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"The Early Mandolin: The Mandolino and the Neapolitan Mandoline." By James Tyler and Paul Sparks

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James Tyler and Paul Sparks. *The Early Mandolin: the Mandolino and the Neapolitan mandoline*. Early Music Series, 9. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. x. 186p.

When I acquired a 1734 mandolino in the nineteen-thirties, having somehow raised fifteen shillings (about \$1.85) for it, I was thrilled to have my first historical instrument, but had no idea that such a tiny, frail thing could have been used for real music making. Nor did I suspect that I would eventually develop such an interest in, and enjoyment of, the whole family of "little lutes," of which the mandolino is such a prominent member.

Consideration of these instruments is bedevilled by names, as is so often the case: mandore, mandora, mandola, bandurria, bandola, pandurina, Milanese mandolin, mandolino, mandoline, even soprano lute — how can some semblance of order and reason be brought to the subject.

Tyler and Sparks approach the problem in a practical way, by concentrating on the Italian branch of the family, settling on the names mandolino and mandoline: mandolino because this was the commonest name of the classic gut-string instrument in its heyday, and mandoline for the violin-tuned Neapolitan variety, the French word being chosen because of the development of such a large repertory for the instrument in France. The word mandolin is used where a non-specific meaning is required.

The book accordingly is in two parts, *The Mandolino* by Tyler and *The Mandoline* by Sparks, each part following the same plan. Origins are outlined, followed by a historical survey covering, in the case of the mandolino, the late sixteenth to the late eighteenth century, and from ca. 1740 to the early nineteenth century for the mandoline. Practical information about the instruments, covering physical features, stringing, tunings, playing techniques, surviving examples, and useful addresses for practical requirements make up the bulk of each section, ending with brief descriptions of other related instruments. The appendices listing primary published and MS music sources are invaluable and quite surprisingly large. Even so, there must be a good deal of material yet to be discovered — seventeen MS sources containing over two hundred pieces for mandolino were recently found in Münster by Stephen Morey just in time for inclusion in Appendix I.

Tyler has a problem in that the discussion of origins has to embrace the whole field of "little lutes" but his brief requires him to concentrate on one variety, albeit the most important one for the practicing Early Musician. So several tracks go cold and anyone interested in the French mandore or the larger mandores and mandolas has to look elsewhere for fuller information (much of it provided by Tyler himself, in *Early Music* 9, pp. 22-31).

Mandolinos came with four, five, or six courses; the Stradivari templates that have survived show that all these configurations were among the workshop's output. In the second half of the eighteenth century the six-course instrument seems to have become predominant — in part, I suspect, because it could function as an alternative to the violin-tuned mandoline. Fouchetti (1771) pointed out that the six-course instrument made fewer demands on position playing than the violin-tuned variety. Be that as it may, the six-course mandolino had an active life into the twentieth century.

Stimulating though discussion of origins and physical characteristics may be, Tyler's chapters on the mandola/mandolino in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are the heart of Part I. He presents a mass of information about the large surviving repertoire and has also discovered many mandolino players amongst personnel lists of various Italian musical establishments, most of whom were also lute or theorbo players. As Tyler says, this should encourage present-day lutenists to be adventurous.

The chapter on practical information for players and makers covers tuning and stringing, playing techniques (finger plucking, not plectrum), available recordings of true mandolinos (three!), some suggested examples of surviving instruments to act as models for reproduction, and the addresses of some journals, makers, and gut or nylon string suppliers, the latter being by no means comprehensive.

Appendix I is a unique source of information about the surviving repertoire and opens up a large field for future research. A point that could have been stressed is that there are also a great many sonatas of the period for violin etc. that can very well be played on the mandolino. If precedent for this is needed, there is a MS in the Bibliothèque de L'Arsenal, Paris with the title "Sonatino per Mandolino e Cembalo del Sign. Scarlatti," which is one of his treble and bass "keyboard" sonatas written out as separate parts. It goes very well on the mandolino, with harpsichord, as do other Scarlatti pieces of the same genre.

The second appendix contains the music examples, which include the opening forty bars of the aria "Transit aetas" from Vivaldi's *Juditha triumphans* (1716), with obbligato mandolino, and a complete, newly discovered, and very attractive "Sonata per Armandolino" by Giovanni Battista Sammartini.

In Part II we enter a different world of emigré Neapolitan musicians settling in France in the later eighteenth century and promoting the new "mandoline à quatre cordes," tuned like the popular violin, in fifths. Many of these taught other instruments, such as the violin, cello, guitar, and par-dessus de viole. Some continued to teach the mandolino as well, which was referred to as the "mandoline à six cordes." The new instrument was also promoted in Britain and Central Europe, one outcome of this activity being exemplified by the following passage from Samuel Pegge's *Anonymania* (1796):

When the instrument now coming into use is called a Mandarin, we are led to think it to be something used by the Chinese Lords or Mandarins; but the truer pronunciation is *Mandolin*, for I suppose it has no connection with the Chinese nation, but rather is an Italian instrument, or *citara*; and the correct way of writing and pronouncing is *mandola*, which, in Altieri's Dictionary is explained by a *cittern*. *Mandola* signifies in Italian an *Almond*; which shews that it takes its name from the figure of its belly, which is much like an almond. (p. 49)

Names are not just a modern problem.

