



NABMSA Reviews

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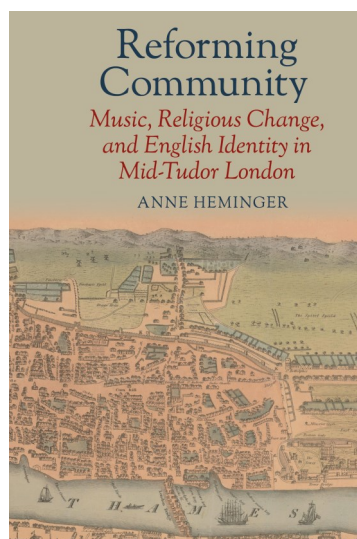
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Núria Bonet, Editor

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Anne Heminger, *Reforming Community: Music, Religious Change, and English Identity in Mid-Tudor London*. Clemson: Clemson University Press, in association with Liverpool University Press, 2025. 256 pages. ISBN 9781638041580 (Hardcover), 9781638041597 (eBook).



Anne Heminger's monograph, *Reforming Community: Music, Religious Change, and English Identity in Mid-Tudor London*, argues effectively for the viability of music as primary evidence in studying ecclesial, devotional, and national culture during what has been called the "Mid-Tudor Crisis," the reigns of Edward VI (1547-1553) and Mary I (1553-1558). An immensely readable book, *Reforming Community* also seeks to draw lines of historical continuity through this tumultuous period of social and religious change based on careful analysis of musical genres and repertoires and of public and private musical practices. Throughout, Heminger is concerned with defining and analyzing the ways such devotional music "confessionalized" Tudor men and women in the theology and prayer practices of the new and old religions. Indeed, she convincingly portrays music as an indispensable way better to understand "how English men and women defined their religious beliefs and their sense of communal identity in the mid-sixteenth century" (p. 9). The study is limited to London parish and livery company records because of their relatively high rate of survival and the possibility of making valid comparisons between musical praxis during a time of significant institutional variation.

Chapters One and Two are concerned with Edward VI's reign, and examine the policies and surviving repertoires of church music and the rise of "metrical song" as a principal medium for religious instruction, prayer, and "confessionalization," respectively. Also advanced is the well-taken argument that the new royal supremacy over the English Church became a particular point of unity around which religious belief and English identity came to be constructed. As evidence, Heminger introduces the liturgical music of the Wanley partbooks (GB-Ob MS. Mus. Sch. e. 420; 1547 x 1549), the Lumley partbooks (GB-Lbl Royal Appendix 74; 1547 x 1552), publisher John Day's *Certaine notes / Mornyng and Evenyng prayer* (1565; originally compiled 1549 x 1553), and printer Richard Grafton's pointed Psalters of 1548 and 1549. She highlights these works' reliance, in part, on Sarum psalm tones and styles not unlike the three Latin-rite "Plainsong" Masses of the mid-century Gyffard partbooks. These examples, plus the detailed analysis of the veritable flood of metrical scriptural texts for singing, are intended to uphold the conclusion that this new music "*sounded* explicitly English" (p. 86; author's emphasis). Examining Christopher Tye's metrical version of the *Actes of the Apostles* (1553), it is argued that "Tye used these explicitly English musical styles in order to enhance the devotional experience of singing his *Actes*" (p. 105). However, it is possible that composers were simply using the techniques and conventions at hand to meet unprecedented liturgical demands, rather than deliberately seeking aural continuity, more less a conscious sense of



“Englishness.” Similarly, the ability of lay listeners to English-language choral music and the perspicacity of singers of tuneful new metrical psalm settings to hear points of stylistic continuity and to distinguish English from other national practices is not easily established.

Chapters Three and Four apply some of the same analytical frameworks to religious music between 1553 and 1558. Under the Catholic queen, Heminger rightly points to a return to the florid polyphonic style of the early Tudor period, the widespread purchase of Latin liturgical polyphony and chant books, and, especially, the proliferation of public processions accompanied by the chants of *Te Deum laudamus* and *Salve festa dies*. She constructs a parallel between the identity-building, privately-sung metrical songs of Edward’s reign and similar functions of Catholic liturgical processions under his half-sister: “Mary’s use of public ceremonial was part of an intentional strategy to realign her subjects with Rome through acts of communal ritual” (p. 199). Still, these processions seem to have been motivated by a fairly wide range of actors; certainly, their general use preceded the 1555-1556 push for formal reunification with the Holy See. But late in the reign, it is largely accurate to say that a processional chant could serve as an “audible symbol of the political realignment of England with Rome” (p. 201). She acknowledges that the lack of extra-liturgical, devotional music from the Marian restoration obviates much sense of continuity on this particular level. At least a brief discussion of the (often audible) deployment in polyphony of equal-note chant *cantus firmus* under Mary might have been a helpful addition.

