

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU)		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 33 (Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies)		
Title of case study: ICS33.02_Transforming perceptions of the composer Johann Christoph Pepusch		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012 - 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Professor Robert Rawson	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Musicology and Historically Informed Performance	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 01/09/2007-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p><i>Venus and Adonis</i> by the Berlin-native Johann Christoph Pepusch (1667-1752) is the oldest surviving operatic work in English with a complete set of performing parts. Professor Robert Rawson's research re-established this previously largely forgotten work as 'a milestone in the history of English opera' and significantly shifted perceptions of Pepusch as a composer. The award-winning, world-premiere commercial recording of <i>Venus and Adonis</i> is now being heard by global audiences for the first time in over 300 years, to widespread critical acclaim. It has had a significant impact on cultural life; repositioned Pepusch within musical heritage; and brought new insights not only into Pepusch's work, but also notably that of Handel; benefitting audiences for classical music, broadcasters and professional musicians.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Impact is underpinned by Rawson's research related to the composer Johann Christoph Pepusch (1667-1752) realised through both scholarly publications and historically-informed performance—with performance integral to his research processes and outcomes. He is director, co-founder, double bassist and plays viola da gamba in the acclaimed baroque ensemble The Harmonious Society of Tickle-Fiddle Gentlemen, who explore the neglected repertoire of public concert life in England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. His research on Pepusch has re-established the composer's reputation and positioned him as one of the foremost composers in England in the period between Purcell and Handel. Although popular at the time, Pepusch has traditionally been seen as 'a learned, but dry composer' (Hawkins, 1776), who sat in opposition to Handel's innovative spirit. Rawson's research shows him to be a pioneering figure of the generation before Handel (traditionally considered to be a musical gap) and demonstrated that the two men were likely collaborators.</p> <p>Rawson's engagement with Pepusch began with the recording <i>Johann Christoph Pepusch: Concertos and Overtures for London</i> (2012) performed by The Harmonious Society of Tickle-Fiddle Gentlemen. Comprised of six of Pepusch's previously unrecorded concertos (one of which is probably the earliest English concerto to survive complete), this re-established Pepusch's reputation as one of the foremost composers of concertos in England in the first decades of the eighteenth century. Archival research by Rawson determined a representative sample of works, and informed by primary manuscript sources he prepared all scores and parts, and led the rehearsal and recording process. An examination of eighteenth-century German literature confirmed Pepusch's early reputation as an innovative composer of concertos, and informed Rawson's liner notes [3.1a]. The archival and historical research that underpinned the project also informed Rawson's 2020 book chapter "<i>After the Italian manner</i>"—<i>Finger, Pepusch and the first concertos in England</i> [3.1b].</p> <p>Following this recording, Rawson's modern edition and world-premiere recording of Pepusch's 1715 English-language masque <i>Venus and Adonis</i> [3.2a], again performed by The Harmonious Society of Tickle-Fiddle Gentleman, further challenged perceptions of Pepusch as a composer and positioned <i>Venus and Adonis</i> within the early history of opera in the English language. <i>Venus</i></p>		

and Adonis is the oldest surviving operatic work in English with a complete set of performing parts (there are no surviving sets of parts for any of Handel's operas). All-sung Italian opera had struggled to make an impact in London in the first decade of the eighteenth-century, and attempts to present all-sung opera in English had previously been unsuccessful. *Venus and Adonis* represented the most substantial attempt of the period to reconcile opera to the English language by making the new Italian style and forms more accessible to English audiences.

Archival work by Rawson directly influenced the preparation for the recording, providing context on the gender of the soloists (the male lead was originally sung by a woman *en travesti*) and the number and distribution of performers and instruments. An important discovery was both the compositional approach to the recitatives and related issues of performance practice. Rawson demonstrates how Pepusch adapted his approach to make recitatives more palatable for his English audience—who were notorious for their dislike of *secco* recitative (and most English composers of the time were extremely limited in their engagement with it). This research reveals how Pepusch maintained the fast-paced, dramatic action which recitatives enable, while also appeasing the public's tastes, by inserting tuneful *arioso* passages within those recitatives [3.2a] [3.2b] [3.2c]. With this, Rawson demonstrates that *Venus and Adonis* provided a clear model for Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, his first dramatic work in the English language, and influenced Handel's own approach to recitative in English [3.2a] [3.2c]. Rawson's work also challenges the myth that Pepusch and Handel were rivals, with overlaps revealed in the two men's lives painting a picture of cooperation and collaboration [3.2c].

