter, illustrated by Jeanette Winter. 64 pages. Arthur A. Levine Books, 2007. *Reviewed by Anna Elisabeth (Isabelle) Dalby, age 8.*

This book is about a girl who was born in the Middle Ages. When she was born, she started having visions in her head. She predicted the color of a baby calf before it was born, and her prediction came true. Then Hildegard told her parents about the world inside her head. But after she told them, they took her to a special place, a monastery, for girls like Hildegard. In that special place she was taught to read and write, and she learned to sing hymns and songs. She used those things and became a great preacher throughout the land. She even wrote to the king and asked him to change his prideful ways. When she preached, she preached the things that God told her and showed her in her head

and visions. She also composed songs and hymns that she said came directly from God talking to her through her visions.

This book was interesting because I learned something. I learned that you should not keep things hidden in your head or not tell anyone. I think I am very lucky that I get to learn to read and write, while Hildegard and other girls were not allowed to do that at that time.

I also want to learn more about her, and the story made me want to hear some of her music. It sounds as if she was very wise and knew a lot about the world. I kind of want to be like her because she turned the music she heard in her head into real songs that people listened to around the land.

I think people should read this book because you can learn a lot of new things. You could learn about the Middle Ages and what people were allowed to do. You can also learn how people write music in their heads. I think the pictures give a lot of detail about what is going on in the story.

*Anna Elisabeth (Isabelle) Dalby is a third-grader at the Winn Brook Elementary School in Belmont, MA. She loves to read, play with her Legos, and listen to music.*



**Music for a Mixed Taste: Style, Genre, and Meaning in Telemann's Instrumental Works.** Steven Zohn. 720 pages. Oxford University Press, 2008. *Review by Morwared Farbood.*

In the preface of his meticulously researched new book, Steven Zohn remarks that most students learn little about Georg Philipp Telemann aside from the fact that he was an important contemporary of Bach or,



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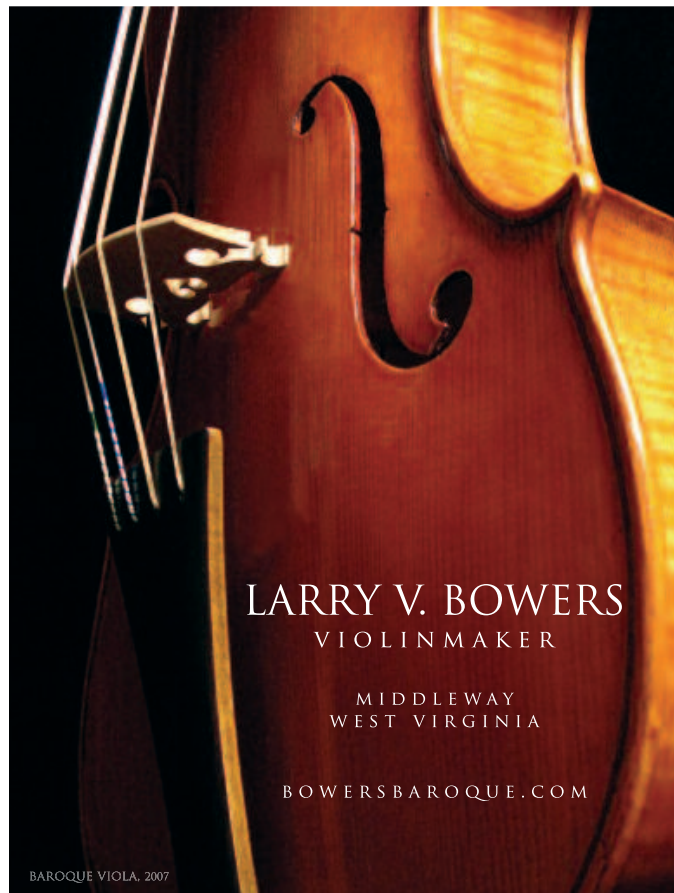
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more dubiously, that *The Guinness Book of World Records* dubbed him history's "most prolific composer." Telemann was, in fact, considered the leading musician of Germany in the first half of the 18th century, but his reputation deteriorated considerably in the 19th century, due in part to the sheer volume of his output. This perhaps explains why Zohn's work is the first book-length study on Telemann to be published in English since Richard Petzoldt's short biography and survey of works was translated in 1974.