Chapter Five is devoted to the phenomenon of the “Godly Ballad,” namely printed religious (or politico-religious) verse meant to be read or sung, a popular but ephemeral genre found in England between the 1540s and 1570s. Such ballads—often tendentious in arguing for one side or the other of the deepening Reformed/Catholic divide—also aimed to increase devotion on a popular, non-liturgical level. We are shown convincingly that clergyman-poet Richard Bearde in a sense “created a genre that was intentionally English and Protestant” (p. 120) in his 1553 *A Godly Psalme of Marye Queene*. Heminger weighs the full range of surviving ballads and their “propagandistic focus on religious practices” (p. 239), and points the way for further scholarship. True to the book’s focus on the solidification of English identity, she also observes that these songs “linked religious participation with membership in the national collective” (p. 240). Alongside her multivalent analysis of Tye’s *Actes of the Apostles*, the in-depth treatment of Godly Ballads evinces a very strong command of the materials and contexts of mid-sixteenth century English culture.

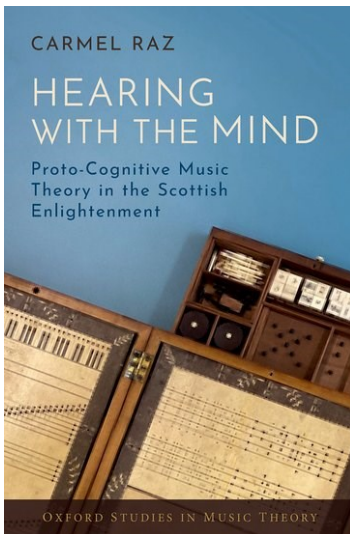
Finally, the Conclusion includes a strong reassertion of the coherent Englishness of religious music under Edward and Mary, a somewhat difficult finding to support. Nonetheless, Heminger has a keen and insightful eye for a musical hermeneutic of continuity rather than one exclusively of rupture. This is a very welcome counterbalance to the dominant historiography of the last forty years, which has emphasized an intrusive, top-down Reformation dismantling an otherwise Catholic England. Finally, her emphasis on the interaction between musical repertoires, musical practice, communal identity, and the developing nature of royal power gives a highly cogent example of how to frame music as essential rather than ancillary evidence.

The volume is nicely produced, with plentiful but not unwieldy footnotes, and an appendix providing (with true generosity) the long list of surviving parish and livery company records from Tudor London, with their current catalogue numbers.

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Carmel Raz, *Hearing with the Mind. Proto-Cognitive Music Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2025. 281 pages. ISBN 9780197786178 (Hardcover), ISBN 9780197786192 (Ebook).



Carmel Raz's *Hearing with the Mind* focuses on the life and musical theories of three authors: John Holden (1729-72), Walter Young (1745-1815) and Anne Young (1756-c.1813). Raz in some of her former articles, already significantly contributed to making these authors far less marginalized than they were: with this monograph she completes the task, bringing new archival evidence about their lives. The thread that runs through the book, holding it together, is John Holden's theory of music perception developed in his *Essay towards a Rational System of Music* (1770). As convincingly argued by Raz, Holden's is a radically new "account of how we perceive music: not its emotional effects, but rather its intrinsic, intramusical relationships, the implicit, the subconscious analysis that allows us to hear chord function or ascertain a given passage's key" (p. 3).