3. References to the research

3.1 (a) Rawson, R. (2012) *Johann Christoph Pepusch, Concertos and Overtures for London*. RAM 1109, 2012 [Recording and accompanying liner notes]. Performed by The Harmonious Society of Tickle-Fiddle Gentlemen. Rawson, R. director and double bass. Includes liner notes by Rawson. Reviewed by Murphy, E. (2014) in *Eighteenth Century Music*, 11(2), 312-314. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/S1478570614000190. Submitted REF 2014. Available CCCU on request. (b) Rawson, R. (2020) "'After the Italian manner"—Finger, Pepusch and the first concertos in England,' in *Musical exchanges between Britain and the Continent, c.1500-1800*, edited by Bryan White and John Cunningham, Woodbridge: Boydell, 2020. Available CCCU on request.

3.2 (a) Rawson, R. (2016) *Johann Christoph Pepusch, Venus and Adonis (masque in two acts), 1715*, Ramée 1502, 2016. [Recording and accompanying liner notes]. Performed by The Harmonious Society of Tickle-Fiddle Gentlemen. Rawson, R. director and double bass. Supported in part by a Handel Institute Research Award in January 2015 <https://handelinstitute.org/award/research-awards/>. Submitted REF 2. (b) Rawson, R. 2018. 'For the sake of fullness of music in the choir'—performance practice and the double bass at the Kroměříž Court'. *Historical Performance*. 1 (1), pp. 119-147. Includes discussion of Pepusch's use of double bass in recitatives. <https://repository.canterbury.ac.uk/item/887w1/-for-the-sake-of-fullness-of-music-in-the-choir-performance-practice-and-the-double-bass-at-the-krom-court>. (c) Rawson, R. (2017) *Recording Pepusch's Venus and Adonis (1715) A Tercentenary Metamorphosis*. The Handel Institute Newsletter. pp. 4-6. Available CCCU on request.

Venus and Adonis won The German Record Critics' Award (Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik) (2016) in the Opera 1 category, one of the most prestigious awards for recorded music in Europe.

4. Details of the impact

An important strand of Rawson's research is to ensure the wider public gain a clearer and more varied picture of musical culture and repertoire in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and to revitalise and restore neglected work of that period. This is exemplified in *Venus and Adonis* which brings a largely forgotten piece of musical history to an extended audience for the first time in 300 years. The recording has changed perceptions of Pepusch, revealing him to be a pioneering composer of considerable originality; established *Venus and Adonis* within the

history of English opera; and brought new insights not only in relation to Pepusch, but also engendered new thinking about the work of Handel. Beneficiaries include broadcasters, critics, musicians and broader classical music audiences, both radio listeners and recording consumers.

Benefitting cultural life. An indicator of public and industry reception of the recording is given by its critical and audience reception, with the sheer volume of airplay, coverage by the music press, awards and accolades, and customer reviews testifying to its impact on cultural life. The recording was awarded The German Record Critics' Award (Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik) (2016) in the Opera 1 category, one of the most prestigious awards for recorded music in Europe. This prize is decided by 156 judges drawn from music critics from across Germany, Austria and Switzerland, who make the award outside the confines of commercial pressure [5.1]. The judging panel said: 'It is hard to decide what is to be praised the most in this recording [...] The mastery with which the composer, [...] or the melancholy richness of the arias and the duets, or the three soloists accompanied by a group of good-humoured 'fiddle-ticklers,' who portray the enchanting and tragically ending love-entanglement with ease. A gem of baroque music theatre.' [translated from German] [5.1]