*Music for a Mixed Taste* consists of a series of independent yet related essays. Some are surveys of genres, such as the overture-suite, concerto, and sonata, and others focus on particular musical subgenres,

including the overture-suite with concerto-like soloist, the concerto for strings without soloist, the quartet with obbligato bass, and the sonata in concerto style. The author sheds light on the history and origins of these genres and subgenres and places them within the context of Telemann's application

of the "mixed taste" of his day, an amalgamation of French, Italian, English, and Polish idioms that essentially defined German compositional style in the 18th century. In addition to thoroughly examining Telemann's ability to mix genres and national styles, Zohn takes pains to show that Telemann's works function as stylistic mediators between old and new: the *galant* style mixed with strict canons, fugues, and the *stile antico*. The author also devotes a separate chapter to the way the composer exploited the Polish style to generate musical and social meanings for his audience that "depended principally on a series of dichotomies that still resonate in the modern world: East versus West, high/urban versus low/rural, and serious versus comic."

The volume's essays focus on an eclectic mix of topics. One deals with Telemann's thriving self-publishing business in Hamburg, an

exploit imitated by many of his contemporaries. Another offers a particularly fascinating exploration of the musical and aesthetic implications of J. S. Bach's previously unrecognized borrowings from Telemann that are to be found in the middle movement of Bach's F minor harpsichord concerto (BWV 1056). In this movement, which is substantially based upon the first movement of Telemann's concerto for solo oboe or flute and strings (TWV 51:G2), Bach not only borrowed the beginning of Telemann's theme, but also adopted details of his scoring, texture, harmonies, phrase and cadential structure, and overall dimensions.

*Music for a Mixed Taste* makes a convincing case for the inherent value of Telemann's works without

**Music for a Mixed Taste makes a convincing case for the inherent value of Telemann's works without needing to prove whether the composer was a "Minor Master or a Great Man."**

needing to prove whether the composer was a "Minor Master or a Great Man." As the author aptly notes, regardless of whether or not this question is settled, the shift away from historical narratives centered on a handful of canonical figures to a broader view of music history has made the question less urgent. Never-

theless, part of the difficulty in evaluating Telemann's music has been his label as a transitional figure, straddling the Baroque and Classical eras and "therefore easily dismissed as peripheral to mainstream musical developments in both." This book should put that issue to rest. Due to the appearance in recent years of numerous critical and performing editions, scholarly studies, and performances and recordings utilizing historically informed practices, Telemann's reputation has been considerably restored. Thus a serious study of his music is long overdue, and Zohn's new book should be well received by musicologists and music lovers alike.

*Winner of the Pro Musicis and Prague competitions, harpsichordist Morwared Farbood is a visiting professor at New York University, where she specializes in both early music and music technology.*

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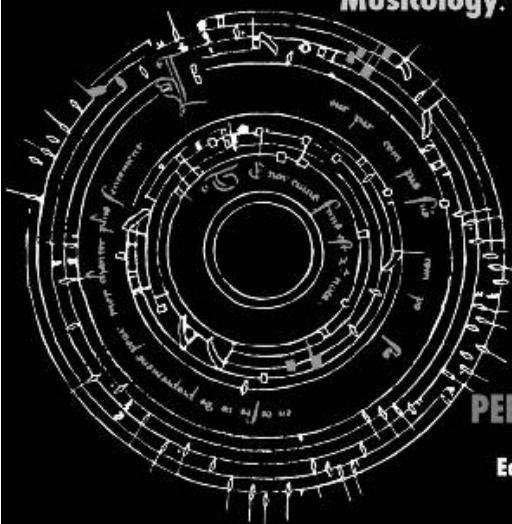
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