for social agency are not a main concern of the book, but Larson does render the connections explicit in her introduction and conclusion. Specifically, she wonders about textual conversation's 'potential for solipsism and isolation', likening a blogger addressing 'an unseen and anonymous internet audience' to Mary Sidney Herbert's psalmist talking 'to God or herself' (166). For Larson, though, 'even in its seemingly most solitary manifestations' conversation is 'concerned with mediating relationships between self and other' (167). Academic research concerned with early literature itself constitutes perhaps one of the most 'solitary manifestations' of conversation. Opposing the critical tendency to foreground the differences between early modern culture and our own, Ian McAdam recently asked, 'must we not rest until we have rendered the early modern historical moment completely alien to us' and 'are not our *identifications* with early modern culture the intellectual gestures that make our professional activity the most compelling, especially as we share the results of our research in the classroom'?[1] Larson's conclusion signals agreement with this position, and in my opinion too placing early modern culture in conversation with our own is a final strength of this book, even if one that is relegated to a relatively minor framing device for the study.

Notes

1 Ian McAdam, Rev. of Kristen Poole, *Supernatural Environments in Shakespeare's England: Spaces of Demonism, Divinity, and Drama, Early Theatre* 15.1 (2012), 241.

Christopher Marsh. *Music and Society in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp 609 + 1 audio CD.

Katherine Hunt
Birkbeck, University of London
Early Theatre 16.1 (2013), 193–6
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.12745/et.16.1.15

In this important new book Christopher Marsh uncovers the variety of music made and heard in early modern England, the 'sheer vibrancy of its musical culture' (1). Historical surveys of the period have overlooked music, and even musicological studies often ignore the music that English people heard most

frequently: psalms, ballads, and bells. Marsh listens to this music alongside its more highbrow counterparts, giving a new perspective on early modern auditory culture. Through careful study of social history, mining of literary texts, and thorough analysis of music and the traces it has left in object, image, text, and sound, Marsh builds up a picture of the rich texture of music performed and listened to by all levels of early modern English society.

The book begins with an introduction to the musical culture of the period before devoting substantial chapters to musicians both occupational and recreational, to ballads and balladry, dancing, psalm singing, and bell ringing. The author marshals a great variety of source material, from quarter session records to ballad illustrations, making frequent and excellent use of the REED series. His work is meticulously researched: the chapter on occupational musicians, for example, draws on information about more than a thousand individuals to give an intricate picture of the kinds of lives they led. An audio CD, produced by Marsh with the Dufay Collective and containing forty-eight tracks of music discussed in the text, is a crucial part of the book. As well as ballads, psalms, and dance tunes the CD includes more obscure forms, including an early change-ringing method and an example of 'rough music': sounds which are lost today, and therefore all the more striking to our ears.

The 'rough music' on the CD replicates that played in Burton-upon-Trent in 1618 as a form of punishment to a young couple accused of sexual misconduct. The shouts and bangings clatter away with spoons, candlesticks, and frying pans, all employed to create a cacophonous redress of indiscretions that was, as Marsh suggests, 'a customary and communal response to the breach of norms' (47). Of course, this music had no score but Marsh and his collaborators have recreated the noise from the Star Chamber records of the incident as well as similar instances mentioned in, for example, the REED volume for Kent.

The inclusion of such sound alongside more conventional music is an indication of Marsh's wider interest in the early modern soundscape. Historians are becoming increasingly interested in the details and implications of how people 'heard their worlds', as one recent study has put it.[1] Historical sounds may be lost but music is more recoverable, and Marsh's close listening both to music and to sounds, like rough music, that we might now categorize as noise is a welcome addition to this developing discipline. Indeed, Marsh's argument is at its most engaging when it closely integrates his listening experience. Putting sounds to work in this way is extremely effective, particularly as the CD allows us, the readers, to listen in as well.

