

### **Mercer's Music and RISM: a 21<sup>st</sup> century collaboration**

The cataloguing of the Mercer's Hospital part-books is the first project undertaken in conjunction with RISM (Répertoire International des Sources Musicales) since the formation of the Irish RISM committee. 'Répertoire International des Sources Musicales (RISM) was established in 1952 by the International Musicological Society and International Association of Music Libraries. The goal of RISM is to locate and catalogue all surviving musical sources dating from the earliest times to about 1800, and in doing so to bring them to the attention of a much wider public'.<sup>1</sup> 'The UK and Ireland database holds details of the 17th- and 18th-century music manuscripts preserved in libraries and archives in the UK and Ireland. It includes manuscripts from national, public and academic libraries, county and city record offices, cathedral and chapel libraries and some private collections'.<sup>2</sup>

The Mercer's Hospital music collection consists of fifty-seven vocal and instrumental part-books in manuscript and printed form. The collection has been on deposit in the Manuscripts Department at Trinity College Dublin since May 1981. The contents of the fifty manuscript volumes include works by Handel, Greene, Boyce, Purcell, Corelli and Humfrey. The seven printed volumes include a selection of concerti and sonatas by Avison, Barsanti, Festing and Stanley. Selected works from the collection were performed at the Mercer's Hospital annual benefit concerts, the first of which was held on 8 April 1736 at St Andrew's Round Church on Suffolk Street, Dublin. Before discussing the RISM process and its importance in relation to my research, I

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<sup>1</sup> [www.rism.org.uk/pages/rismabout](http://www.rism.org.uk/pages/rismabout), accessed 18 February 2009

<sup>2</sup> [www.rism.org.uk](http://www.rism.org.uk), accessed July–August 2007 and 18 February 2009

will provide some background information on the Mercer's Hospital collection, its place and significance within the context of music making in eighteenth-century Dublin.

In Dublin during the eighteenth-century benefit concerts in aid of hospitals and various charities were frequent, the best documented of these being the concerts held at the Rotunda (Dr. Mosse's Lying-In Hospital). Other Dublin hospitals which sourced funding from musical events include; the Meath Hospital, Dr. Steven's Hospital, St. Nicholas' Francis Street, The Hospital for the Incurables (Beaumont) and the Charitable Infirmary.<sup>3</sup> Apart from theatre and cathedral music, music performed for charitable purposes provided the main outlet for music performance in eighteenth-century Dublin.

Mercer's Hospital opened in 1734. It was one of a number of eighteenth-century institutions provided to supply medical care for the poor and destitute.<sup>4</sup> The building, located on Stephen Street in Dublin's city centre, was donated by a Mary Mercer. After her death the deeds of the hospital transferred to the parishes of St Peter, St Bride, St Luke and St Nicholas.<sup>5</sup> The hospital was not specified among Mary Mercer's endowments, however her last will and testament states that her executors use the profits accrued from the purchase of lands to the value of £2000 to support the sick poor of the aforementioned parishes.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Boydell Brian, *A Dublin Musical Calendar*, (Dublin: 1988), p 267

<sup>4</sup> Lyons J.B., *The Quality of Mercer's The Story of Mercer's Hospital 1734-1991*, (Dublin: 1991), p 17

<sup>5</sup> Mercer's Hospital Records 1736-1772, p 90

<sup>6</sup> Probate of Mrs Mercer's Will of 8 August 1733, Death 4<sup>th</sup> March, 1735

The Mercer's benefit concerts ran for a forty-one year period from 1736. The last benefit concert recorded in the hospital's minute books took place on Thursday 12 December 1771, however the Christ Church Chapter Books document the participation of members of the cathedral choir as late as 1777.<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to determine when exactly the benefit concerts ceased. This is due to the absence of administrative records for the years 1772-1786. The records resume in 1786 with no reference to benefit concerts. From 1786 up to and including 1833, at least, the hospital minute books document the occurrence of charity sermons, the first of which took place on Sunday 19 March 1786. It is probable that over time the benefit concerts developed into charity sermons or indeed that the term 'charity sermon' was merely employed to promote an existing established format. The benefit concerts took the format of a 'divine service... performed... after the cathedral manner.'<sup>8</sup> Since the repertoire for the Mercer's Hospital benefit concerts comprised of sacred works it is likely that the benefit concerts took the form of a cathedral service.<sup>9</sup>