An astonishing quantity of music composed between ca. 1760 and ca. 1800, printed and MS, chamber, concerted, song and aria accompaniments and instruction books has been unearthed by Sparks in the five years he has devoted to this task. All the material is contained in Appendix III, which, like Tyler's, is invaluable and unique. The problem of which type of mandolin a composer may have intended after ca. 1760 is touched on but it would have been helpful to have had somewhere in the book examples of the chord patterns that are characteristic of the two instruments, bearing in mind that their ranges are identical.

Sparks had an easier task than Tyler in discussing the origins of this instrument, because only a little circumstantial evidence seems to exist and there is not much to be said with any confidence. Two factors seem to have underlain its development; the presence in Naples of "long-lutes" of Arabian origin, with wire strings, and the great popularity of the violin

at that time. The outcome was this four-course violin tuned newcomer, which was essentially a cut down "long-lute," and it was presented as a violin alternative. The mandolino was unaffected by this, except that, to judge by the tutors published in France, playing with a plectrum in mandoline fashion became acceptable. Some mandolinos were chopped about to convert them into pseudo mandolines, just as guitars were converted into chitarra battentes in the same period.

Fouchetti (1771) in his tutor for both instruments wrote:

This instrument (the mandolino) is not as difficult to play as the four-course mandoline, because one doesn't have to move up the neck so often. Also it is preferred to the other type at present, and is considered more harmonious, though this is a question of taste. (p. 91)

The distinctive constructional features of the mandoline, deep body, bent soundboard to increase string pressure on the bridge and tendency to florid decoration, are shared with the chitarra battente, which developed in the same area of Italy at the same time. The modern chitarra battente and Neapolitan mandolin are strung with a mixture of gut, brass, and sometimes silk strings, often with the fourth course octaved, and it was of much lighter construction than the modern instrument, with all that that implies for touch, responsiveness, etc. (Whether similar mixed stringing was used on the chitarra battente is a thought that I have long harbored.)

By the end of the century the so-called Cremonese mandolin was developed, about which Bortolazzi (1805) wrote:

There are gut strings, as on the violin, but much finer. The double wire strings, which one meets with on some mandolins, are no good; they give a far less lovely sound than the former sort . . . those with eight strings are called Neapolitan; alone, these sound unpleasant, with an overly-hard, zither-like sound, so we are left as before with the newly invented four string mandolin — the Cremonese or Brescian — which is pleasing and which possesses a full song-like tone. (p. 110)

Bortolazzi's *Anweisung die mandoline*, from which this quotation comes, was published in Leipzig, and the author gave concerts in Vienna, where the mandolino, Cremonese mandolin, and Neapolitan mandolin co-existed.

After a full survey of the mandoline in France, Britain, Prague, Vienna, and Germany, Sparks gives a comprehensive guide to playing the instrument, based on late eighteenth-century tutors, most of which were published in Paris. This is followed by a brief discussion of suitable accompanying instruments and advice about modern strings for a reproduction instrument. There are two incomplete music examples in Appendix IV, an extensive bibliography, and, praise be, an index.

The tutors give valuable information about plectrum use and technology, and the practice of *tremolo* (a trill on one note) in the eighteenth century. In general only white notes were trilled, metrically and with an odd number of strokes. Those who used a continuous trill were contemptuously called *Pétacheux*, after the firework known as a squib. Leoné advised against much use of *tremolo* and discussed other ways of treating white notes by adding turns, alternating octaves, ostinato figures, and arpeggios. The question of *tremolo* does not arise seriously with the mandolino, and it is noticeable that white notes are not found in music expressly for it.

Sparks mentions that mandolins [*sic*] were included in the Académie des Beaux-Arts orchestra in Lyons ca.1760, to reinforce the upper parts; this echoes a practice with the mandolino that goes back to the 1589 Florentine *Intermedii* and probably earlier, and which works well in instrumental groups for *balli* and other seventeenth-century dance music. Dancers comment that the instrument's sharp attack helps them.

The earliest reference to the mandolino in Britain is given by Sparks as 1707, but the Talbot MS (ca. 1690) contains a page originally headed "Mandoline." This was crossed out by Talbot and "Arch-Lute Mr Shaw's" substituted, with detailed measurements. It is one of life's frustrations that this happened. He had previously recorded a "Mandore" and "arch-Mandore" and it seems that he intended to record a mandolino as well, but for some reason failed to do so.

On incidental matter that seems to fall between two stools (or perhaps between two authors?) is the nature of a "liuto" in eighteenth-century Italy. Tyler says that the name was used for the large mandola tuned to the modern guitar intervals from E-e'. According to Sparks the eight-course Roman mandolone was "usually referred to as a liuto." The large mandola are, of course, analogous to the German gallichone/mandores, for which the E-e' tuning was used as well as the original D-d'. Following Italian Baroque lute practice, "liuto" (Tyler's large mandola) music was written on treble and bass staves, the treble being for solo

passages and sounding an octave below written pitch. Music written for "mandolone" seems to have been just a single-line bass, and it is unclear whether "mandolone" refers to a large mandoline or the Roman instrument created by Gaspar Ferrari.

Hopefully a companion to this volume will eventually be written, dealing comprehensively with the French mandore and the large *mandores luthée* of central and northern Europe, and their interrelationship with the large Italian versions. Then the "alternative lute" story will be complete. Meantime this book, directed at players, scholars, and potential or actual makers of mandolinos and mandolines fulfills its purpose admirably.

Donald Gill