The international music press gave *Venus and Adonis* a series of accolades, including Critics Choice in Opera News (currently the largest-circulation classical-music magazine in North America – March 2017); 4 stars from French classical music magazine, *Classica* (Oct 2016); highly recommended in *Limelight*, 'Australia's premier arts platform' (Jun 2017); one of Gramophone's Best New Recordings (online Nov 2016); one of four 'Discoveries of 2016' in *Note-1 Musik* (Germany – Dec 2016); CD of the week for German public radio broadcaster BR Klassik (Sept 2016); and the influential American online music database AllMusic's Editor's Choice (Oct 2016) and one of their 'Best of 2016'. State-of-the-art 24-bit streaming services also gave it commendations, including being the 'Listening Tip' on HiRes Audio (Sept 2016) and featuring on Qobuz [5.2]. Additional reviews include *The Observer* (Nov 2017); *BBC Music Magazine* (Oct 2018); *Fanfare*, USA (Jan/Feb 2017); *American Record Guide* (Jan/Feb 2017); *Crescendo*, Germany's largest classical music magazine (Sept 2016); *Rondo*, Germany (Sept 2016), and in *Le Soir*, Belgium, where it reached number three in their readers' poll (Sept 2016). [5.3].

Venus and Adonis entered the official UK classical specialist chart at number 20 (16-22 Sept 16) [5.4]. Physical sales total over 1,000 and streaming figures totalling more than 50,000 to November 2020. The recording, excerpts of the recording, and related features continue to amass airplay with approximately 11 hours on major stations across Europe and the US between 2016-2020, including: BBC Radio 3, Radio Classique (France), Radio SRF2 Kultur (Switzerland), Radio 4 (Netherlands), RTBF Musiq 3 (Belgium), BR Klassik (Germany), France Musique, WDR3 (Germany) and RAI 3 (Italy). *Johann Christoph Pepusch: Venus and Adonis: Overture* is on the current playlist for WQXR, the US's most listened to classical music station [5.5]. Customer reviews give an indication of its impact at the level of the individual listener: 'A charming Baroque work which is more than just a historical curiosity' (Amazon 8 Nov 16); 'Wonderful recorded sound, fantastic soloists and a tight, all-star baroque band. Essential for lovers of early English opera!' (AllMusic, 27 Oct 16); 'The Harmonious Society of Tickle-Fiddle Gentlemen have shown that Pepusch is, at his best, capable of first-rate and inventive music. [...] When I finished my first listen I was left with one question: why on earth hasn't this piece been recorded before?' (Amazon, 30 Sept 16) [5.6].

Changing perceptions of Pepusch and repositioning *Venus and Adonis* within Musical Heritage. Rawson's integration of performance and scholarly work has raised awareness of Pepusch and his work, contributing to a growing understanding and appreciation of Pepusch as a composer by broadcasters, critics, and broader classical music audiences. Traditionally the era between Purcell and Handel was considered a musical 'black hole' (Gramophone, 2017), with Pepusch having the reputation as an uninspired composer. The recording of *Venus and Adonis* has changed the way in which early English opera and Pepusch's work are seen and has established the work as a milestone in the history of English opera. Rawson's research on Pepusch was translated into an hour-long programme, *The Extraordinary Life and Music of Johann Christoph Pepusch*, for BBC Radio 3's *Early Music Show* (Feb 2019 repeated May 2020),

with a shortened version still available as a podcast [5.7]. Rawson featured alongside presenter Lucie Skeaping (BBC Radio 3 weekly listeners approximately 2,000,000) in a programme that challenged traditional perceptions of Pepusch and examined his contribution to musical history. Rawson also discussed Pepusch in an interview with Sunday Baroque (March 2017), a US-syndicated weekly radio show with quarter of a million listeners weekly across the US. Here he positioned the composer in relation to Handel and drew attention to the quality of Pepusch's compositions. The success of the recording in changing perceptions of Pepusch as a composer and establishing his place in musical history is also evidenced in the work's critical reception [5.2] [5.3].