Perhaps the most extraordinary track on the CD is a congregational rendition of Psalm 29. Scholars, notably Nicholas Temperley in his *The Music of the English Parish Church* (Cambridge, 1979), have discussed English psalm singing, but like other music it has received surprisingly little attention from historians of the Reformation. Marsh builds on Temperley's description of the sound. The psalms were sung very slowly, each note taking up to three seconds, with the lethargic pace all but obliterating rhythm and metre. Marsh makes a convincing case for the prevalence of 'lining out', in which a parish clerk would sing the line faster and more tunefully before it was repeated by the congregation. Reading a description of the sound one expects to agree with Elias Hall's dismay, noted in his *Psalm-singer's Compleat Companion* of 1706, at how singers 'roar, some whine, some creak like wheels of carts' (433; quote from Hall, *The Psalm-singer's Compleat Companion*, 1706, p.2). The psalm we hear on the CD, however, tells a different story. It sounds very, very strange. Yes, it's droning and discordant, and the lack of rhythm has a deadening effect. But it also sounds communal, inclusive, and even haunting at times. Surprisingly moving, the psalms transcend their detractors' criticisms. Marsh situates psalmody amidst other contemporary music and emphasizes that this was a form of music 'owned and influenced' by 'England's unexceptional Christians' (440). The psalms were participatory and popular, so much so that they resisted attempts from above to change how they were sung; their odd, mournful sound was ubiquitous in the musical landscape of the period.

Questions of auditory attention and musical memory are also key to the book. Ballad tunes were familiar and often reused, and could themselves carry meaning. Melodies, Marsh argues, 'were capable of reinforcing, altering and destabilising textual messages in a compelling manner' (289). A 'palimpsest' of a tune's previous uses contained in the melody itself 'added depth to the meanings of a text and linked it with all the ballads for which it had previously been appointed' (299). A particular tune's associations could be exploited as in, for example, the use of the tune known as 'The Pudding' for a ballad celebrating the accession of William and Mary. The melody had been used for several jolly, innuendo-filled, good-time ballads in the early and mid-seventeenth century. Associating William with this well-liked tune was, Marsh suggests, an attempt to challenge some of the negative assumptions about him: that he was aloof and sexually inadequate, for example. Such conclusions must remain speculative; we have no way of knowing for sure whether this was the intention behind the choice of melody, nor whether it

was received as such. Still, Marsh's analysis of the tunes and words of several examples makes a convincing case that this area deserves further scrutiny.

Music had great potential to destabilize religious, class, gender, or other norms in early modern England. Marsh considers the ways in which music mediated human relationships, a strand that is particularly developed in his discussion of the negotiation of class boundaries in the period. Rejecting the two-tier model of culture originally proposed by Peter Burke in *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 1978), Marsh adds his voice to the revisionist argument to show how 'low' and 'high' culture intermingled in a constant ebb and flow and how music, in particular, created sometimes unexpected forms of collectivity and community.

People are at the centre of this study, and Marsh shows how individuals could personify the ambiguous position of music in early modern society. Musicians and dancing masters, while often looked down upon as servants, were simultaneously praised for their skill, put in privileged and complicated relationships with pupils who were their social superiors and, in the case of male teachers and female students, able to cross gender boundaries in ways that sometimes caused scandal. Ballads and country dancing were considered part of the culture of the citizenry and peasantry but were enjoyed in the period by people of all classes. What emerges from these pages is a noisy world, one in which music was as readily able to subvert as to underpin identity.

This book provides a long overdue survey of the popular music of the period and its social context. It covers a great deal of ground and there are many tantalizing points on which Marsh doesn't have time to dwell: the role of music in the theatre, the reuse of images (just like tunes) in printed ballads, the relationship of popular to court music, and a deeper engagement with problems in sound studies are just some of the themes mentioned but not developed. If this is a failure it is an extremely fertile one, suggesting many avenues for further research. The book will surely prompt new ideas from historians and scholars of literature, theatre, music, and material culture. As recreation, as worship, as social comment and social mediation, or simply as fun, music was enmeshed in English culture at all levels and in many ways. Marsh's book provides a remarkable opportunity to eavesdrop on this neglected dimension of early modern English life.

Notes

1 Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca, 2003), x.