

## BOOK REVIEW

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**Nicholas Temperley, ed. *Musicians of Bath and Beyond: Edward Loder (1809–1865) and his Family.***

Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2016.

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**Reviewed by Sarah Kirby**

The late-Georgian and Victorian periods have, for much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, been ‘the most despised’ in the history of music in Britain—‘an embarrassing slump between the ascendancy of Handel and the coming of the “English Musical Renaissance”’ (p. 1). This is, perhaps, not entirely without reason: there was indeed an awful lot of music produced during this era that challenges modern critical standards. And yet, however much ‘bad’ music there might be, it would be foolish to dismiss the entire country and century outright. Even the most cursory glance at recent scholarship shows that musical activity in nineteenth-century Britain was abundant; enough that one might hope finally to repudiate that thoughtless and far too oft-repeated phrase, ‘das Land ohne Musik.’ In 1966, however, when Nicholas Temperley first discovered the work of Edward Loder (1809–1865) and reconstructed and staged his opera *Raymond and Agnes* at Cambridge, it was exactly this wholesale dismissal that he faced, in the ‘patronising and prejudiced attitude to the “Victorians” which had for so long coloured perceptions of every art except literature’ (p. 289). *Musicians of Bath and Beyond* is the culmination of a life-long effort by Temperley to draw attention to Edward Loder’s music and give it a more prominent place in British musical history. More than this, Temperley uses the example of Loder and his ‘remarkable family of musicians’ (p. 1) to explore nineteenth-century musical life in Britain and the challenges faced by musicians living and working at this time.

The revival of musicological interest in the Victorian period over recent decades stems largely from a generation of scholars challenging the historiographical narrative that privileges the singular artistic work and autonomous composer over the study of music within society. In this book, Temperley ‘hopes to recombine’ two distinct approaches: one considering the

music itself, and the other focused on musical life (p. 1). By approaching the Loder family from both angles, this book provides both descriptions of individual pieces—necessary as the contributors are dealing with music almost certainly unknown to the readers—and important contextual information. As part of the *Music in Britain 1600–2000* series that has included other titles on Victorian music including Christina Bashford's *The Pursuit of High Culture: John Ella and Chamber Music in Victorian London* (2007), Suzanne Cole's *Thomas Tallis and his Music in Victorian England* (2008), and John Carnelley's *George Smart and Nineteenth-century London Concert Life* (2015), Temperley's *Musicians of Bath and Beyond* expands the ongoing movement exploring Victorian audiences, experiences, and music in all its forms and uses.

Bookended by Temperley's own comments—the introduction issuing a call to reassess this musical period and some of its leading figures, and the epilogue providing an account of the 1966 revival of *Raymond and Agnes*—the body of the book is divided into three sections, each narrowing in scope. Part One contextualises the Loders and their music in Bath, Manchester and London; Part Two is biographical, considering the lives and careers of a number of prominent Loders (here, the family tree provided at the beginning of the book is useful), while Part Three studies closely the compositions of Edward Loder, from his relationship with his librettists, down to specifics of orchestration and instrumentation. There emerges, not only a picture of Edward and the challenges he faced in a hostile British musical world, but also of the broader musical landscape of Britain during this era. Particularly in opera, nineteenth-century Britain, unlike France, relegated 'the librettist from poet and dramatist to poetaster and literary hack, but did not ... witness a corresponding rise in the status of composer' (p. 220).

Stephen Banfield's opening chapter, 'Earning a Musical Living,' offers an intriguing entry into discussion of the Loders by considering the career prospects of musicians during this period, and introducing the concept of 'the musical equivalent of the medical general practitioner' (p. 8). Using analysis of quantitative data based on various musicians' financial records, Banfield suggests ten rules that might have allowed for a successful career as a musical generalist. The musical GP was, however, quickly disempowered by the 'rise of Victorianism' (p. 20) with its notions of respectability, a sensibility to the bohemian artist, and the romanticised idea of the singular artistic creation. Unfortunately, 'making one's living as a composer ... was in diametric opposition to making one's reputation' (p. 22): the sort of music that sold was not of the creatively rewarding kind. Matthew Spring's 'The Musical Life of Bath, 1800–1850' also charts the rise and fall of the professional musician, although through narrative, rather than quantitative data. Nineteenth-century Bath was an intensely musical city, with the proportion of musicians in the population twice that of London or Manchester. Music, it seems, was everywhere, but the rise of the amateur musician led to the death of many older professional musical institutions.