- '[T]his premiere recording is a success [...] and completes the accomplishment of establishing this important link of English Baroque music.' [Classica, France, 2016]
- '[T]his excellent recording reveals that Pepusch is a significantly better composer than is normally assumed.' [Gramophone, 2016].
- 'It's an immediately engaging and gloriously tuneful piece' [Observer, 2017].
- '[H]ow can this melodious and memorable music have languished [...] Venus and Adonis isn't just a milestone in the history of English opera, it's a charming work that cries out to be seen as well as heard.' [Limelight, Australia, 2017]
- 'It's a gem [...] with some moments giving young Handel a run for his money.' [BBC Music Magazine, 2018]
- 'We expect that Pepusch will finally be conferred the title of a true lyrical composer and not just the arranger of popular tunes in a Threepenny farce.' [Qobuz, France, 2016]
- 'We can now enjoy a piece of forgotten musical history. "Venus & Adonis" is, however, not only a real discovery for music history, but also musically a pearl of baroque composing art.' [Klass Aktuell 2016, no. 3].
- 'This recording does at last put Pepusch and his work back into proper importance.' [American Record Guide, 2017].

Impact on professional musicians and conductors. This repositioning of Pepusch and the recording *Venus and Adonis* have revealed the significance of the work to professional musicians and composers. John Butt (Musical Director of world-leading baroque ensemble, Dunedin Consort) writes: 'The new realisation of this excellent operatic work has been a revelation for all who are interested in dramatic music from the early eighteenth century [...] it opens our eyes to the potential richness of English opera after Purcell and Blow and provides much more than just a worthy parallel to Handel's later achievements in English oratorio (and is indeed an extremely rich partner for the latter's *Acis and Galatea*). Not only does this discovery for me [...] greatly enhance my knowledge of the very best aspects of the English scene around the time of Handel's arrival, but it also has made me rethink the possibilities for performing (and potentially staging) early dramatic music in the English language.' [5.8]

Additionally, *Venus and Adonis* has relevance to performance practices, not only in relation to Pepusch, but it also provides vital clues for interpretation of Handel's work, for which there are no surviving original performance parts. This is evidenced in part by comments in reviews of *Venus and Adonis* in classical music publications. Gramophone highlights 'several fascinating parallels with Handel's *Acis and Galatea*'; American Record Guide references Rawson 'making the clear case for Pepusch's work as a model for Handel'; and Limelight writes 'it's a clear precursor of Handel's *Acis and Galatea*'. [5.2] [5.3] The use and performance of recitatives, which Rawson demonstrates Pepusch adapts to make more palatable for an English audience, has relevance to the work of musicians and conductors. John Butt writes: 'Rawson's research presents what he has learned from the original sources of *Venus and Adonis* [...] Not only does this information provide information on the style and balance of instruments, it also provides extremely good evidence of continuo practices of the time, particularly the almost constant use of the double bass in recitative. [...] While there have long been suggestions that Handel followed this practice at least some of the time, this recording provides excellent evidence for an historically-informed continuo practice that is very profitably applied elsewhere. Indeed having done this for Bach for many years, I am now, as a result of this recording, now beginning to apply some of the same practice to Handel.' [5.8]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Collated material related to *Venus and Adonis* receiving The German Record Critic's Award (Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik) (2016) in the Opera 1 category.

5.2 Collated awards/accolades for *Venus and Adonis*.

5.3 Collated music press reviews for *Venus and Adonis*.

5.4 *Venus and Adonis* in the UK specialist classical music charts

<https://www.officialcharts.com/charts/specialist-classical-chart/20160916/specclass/>

5.5 Collated broadcast data related to *Venus and Adonis*.

5.6 Collated audience reviews from Amazon and AllMusic.

5.7 PDF of listing for The Early Music Show. *The Extraordinary Life and Music of Johann Christoph Pepusch*, BBC Radio 3, Sunday 3 Feb 19; and 30 min podcast can be found here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0002c8z>.

5.8 Testimonial from Musical Director, Dunedin Consort.