Initially attendance at the benefit concerts was high. Eight hundred people are recorded as having attended the 1739 performance.<sup>10</sup> The audience profile was very much that of the eighteenth century Anglo-Irish nobleman, for example the Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Devonshire attended the concert of 6 March 1740. Courts and sessions at the House of Commons were requested to adjourn on the day of the

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<sup>7</sup> Reference in Christ Church books to a Mercer's Performance in 1777, see Boydell *A History of Music at Christ Church cathedral, Dublin*, (Suffolk: 2004), Boydell *Music: Documents*, pp. 121-2. The last recorded benefit concert took place on Thursday 12 December 1771, see Mercer's Hospital Records 1736-1772, p 350; Mercer's Hospital Records 1736-1772, p 350

<sup>8</sup> Mercer's Hospital Records 1736-1772, p 44

<sup>9</sup> 'The term "in the cathedral way" was repeatedly used in Dublin during the following years [after 1736], to ensure that the Church authorities would not expect a concert of sacred music, but church music. Originally it may have referred to St Paul's Cathedral where the same works of Handel's were performed for charity.' (Townsend p. 35) see - Otto E. Deutsch, *Handel: A Documentary Biography*, p. 402-3

<sup>10</sup> Mercer's Hospital Records 1736-1772, p 48, Mercer's Hospital Records Managing Committee 1738-1750, p 5

Mercer’s performance.<sup>11</sup> This permitted the attendance of the Lord Justices and Speaker of the House of Commons. Such grand gestures reflect the social importance attached to these benefit concerts.

The hospital’s minute books refer to the annual benefit concerts as being ‘the principal support of the hospital.’ Tickets were necessary for admission to the concerts and could be purchased from the hospital for half a guinea each.<sup>12</sup>

Examination of the financial management of these concerts reveals how significant the concerts were to the overall maintenance and management of the hospital, which also received funding in the form of annual subscriptions, casual benefactions and legacies.

The level of involvement from professional, semi-professional and amateur musicians in the Mercer’s benefit concerts reflects the network of musicians available in eighteenth-century Dublin. Performers at the Mercer’s benefit concerts include Mathew Dubourg (1703–1767), a violinist, state musician and former pupil of Geminiani. Dubourg was an active performer in eighteenth-century Dublin.<sup>13</sup> The participation of members of Christ Church and St. Patrick’s cathedral choirs was very important to the successful performance of the Mercer’s benefit concerts and is widely documented in the hospital’s administrative records. It was also usual for musicians to be recruited from the Philharmonic society, the Charitable Musical

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<sup>11</sup> Mercer’s Hospital Records 1736-1772, Mercer’s Hospital Records Managing Committee 1738-1750, Mercer’s Hospital Records Books of Minutes of Governors 1750-1768

<sup>12</sup> Mercer’s Hospital Records 1736-1834, Boydell, *A Dublin Musical Calendar 1700-1760*. For the 1739 concert it was also possible to purchase them at Mr Manwarings Shop on College Green; Mercer’s Hospital Records 1736-1772, p 45. William Manwaring (d. Dublin 1763), was a violinist and music publisher. He was Treasurer of various Charitable Musical Societies, Boydell, p 284, 259

<sup>13</sup> Boydell, *Calendar*, p 278, Mathew Dubourg (1703-1767) was employed at Dublin Castle as Master of State Music from 1724 until 1764/5

Society, The Musical Academy and the Society for the Support of the Decay'd and Indigent Musicians. These societies met regularly, usually once a week, at various minor halls or taverns in the city and some gave regular concerts.<sup>14</sup>

