

## Playing Music Together in late-C18th England

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### From original abstract

While dances and balls were popular forms of entertainment in late eighteenth-century England, the music played for these dances was also played outside of the assembly room, by gentlemen amateurs and artisan professionals at home. The manuscript tunebooks musicians kept not only reveal the sorts of tunes that were shared and played, but also who they played with, what instruments were involved in the ensemble, and sometimes even when and where they met to play.

Francis Collinson, David Johnson, Samuel Bayard, and Celia Pendlebury, among others, have defined ‘domestic tunebooks’ as those used privately by ‘home players’, who might not ever seek to perform in public or to have their music collections printed. I argue that there is a much less distinct line between these types of musician, and very little distinction at all between tunebooks used for different purposes (learning and teaching, social playing, collecting, public performance) – indeed, many of these tunebooks were passed between musicians and used for different purposes by different people, or even for different purposes by the same individuals. I will give examples of these, including Joseph Barnes’ tunebook which features violin lessons, fingering charts and tunes alongside recipes for tinctures used in animal care in his work as a yeoman farmer.

My arguments can be illustrated using two main case studies: the manuscript tunebooks of John Malchair (1730-1812) and Humphrey Senhouse (1731-1814). John Malchair was a professional violinist, leading the band at the Oxford Music Room for 32 years, yet he did not perform the country dance tunes he collected and even writes disdainfully of how the music was treated by dancing masters; instead, Malchair shared his tunebook and played tunes from his collection privately with friends to facilitate discussion of ‘national music’ and the categorisation of melodies into national groups. Humphrey Senhouse, Member of Parliament for Cocker mouth from 1786, inherited his tunebook from his father, turning it upside down to add his own tunes from the back. Next to these he wrote the names of various friends – members of the aristocracy and gentry – with whom he, presumably, played these tunes. I can play recordings of some of these tunes as illustrations, and discuss what such activities fit into wider patterns of sociability in eighteenth-century England.

### Responses to Mark’s questions

On physicality – there is not much physicality indicated in these sources. The music may be largely dance tunes, but it is rare for manuscript tunebooks to contain choreography (I can think of only one example). Playford’s *Dancing Master* contains dance steps – and arguably was so persistent in its success (17 editions 1651-1728) because it was one of the few printed music books to do so. Regarding domestic music making, some tunebooks contain several

parts (eg, melody, harmony, continuo) on loose sheets which could be distributed, or which were copied into multiple people's books so they could play together; others were written in 'table top' format, with the harmony upside down at the top of the page so the person sitting opposite at the table could join in. This very clearly tells us one situation in which these tunes were played. This is also preserved in tune titles such as Timothy Tailor's Table Top Hornpipe.

On memory – many of the tunes in these tunebooks would have been memorised. Much of the repertoire is copied from printed sources, and we might conclude that it was copied out before it was learnt. We know from the writing of William Crotch that John Malchair used to play tunes from memory after he went blind in old age. I know from personal experience that what's written down is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the number of tunes one knows well enough to perform, and well enough to join in with when someone else leads. (Compare it to the number of tracks you buy vs the number you could hum along with.) Some tunebooks make this explicit by only containing incipits (the first couple of bars) as a memory jogger. It is sad for the historian that we can never know what tunes musicians played that they didn't record!

On the 'field' and class – I'm interested in tunebooks and the people who made tunebooks, so have a very limited view of the dance floor. John Malchair occupied an interesting position as a musician as he wasn't interested in dancing! But as a drawing master and musician he tutored a lot of upper class society (undergraduates at university), and had a number of friends in high places (eg, people recorded to have given money upon his retirement), and he stayed at country houses during the summer months (between Oxford terms and performance seasons). I'd love to know more about what he would have done there – he would have presumably eaten with the servants, but have spent evenings in the drawing room playing music with the family, and his watercolours record that he often spent time in the company of the landowners themselves as well as their children.

### Speaker bio

Alice Little is a Research Fellow at the Bate Collection of Musical Instruments in Oxford, and a Junior Research Fellow at Corpus Christi College. She holds a Humanities Research Fellowship for 2019-21 for which she is working with the English Folk Dance and Song Society to study the eighteenth-century tunebooks in their collection.