Concluding the contextual first part, Liz Cooper's 'The Theatre Royal, Manchester, in Edward Loder's Time' and Alison Mero's 'The Climate for Opera in London, 1834–1865' give background to the musical landscapes of two cities important in Edward Loder's career. Cooper provides names and dates for principal performers, conductors and directors up until Loder's time in Manchester, where his appointment 'increased the prestige of the Theatre Royal's orchestra and built its reputation for excellent playing' (p. 44). Mero's chapter on London, adapted from her PhD thesis, discusses the musical expectations of audiences, anxieties about English musical identity, and the practical and economic constraints placed on composers.

The biographical chapters reveal a number of musicians who, for their individual achievements in varying musical spheres, should perhaps be better known. Andrew Clarke's 'Loder & Sons, Bath: A Band of Musicians' is an expanded version of the family tree that heads the book. Clarke suggests that, while Bath declined socially during the nineteenth century (not least through increasing musical and touristic interest in the Continent at the end of the Napoleonic Wars), the aristocratic 'decline' opened up opportunities for the middle classes. The Loders and their success 'epitomised the rise of the middle class' (p. 76).

Rather than straight biography, David J. Golby's 'A Master Violinist and Teacher: John David Loder (1788–1846)' provides a discussion of the genesis, legacy and importance of J.D. Loder's violin treatise. J.D. Loder (Edward's father) was unusual in the status he achieved in his native country, and his seminal text on violin pedagogy was revered for at least the next eighty years. Golby writes:

if it is a truth widely acknowledged that the prevalence of pride and prejudice in nineteenth-century British society had a detrimental impact on the achievements and fortunes of home-grown instrumentalists, then it is all the more satisfying to be able to write about J.D. Loder as one of a handful of exceptions to this rule (p. 123)

(a sentiment so nice that he might be forgiven his slightly forced Austen references!).

Andrew Lamb's 'Edward James Loder (1809–1865): A Life in Music' is fittingly placed at the centre of the book, making Loder both physically and conceptually the figure around which the rest of the work revolves. While Lamb describes Loder as a member of a group 'who gave distinction to British music during the early part of Queen Victoria's reign' (p. 125), this appears, however, to be a chapter of failures: Loder went bankrupt, fled the country (perhaps to escape creditors), went to debtors' prison, and, unsuccessful in his early operas, turned to writing popular songs: 'essentially hack work to satisfy the home entertainment market and his own pocket' (p. 131).

Julja Szuster's 'George Loder's Contribution to Musical Life in Colonial Australia' provides another counterpoint to the Loder story, outlining the activities of George Loder the younger (1816–1868, Edward's cousin) who spent in total six years in Australia between 1856 and 1868. Acting as musical director for Anna Bishop, conducting the Lyster touring opera company and performing in a duo with his wife, Emma Neville, George Loder left a lasting impression on the city of Adelaide that Szuster believes can be 'measured by the continuing benefits to the community,' particularly his success 'in raising the performing standards of the amateur and semi-professional musicians' (p. 166).

Perhaps the most refreshing chapter of the biographical section is Therese Ellsworth's "'A Magnificent Musician": The Career of Kate Fanny Loder (1825–1904).' Kate Loder (Edward's cousin and George the younger's sister) was a respected performer, teacher and composer, and this chapter contains many examples of her work. Entering the Royal Academy of Music at the age of thirteen, Loder's distinguished career included becoming both the first female professor of harmony at the RAM and the youngest person elected an associate female member of the Philharmonic Society. She had a number of students both at the RAM and privately, and often taught without charge those who could not afford lessons. Described on her death by George Grove as 'the kindest friend to young artists of all kinds, and ... a powerful influence on the art of her time' (p. 189), Kate Loder appears one of the most successful and intriguing figures of this book.