The contents of the Mercer's Hospital part-books can be divided into three categories; MSS 1-44 (the core repertoire), MSS 45-50 (these manuscripts contain works which were not regularly performed at the benefit concerts, if at all) and MSS 51-57 (the printed sources). (Overhead-Table of Contents Mercer's). Sixty percent of all manuscript volumes in the Mercer's collection present some discrepancy or variant reading for certain works. The nature of the discrepancies, which include the pasting in of music, the attachment of extra staves of music to pages, the inclusion of originally un-scored movements and changes in notation and scoring in some vocal and instrumental parts, suggests significant adaptation of parts in the collection.<sup>15</sup> The most adapted work in the collection is Handel's 'Utrecht' *Te Deum-Jubilate* where fifty percent of manuscript copies for this work have been altered in some way. These discrepancies raise several important questions about the sources in the collection, their use and the arrangement of the works therein.

My research project includes the examination of a number of musical issues. Analysis of the Mercer's sources and comparison with other contemporary sources available in collections in Dublin, Britain, Europe and America are central issues. I will create a stemmatic analysis of the sources and comparison of the Mercer's manuscripts with other sources will clarify if the music was arranged or altered in any way to suit performing forces available in eighteenth-century Dublin. I have been able to acquire

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<sup>14</sup> Boydell, *Calendar*, p 267-69

<sup>15</sup> Barenreiter and Cranmer critical editions were used as a guide while examining all Handelian works in the collection

important and relevant information regarding the location and condition of a large number of contemporary sources through using the RISM database. As a researcher I have been able to use this information to create a database of sources for works present in the Mercer's collection. (Overhead of sample of sources database).

Information on the RISM website and database can be easily accessed by using any number of searches i.e. by manuscript title, by person, by the name of the institution in which the material is held, by the title of the work, by subject, for example whether the work is an anthem or an allemande, and by library sigla. Information can be accessed in a varying number of ways. I carried out most of my searches by using the 'manuscripts' search engine which facilitated a detailed search.

By experiencing the benefits of using RISM as a researcher i.e. easy access to a world of information about hundreds of manuscript collections preserved throughout the UK and Ireland I realised the importance of contributing to such a resource. RISM employs a number of different guidelines and procedures in cataloguing manuscript material. According to RISM guidelines each volume i.e. each part-book or score-book and each item i.e. each musical work within each volume is to be catalogued using a collection and/or item template. Incipits of no more than three bars, or where the musical phrase ends naturally, are to be provided for each work with each item template. Information is entered into each collection template under specific headings or fields. (Example Collection Template). Item template headings are more specific in relation to information concerning each individual musical work. (Example Item Template). Both collection and item templates have some headings in common. It is important to note that not all fields present on collection and item templates are

relevant to cataloguing the works present in the Mercer's Hospital part-books, for example the 'Autograph note' field is to be completed if a work is entirely or partly in the hand of the composer. As none of the works present in the Mercer's Hospital part-books are autographed scores this field does not apply. (Example completed Collection template Ms 34, Item Template Ms34 Zadok, Sibelius example incipit for Zadok).

Once RISM cataloguing of each volume is completed the templates with incipits are forwarded via e-mail to the RISM UK central office for assessment and subsequent inclusion in the RISM database. The inclusion of the Mercer's sources in the RISM international database is significant in terms of providing other researchers and musicologists with worldwide access to information about this collection of Irish manuscript sources.<sup>16</sup> It is important that researchers are aware of these sources and that they are given the opportunity to consider them alongside other contemporary sources for works by composers such as Handel, Greene, Croft, Purcell, Humfrey and Corelli. It is not surprising that the Mercer's repertoire contains works by popular and successful English and Italian composers, in turn reflecting the musical tastes of the eighteenth-century Dublin concertgoer and also demonstrating influence from the London concert scene.