The book is articulated in six chapters, four of which are devoted to Holden. Raz starts with a dive into biographical research, digging out new archival sources that allows her to articulate Holden's persona from of four supposedly different persons: a guild member, a potter, a bell ringer and the father of a student at Glasgow University. The author of the *Rational System of Music* had indeed been a carillonneur in Glasgow (witness the engraved list of people who held the position since 1738), while being a merchant potter and later becoming the music director of the University of Glasgow Chapel choir. Nor does Raz limit her inquiry to the author of the musical treatise, as her biographical chapter tracks down the story of all the Holden family, painting a lively picture of social mobility in eighteenth century Britain. After having determined who John Holden was with facts and figures, the three subsequent chapters plunge us into Holden's theoretical work. As Raz explains, the main interest in Holden's work lies in his psychological theories where he uses the tools developed by the rich stream of eighteenth century British philosophy of the mind (attention, memory, imagination...), blended with a tinge of French music theory, to frame an idiosyncratic theory of music perception. In particular, Holden argues that our mind frames the objects of perception imposing structure onto them: thus, in music perception, he identifies the principle of the *isochronous parcels* whereby he explains how the perception of rhythm and pitch is influenced by an innate stimulus of grouping sounds into equal small units and by the ability of the ear to recognize them. This principle led him to explain, for example, why we perceive rhythm in unaccentuated sequences of beats (think of the tick of the clock): while the accent does not necessarily exist in acoustic reality, it exists in our mind because of our innate attitude at grouping. In the case of the perception of what we nowadays call tonality, Holden believes that our ability to parcel time generates quantitative intervals he calls *modules*, where our memory retains the key note (nowadays tonic) "where it functions as a standard unit in reference to which other pitches are measured and thus perceived" (p. 52).

The musical examples Holden uses throughout his work are almost entirely taken from familiar psalm tunes: this particularity sets the stage for the third chapter of the book, where Raz asks herself the reasons for this peculiar choice. In order to answer the question, Raz briefly traces the history of the transformation of devotional music making in Scottish churches, from the presbyterian reform that replaced polyphonic settings with homophonic psalmody, to the Monymusk revival, that was to reintroduce part singing in Scotland. It is in this context, Raz tells us, that Holden's *A Collection of Church Music* (1766) should be analyzed. Holden published a four-part arrangement of psalms, to be used by Glasgow's Chapel choir under his direction, preceded by a preface aimed at readers interested in music theory, while in his major work he often uses examples drawn from this repertoire in order to make claims about the universality of his found principles. As Raz conveniently notices, Holden is utterly unaware of the positionality of his statements, and in this attitude he joins a fairly numerous cohort of eighteenth-century writers, Rameau among them. Raz also shows how Holden's theoretical grounding bears the traces of the reception of Rameau. The last chapter devoted to Holden's work puts his theories more closely in relation to the Scottish common sense school, tracing the influence of Reid's discussion of memory and attention and in general his approach to sense perception on Holden. Also discussed are Adam Smith's theories about music, where Raz sees traces of influence of Holden's thinking on Smith. More generally Raz points to the fact that the similarities between "Reid, Holden and Smith constitute a compact and suggestive case study in



the circulation of concrete ideas about perception and listening between philosophy and music” (p. 154). This circulation of concrete ideas is further witnessed by the next example Raz brings in her fifth chapter devoted to the *Essay on Rhythmical Measures* (1790) written by the Scottish cleric and musician Walter Young.

The sixth and last chapter of *Hearing with the mind* is devoted to Young’s sister, Anne Young, author of an interesting and lavishly crafted set of musical games. The pages devoted to Anne’s work not only contextualize her pedagogical approach and prowess in music theory, but also make us feel the uncomfortable position of an eighteenth-century woman aiming at something different than mere domestic life. Raz explains how teaching was one of the only honorable occupations for unmarried middle-class woman, and also pens the grim fate of those who lived as governess in aristocratic families, trapped in a limbo between the aristocratic family itself – to which they did not belong – and the servants: foreign bodies wherever they settled. Anne’s interest in pedagogy is related to her work as music teacher and Raz traces back her attitude towards enhancing learning by play to the *Thoughts Concerning Education* where Locke overtly suggested the benefits of rendering the act of learning more enjoyable for children. Another fascinating topic addressed by Raz in examining the rhetorical strategies Anne adopts in the introduction to her work, is the way female science writers sort of crafted a pedagogical niche where their presence and learning could be (at best) tolerated: popularizing science for a children’s audience, sometimes through gamification, and seasoning theoretical knowledge with self-deprecating gestures aimed at reassuring the male reader that – indeed – they claimed neither originality nor authority upon the ideas they presented, were common features.

