

O Let Us Howle Some Heavy Note: Music for Witches, the Melancholic, and the Mad on the Seventeenth-Century English Stage

By Amanda Eubanks Winkler

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In the 17th century, harmonious sounds were thought to represent the well-ordered body of the obedient subject, and, by extension, the well-ordered state; conversely, discordant, unpleasant music represented both those who caused disorder (murderers, drunkards, witches, traitors) and those who suffered from bodily disorders (melancholics, madmen, and madwomen). While these theoretical correspondences seem straightforward, in theatrical practice the musical portrayals of disorderly characters were multivalent and often ambiguous.

O Let Us Howle Some Heavy Note focuses on the various ways that theatrical music represented disorderly subjects?those who presented either a direct or metaphorical threat to the health of the English kingdom in 17th-century England. Using theater music to examine narratives of social history, Winkler demonstrates how music reinscribed and often resisted conservative, political, religious, gender, and social ideologies.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Winkler's book is an outstanding contribution to the social and political history of musical theater in London from the age of Shakespeare to the rage for Italian opera in the first decade of the eighteenth century." ?Renaissance Quarterly

"... In keeping with the instability of the seventeenth-century English stage, Amanda Eubanks Winkler refuses to bind her subversive characters in neat packages. I find her observations of negotiated trends, which do not always fit into tidy theoretical boxes, honest conclusions of an extremely complex period of English cultural life.... Whether onstage or within Winkler’s text, these unruly characters refuse to be absolutely contained." ?MEGAN McFadden, Vol. 13 2009

"... an outstanding contribution to the social and political history of musical theater in London from the age of Shakespeare to the rage for Italian opera in the first decade of the eighteenth century." ?Linda Phyllis Austern, Northwestern University, Renaissance Quarterly, Vol. 61.1 Spring 2008

"[T]he book [is] of great interest to anyone who wishes to explore the complex ways in which the assumptions and expectations of society conditioned the representation and reception of madness and witchcraft in the 17th-century English theatre, and the crucial role music played in this interaction." ?Early Music

"Seventeenth-century England provides an outstanding backdrop for this study, which focuses on theatrical characters generally associated with mental disorder.... Opera scholars should find this work helpful, and specialists in gender studies will gain much from Winkler's discussion of stereotypes, role reversals, pathological diagnoses, and so on.... Recommended." ?Choice

From the Publisher
A multidisciplinary study of the uses of music in 17th-century English theater.

About the Author

Amanda Eubanks Winkler is Assistant Professor of Fine Arts at Syracuse University. She specializes in early music.

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