Printed sources are not currently being collected for the UK RISM database which contains manuscripts only. The printed sources present in the Mercer's collection have been catalogued in accordance with guidelines from the RISM Central Office in Germany for inclusion in their RISM catalogues of printed music. Information

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<sup>16</sup> The RISM website has been a vital resource in compiling a 'Database of Available Sources' in relation to works present in the Mercer's hospital music collection. This database will be included in the final thesis as an appendix to Chapter 2.

required for this aspect of the project includes a transcription of the title page of each volume, the call number/shelfmark of the volume and an approximate date of publication, if this is not given on the title page.<sup>17</sup> (Provide example). The Mercer's printed part-books serve as an important archival resource when considering the transmission of music to Dublin during the eighteenth-century. The Mercer's printed sources indicate a number of trends in this respect; (i) the inclusion of a list of subscribers on three volumes in the printed collection indicate that music was acquired through subscription, in turn reflecting trends in the general book trade during the eighteenth-century, (ii) details of subscribers contained on some of the printed sources indicate how it was not only Dublin musical societies but also individuals resident in Dublin that subscribed to various contemporary works and (iii) the presence of these details on various printed sources in the collection also show that Mercer's Hospital may have acquired some, if not all, of its printed music indirectly through subscriptions from the Philharmonic society and /or through various individuals.<sup>18</sup> The Philharmonic Society is one of four musical societies that had a strong association with Mercer's Hospital.<sup>19</sup> The stamp of the Philharmonic Society is present on several printed volumes in the collection.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Guidelines and information regarding the inclusion of the Mercer's printed sources in the RISM printed catalogued were received by email from Sandra Tuppen at the British Library on 9 June 2009

<sup>18</sup> Boydell, *A Dublin Musical Calendar*, p 268

<sup>19</sup> The other three charities include The Charitable Musical Society, The Musical Academy, The Musical Society for the Support of Decay'd and Indigent Musicians or their Families

<sup>20</sup> Some of the printed part-books in the Mercer's collection, namely Barsanti's *Concerti Grossi and Festing's Sonatas for Two Violins and Bass*, Volumes 52 and 53 respectively, possess the stamp of the Philharmonic Society. The stamp is present on parts 1 and 2, and 4 to 10 in volume 52 and parts 2 and 3 only in volume 53. Contained in parts 3 and 4 of the Barsanti is a list of subscribers including the Charitable Music Society, requesting two copies, the Philharmonic Society, Mr Bernard Fitzpartick of Dublin and James MacFarland also of Dublin. Present on the front cover of part 3 volume 52 is written 'Barsanti James MacFarlane of Dublin Esqr. Tromba.'<sup>20</sup> Due to Mercer's association with the Philharmonic Society it is highly likely that the hospital acquired these printed sources as a result of this subscription.

The Mercer’s Hospital music collection comprises an important set of eighteenth-century manuscript and printed part-books. The repertoire contained in the part-books is representative of that performed in eighteenth-century Dublin which concentrated chiefly on the works of Italian Baroque composers such as Corelli and Vivaldi, with Handel’s compositions proving extremely popular. The hospital’s inaugural concert may have been the first occasion on which Handel’s sacred works were performed in Dublin.<sup>21</sup> The establishment of such a series of benefit concerts provided the eighteenth-century musician an opportunity to perform important Handelian works, and music by other European composers. The majority of works in the collection are complete which means these comprehensive sources provide researchers and musicologists with a very clear and full picture of the musical contributions made towards the Mercer’s hospital benefit concerts. The insight the collection affords us to the musical scene in eighteenth-century Dublin demonstrates how music not only served as a form of entertainment but also helped punctuate the occurrence of important social developments within the city such as the opening and continued success of a number of Dublin hospitals.

The collaborative nature of the relationship between my research on the Mercer’s Hospital part-books and RISM is one which has many benefits, for example, applying the RISM cataloguing methodology to my study gives focus to my research. I feel a sense of satisfaction in knowing that the information I am gathering and contributing will be included in the RISM online database. My research project has given RISM the opportunity to widen its scope and to commence gaining access to Irish manuscript material which is one of its main aims.

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<sup>21</sup> Boydell, *Calendar*, p. 15; ‘the first verifiable performance of any of his music in Dublin was excerpts from his operas presented in 1725’