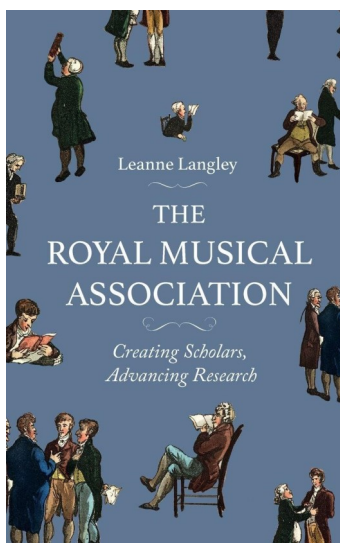
I would like to conclude with a remark on the author’s attitude to anachronistic language and comparisons. Raz ingeniously shelters herself from criticism by closing her introduction with a paragraph devoted to a “defense of anachronistic comparison”, where she anticipates possible criticism and assures the reader that in her pages “the occasional use of anachronism does not lead to distortion of misinterpretation” (p. 16), so, no harm done? The Latins had an adage for this kind of rhetorical expedient: *excusatio non petita, accusatio manifesta*. I must confess I am not, for example, completely convinced that we are doing no harm to our historical sources when we force later views about the classification of knowledge onto them. What do we gain by calling Holden’s theory “proto-cognitive”? What Holden was doing had its own name at the time, and that name was “philosophy of the mind” (just as there were no “scientists”, but there were “natural philosophers”). Those labels were rich in possibilities, they contained both the actuality of how they were practiced, and the range of potentialities to which they could lend themselves. My impression is that once we stick a later label (such as “cognitive studies”) to an ancient author, classifying him or her as a precursor to that specific development of the discipline he or she practiced, we are already closing down the range of potentialities. Words and things entertain complex relationships, severing coeval ties between practices and how they were called is not a neutral endeavor. Anyway, Raz’s introduction shows she has made an informed methodological choice, and her use of anachronism is the result of a well-considered decision, which only shows we disagree on this specific point.

Last but not least, it will be useful to stress that *Hearing with the Mind* has been [published in open access](#): everyone can freely enjoy the reading, so, please, do!

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Leanne Langley, *The Royal Musical Association: Creating Scholars, Advancing Research*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2024. 278 pages. ISBN 9781837650385 (Hardcover), ISBN 9781837652303 (Paperback), ISBN 9781805434887 (eBook EPUB), ISBN 9781805434870 (eBook PDF).



The book *The Royal Musical Association: Creating Scholars, Advancing Research* was published in 2024 to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the Royal Musical Association, having been proposed to its author, Leanne Langley, a decade earlier by the then monograph editor, and now president, of the Royal Musical Association (RMA) – Simon Keefe. In fact, the author has deep ties to the association as a past vice-president and long-standing member (I also acknowledge my own connections to the RMA as past council member, officer and student representative). Nevertheless, this is not a “dutiful company history” but, rather, a work that traces a “broader intellectual history” of British music research and the RMA’s contribution to it. Through an impressive study of the archives of the association, Langley has delivered a detailed, yet engaging, re-telling of the history and purpose of this remarkable institution. The book demonstrates the historical weight of the RMA, an institution that often remains misunderstood. To this day, it is still regularly confronted by the question: “What is it that you actually DO?” (p. 231). After reading the book, one realises that the answer is perhaps not straightforward but all the more

interesting.

The book is structured in six chapters (and a coda) which are arranged in chronological order and cover the main eras of the RMA’s history. The First chapter (1800-74) covers the period of the 19th century before the founding of the association in 1874. The very idea of “musical research” was a challenging idea in nineteenth-century Britain” (p. 1), but the country was experiencing a thriving musical culture dominated by performance. Chapter Two (1874-1924) describes the beginnings of the RMA as a learned society (an “odd sort of music club”, even (p. xi)) which did not focus on concert activities, thus distancing itself from existing musical societies. Through this split from the prevalent performance culture, the RMA established musical research as its own field, rather than as an “add-on” to concerts (p. 23). The beginning of the association also coincided with changes in the understanding of the purpose of British universities and how the discipline of Music might function within it. To anyone familiar with current challenges in UK Higher Education, and specifically those facing Music departments, it is fascinating to realise the similarities with the challenges of the late 19th century:

At issue were questions around the dual nature of music as technical skill and intellectual activity; the purpose of a university and its constituents, including social class and the acceptable uses of music; and the practical arrangements for student attendance, teaching and assessment that would achieve Music’s integration into existing academic structures. All these issues presented challenges to the status quo of UK university organization. But their troublesomeness also suggests a limited understanding of music’s potential and a lack of respect for it as a subject worthy of intellectual effort and academic status. (p. 27)

Chapters Three (1924-44), Four (1945-60) and Five (1960-80) trace the development of music research as an academic endeavour, both through the “educational transition” of the 1940s-60s and towards the institutionalisation of research that was to take place in the 1980s. Much space is devoted to Edward J. Dent, perhaps the most illustrious of the association’s presidents (from 1928 to 1935), who was at one point at the helm of the RMA, the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM), and the International Society for Musical Research (ISMR, which became IMS). He encouraged younger scholars to participate at conferences, leading to an improvement in the overall quality of papers. A more recent debate within the RMA on Dent’s legacy is sadly not mentioned, as Langley’s perspective would have been invaluable. Between 2021 and 2022, a consultation was undertaken to determine whether Dent expressed antisemitic views in his writings, such as in letter to Alban Berg in 1933; it should be determined whether the annual Dent Medal should be renamed. The experts consulted determined that Dent was indeed expressing an “antisemitic and more widely an anti-German attitude, but that he never expressed antisemitic views in his public pronouncements or actions” [2]. In the book, we can read about Dent’s efforts to support researchers fleeing Germany during the 1930s, as well as accusations he received from pro-Nazi scholars of being *supportive* of Jewish scholars. Finally, Chapter Six (1980-2024) covers another four decades of history, although the more interesting questions on the development of the academic discipline and the RMA in general lie in earlier chapters.



The book draws from two main archives: the RMA papers at the British Library (1874-1971) and currently uncatalogued, privately held papers in Manchester; it is also supported by copious secondary sources that provide a critical framework for the discussion of the association's purpose and activities. Thanks to these sources, the decisions, discussions and challenges of the RMA have been preserved through the decades. These primary sources end in 1997 and the author acknowledges the difficulty of retracing the last quarter of a decade with the same precision. In fact, this raises wider concerns about the access that future researchers will have to archival material of learned societies as communications move online and are less likely to be archived for posterity.

The book reminds us that the RMA was not intended to be a *musicological* society, but a *musical* association, founded "FOR THE INVESTIGATION AND DISCUSSION OF SUBJECTS CONNECTED WITH THE ART AND SCIENCE OF MUSIC" (p. 41). Many early papers indeed focused on scientific aspects of music, including acoustics and organology. The addition of the word *Royal* was requested by Edmund Fellowes and granted King George VI in 1944, although the association does not have a royal charter – another potentially confusing aspect regarding the identity of the RMA. The book ends with a short discussion on the legacy of the name, as Langley argues that "Royal", "Musical" and "Association" still encompasses what the RMA stands for. It is perhaps curious, then, that another relatively recent debate on the name of the association is not discussed, as it would reveal some of the contemporary preoccupations and challenges it faces. The 2022 online symposium "RMA Mission, Name, Identity" aimed to reassess the society's wider mission; one of the issues at stake was the word "Royal" and the problematic connotations it may carry. As with the Dent Medal, the name ultimately stayed the same, but the debate once again demonstrated the continuous grappling with identity that the RMA has undergone.

To conclude, *The Royal Musical Association: Creating Scholars, Advancing Research* is a book that will interest a large range of scholars, well beyond those directly involved with the RMA. For member, it may be fascinating to discover the historical lineage of so many of the activities which are still part of the association's remit: the annual dinner (1890s) that became the annual flagship conference (1960s), the *Proceedings* that became the *Royal Musical Association Journal*, the Research Students' Conference (1967), the Dent Medal (1961), international collaborations, etc. For other readers, the book will provide a renewed understanding of the development of a "British brand" of musicology and a historical perspective on the academic discipline of music research. In any case, Langley has written an accessible book which takes great strides towards answering the question: "What is it that you actually DO?".

[1] <https://boydellandbrewer.com/blog/music/tracing-the-150-year-evolution-of-the-royal-musical-association/?v=7885444af42e> (accessed 28 July 2026).

[2] <https://www.rma.ac.uk/grants-awards/the-dent-medal/> (accessed 4 August 2026).

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