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Music for St Cecilia's Day: From Purcell to Handel. By Bryan White. Woodbridge:

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In the latest addition to Boydell's Music in Britain, 1600–2000 series, Bryan White traces the development of celebrations for St Cecilia's Day (22 November) from the 1680s to the late 1730s: specifically the musical odes written by composers including Purcell, Blow, Eccles and Handel to texts by authors such as Dryden and Congreve.

The book comprises six chapters, replete with almost 40 music examples and over a dozen illustrations. The first three chapters deal primarily with the ode in London to 1700. Chapter 1 examines the annual Cecilian feasts in the capital, 1683–1700. Musical observance of the feast appears to have begun in 1683, for which Purcell composed 'Welcome to all the pleasures'. Little is known of the event but from the following year the celebrations were organised by the Musical Society of London. The public odes began, at least in part, as a means for court musicians to generate extra income in the face of retrenchments at court. The odes were combined with a dinner, influenced by the increase of patriotic country feasts in the 1680s, and proved popular with London audiences in the emerging concert scene. External events led to the 1688 festivities being cancelled; the Musical Society's Cecilian celebrations recommenced only in 1690 and continued until 1700. Chapter 2 offers a fascinatingly in-depth analysis of the Musical Society itself. This rich cultural history reveals that the society comprised a diverse membership (merchants, professionals, nobility, professional musicians), which exploited often complex personal and professional networks. White puts flesh on archival bones to show that the feasts during the late seventeenth century became increasingly elaborate affairs, with performers regularly numbering 50–60 including singers and instrumentalists. With the turn of the century, rising costs and limited profitability signalled the end for the Musical Society celebrations. In Chapter 3 White explores each of the London odes to 1700, presenting the context and a discussion of the music. Aside from Purcell's masterpiece 'Hail Bright Cecilia' (1692), the odes of Draghi (edited previously by White for the Purcell Society) and Blow stand out as being of most potential musical interest. The earliest odes of Purcell and Blow were effectively court odes, with only the object of praise changed. However, as White shows, the later Cecilian odes became evermore virtuosic and were written for more elaborate ensembles than contemporary court odes, reflecting public tastes. As the new century beckoned and the Musical Society's role dissipated, the Cecilian odes began to be more generally in praise of music. Here White also identifies a shift in musical style, one that became more varied in both style and form, leading ultimately to the odes of Handel. Chapter 4 assesses the church services instated by the Musical Society in their celebrations from 1693: designed as a 'corrective to Calvinist strictures placed on the music of the Chapel Royal by William and Mary' (p.217), it allowed the performance of a burgeoning new style of sacred music heavily influenced by Purcell's *Te Deum* and *Jubilate*

(1694). The services had far-reaching influence, which White shows as diverse shaping events such as the Three Choirs Festivals and the style of music written for coronations. The penultimate chapter details the way in which Cecilian celebrations developed outside London in the first half of the eighteenth century. While they seem to have begun largely in imitation of the London festivals these provincial events often involved new works commissioned by local composers, performed by amateurs supported by cathedral musicians; the 1694 publication of Purcell's 'Welcome to all the pleasures' also meant that it too featured prominently. The final chapter explores Cecilian music in the capital in the eighteenth century, with a discussion of the odes written to the end of the 1730s. These odes were generally commissioned and organised by individual music clubs and societies. Handel naturally looms large in the discussion, but the odes of Boyce and Greene especially are not without merit or historical significance. The later odes began to move away from being first performed on St Cecilia's day: Handel's *Alexander's Feast* was performed in February 1736 signalling the integration of the ode into the theatre season. Once this happened the association with Cecilia declined as did settings of Cecilian poetry, which in the later eighteenth century became an object of satire.

While readers are likely to be familiar with the odes of Purcell and Handel one of the main strengths of the book is White's detailed yet eminently readable summaries of the musical contents of the other surviving odes, generously supported by music examples. He offers a thick contextual history merged with sensitive and insightful musical commentaries and analyses. In doing so he presents a richly descriptive account not only of the socio-cultural contexts in which the odes were written but also of the music and poetry itself. A central theme to the book is the veneration of the Catholic St Cecilia in anti-popish England. Festivals were often held in honour of Cecilia on the continent, which may have been driven by the many foreign musicians working in London and especially in courtly circles, but as White explains this was palatable to English Protestants because of the 'obscure relationship the legend of St Cecilia and her standing as patroness of music' (p.25). The final chapter ends with a short conclusion section briefly explaining the demise of the Cecilian ode in the second half of the century; this perhaps could have been expanded to explain that process in more detail and round out the conclusions more fully. But this of course criticises the author for not doing what they did not set out to do – to be left wanting more is perhaps no bad complaint after almost 400 pages. Studies of English music of the period can often be overshadowed by Handel; White demonstrates the richness of the musical context in which he was operating and how central Purcell remained to it. This book will be necessary reading to anyone concerned with late seventeenth-/eighteenth-century England, and its socio-cultural contexts.