The final, analytical, section begins with Nicholas Temperley's own chapter, "'Three fifths of him genius and two fifths sheer fudge": Heights and Depths in Edward Loder's Work.' Referring in its title quote to a criticism of Edgar Allan Poe, Temperley suggests that the same could easily apply to Loder, who was, like others, compelled by poverty to spend time 'writing conventional music for a public that could not appreciate [his] genius' (p. 192). This chapter provides numerous examples of Loder's compositions, and, while the ballads and sacred music are in many cases uninspiring, Temperley makes a strong case for the view that, when Loder found 'the time and the motive to set his imagination free ... the results were often rewarding, sometimes astonishing' (p. 192).

David Chandler's "'Ah, trait'ress, me betraying": Edward Loder and his Librettos' addresses some of the challenges Loder encountered when faced with composing music for uninspired and often ill-conceived libretti. The title of this chapter is an example not only of the poor texts Loder had to work with, but also suggests that 'Loder's librettos were themselves "trait'resses" "betraying" his musical inspiration' (p. 234). Chandler perceptively points out the lasting effects of these poor texts, suggesting that the literary failings 'will unfortunately continue to represent much the biggest obstacle to their return to stage' as it is rare for an opera to be 'revived on the basis of ... musical values alone' (p. 235). Similarly, Paul Rodmell's discussion of 'Edward Loder's Serious Opera' examines the three surviving operas—*Nourjahad* (1834), *The Night Dancers* (1846) and *Raymond and Agnes* (1855)—through a methodical analysis of their musical content as well as their critical reception. These operas, conveniently, date from different stages of Loder's career and thus allow 'consideration of his development as a composer ... [and are] evidence of an evolving style' (p. 236). Rodmell concludes that it is 'more a reflection of circumstance than a warranted fate' (p. 267) that Loder has failed to achieve lasting renown. Finally, Valerie Langfield's '*Raymond and Agnes: Orchestration and Dramatic Characterisation*' considers intimate details of the score and Loder's use of instrumentation as a means of characterisation, most particularly in his use of percussion.<sup>1</sup>

Overall, and particularly in these final analytical chapters, this book is filled with detailed and well-presented musical examples. In addition, the companion website, providing audio examples of music by the Loder family, is particularly helpful.<sup>2</sup> Given that much of the music discussed would otherwise be inaccessible to most readers, this is a welcome resource, as the opportunity to hear some of these works gives them an added vitality. Details of several other projects actively reviving Victorian music are also provided, including Retrospect Opera, which plans to mount a production of Loder's *Raymond and Agnes* in 2017, should funding materialise.<sup>3</sup>

A conscious, scholarly reassessment of the music of late-Georgian and Victorian Britain is already well underway, as demonstrated by other books in this series. Yet the prejudices surrounding this period have by no means been completely overcome. Perhaps they never will be, given the ease with which vast quantities of aesthetically awkward Victorian music can be found, but it is exactly for this reason that books like *Musicians of Bath and Beyond* are so valuable. Temperley and other dedicated researchers have done the hard work of wading

<sup>1</sup> Langfield has reconstructed the missing overture of *Nourjahad* from an extant vocal and four-hand piano score. This was recorded in 2010 as part of the CD *British Opera Overtures* by the Victorian Opera Orchestra conducted by Richard Bonyngue. See p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> See <<https://boydellandbrewer.com/musicians-bath-beyond/>>.

<sup>3</sup> See <[www.retrospectopera.org.uk](http://www.retrospectopera.org.uk)>.

through the 'fudge' to find the 'genius.' While it does seem rather odd to find the term 'new musicology' and assertions of the novelty of this approach used repeatedly in this book (given the term is now nearly forty years old), it remains a valuable continuation of this tradition. Temperley believes Loder was 'a composer of genius, denied the historical position he deserved because of the many disadvantages and prejudices faced by English composers of his generation' (p. 1). *Musicians of Bath and Beyond* and its surrounding projects go some way toward erasing those disadvantages.

**About the Reviewer**

Sarah Kirby is a PhD candidate and tutor in musicology at the University of Melbourne. Her current research deals with music at International Exhibitions, and her research interests include late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British and Australian music history and criticism.