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Mike Baldwin. *Harp Making in Late-Georgian London*. London: Bright Light, 2020. 413 pp., 68 color illus., 77 black-and-white illus., 9 tables. ISBN 978-1-5272-6511-0. \$76 (hardback).

Harp Making in Late Georgian London is a handsomely produced book by Dr. Mike Baldwin, a British organologist and instrument builder. Baldwin has had an interest in harps for much of his life, beginning in his early teens. He continued his work and studies at several institutions and harp workshops, completing his PhD in 2017 at London Metropolitan University. The hard-cover volume, printed on high-quality paper with many color illustrations, is laid out in eleven chapters, each divided into several sections. Over 100 pages of appendices make up a quarter of the volume.

In the introductory first chapter, the history of Soho, where harp makers lived and worked, is briefly covered, then the development of the pedal harp. After a reasonably clear and well-balanced overview, Baldwin soon delves into the Erat company. This establishes early on one of the problems of the book: much of it is not a general history of a particular time and place in harp making, but a study of just one workshop. Baldwin has made a very thorough study of English harp makers, and of the Erats, but his subjects might have been better served by two separate books, rather than a single, oddly balanced one.

The second chapter, “Consuming the Harp,” is a sociological look at the predominantly affluent and feminine world of amateur harpists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Here Baldwin does a good job of presenting quantifiable documentation. In the first section of the chapter, he cites literary and epistolary references to the harp as seen in social settings. The second section presents a relatively small selection of iconography featuring harps and young women, examined with an eye to the relationship between harps and the fashions of the period. The chapter closes with a section enumerating the contemporary publications of harp music in London and how they compare with publications for other instruments. Also presented is a summary of Simon McVeigh’s *Calendar of London Concerts, 1750–1800*, focusing on the harp, but without interpretation or explanation.

The third chapter, “London Harp Makers,” is a roll call of the harp makers operating in London at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The first two pages provide an interesting, if brief, context for the concentration of builders in the Soho area, followed by a list of makers. The in-

formation given about each is something of a mixture, ranging from a list of their addresses to enumeration of their offspring, and on to gossip regarding their extramarital affairs. Much of Baldwin's interpretation of the information is admittedly conjectural. The section on John Falce Browne is problematic. While Baldwin illustrates some rare advertising material, much of the information set forth in the text is inaccurate. Browne's middle name is twice given as "Fuce" rather than "Falce," and the company of Browne & Buckwell is said to have closed at the start of the twentieth century, when in fact the company was still operating into the 1940s.

Baldwin addresses the decoration of harps in the fourth chapter, "A Decorative Design History." While the decorative aspect of harps is responsible for much popular interest, the topic is rarely examined. Here, Baldwin makes only too thorough an investigation. The information he presents is important, but the result is fraught with problems. A good deal of text is expended going down a rabbit hole of unsuccessful comparisons between orders of Classical architecture and the more fanciful ornamentation of harp columns. He cites the Erard spiral column Gothic design as having been introduced in London in 1835. In fact, that model was first produced in Paris, and not until ca. 1890.

Chapter 5, "A Technical Design History," goes into considerable detail on the technical developments of the harp's pedal mechanism and the relevant patents. The early nineteenth century was the time of transition from the single action to the double, and a fertile period in harp engineering. Here, Baldwin has assembled a remarkable collection of patent drawings, but did not include the explanatory texts. To make matters worse, most of the drawings are printed in half-page size, too small to be readily deciphered. While Baldwin's summary explanations are useful to a degree, it would have been far more helpful to have the original descriptions.

The real center of this book is the Erat establishment, who built some of the best harps of the time. They are brought into focus in chapter 6, "The Erats: A Manufacturing Family." The details of the family's life are presented in the most granular detail, ranging from the content of wills to the cost of clothing for the Erat children. To fully quantify the status of harp makers in the context of the general populace, Baldwin includes a table from the period showing eight social classes, ranging from royalty down to criminals, and their relative incomes. It is not made clear, however, to which tier the Erats would have belonged. An interesting passage summarizes the Erats' involvement in the Society of British Musicians, affording

some insight into concert production and promotion at the time.

The examination of the Erats' lives continues in chapter 7, "Jacob Erat's Manufactories." The subjects are primarily the buildings in which the business was conducted, though Baldwin also ranges into inventories, expenses, and the number of times people fell down a particular flight of stairs in one of the buildings. The chapter is interesting as information about early nineteenth-century artisanal life and production, but the lack of interpretation as to its relevance to harp making renders this study of the Erats' environments of greater interest to the social historian than to the organologist.

Chapter 8, "Making the Harp," is a catchall of information that might have made more sense had it been presented elsewhere in the book. The first section, "Business Arrangements," discussing staffing and suppliers, would have added dimension and context to the preceding chapter. The second section, "Making the Harp," which looks at the woodworking and metalworking processes, might have been included in the chapter on technical design. The last section, "Decorating and Finishing the Harp," is a valuable description of casting the applied decoration, and painting and gilding techniques, all of which might have fitted better into chapter 4. There are also difficulties with terminology, such as referring to "lead white" and "flake white" as two different pigments, though they are the same. The chapter concludes with a study of the cash flow of the Erat business, including a most confusing spreadsheet, in which income is shown as negative numbers.

As with chapter 9, "Materials and Suppliers," much of the content of chapter 10, "Selling the Harp," seems misplaced. There is an extensive list of harps and related items and their prices sold by Erat and by Grosjean, though the list is not organized or interpreted. There are also several maps showing the locations of Erat's customers in London, England, and Wales, but scant connections are made between the locations shown on the maps and the customers listed in the text. From here, Baldwin returns a third time to an examination of harp decorating, painting, and gilding. It is interesting, but why was this information not included in the chapter on harp design and decoration? Of greater value are the sections on harp covers, music stands, benches, string boxes, and gauges. Musical instrument accessories are in general a neglected field of study, so it is refreshing to see some documentation.

The final chapter 11, "Willis, Erat and the Harp," is something of a

puzzle. It is a recounting of a diary by one Robert Willis, a young man who took an interest in improvements to harp mechanisms, spending roughly two years at the Erat workshops. His successes in the field were limited and certainly not lasting. It is difficult to understand why something so self-contained merited a chapter in a general overview of a period of harp making, especially when Willis's full diary is included in the appendices. While the story of Robert Willis is at times entertaining, it might have done better as the subject of an article.

Much of the greatest value of this book lies in the appendices, where Baldwin has assembled over 100 pages of rare source material. Included are workshop inventories, a directory of harp makers' addresses, photos of the molds for decorative castings, makers' wills, and patent drawings, albeit still without the accompanying texts. Indeed, none of the appendices include more than minimal notes of context or explanation, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions.

Harp Making in Late Georgian London is a substantial work, representing a good deal of effort. It includes some valuable information and resources. Unfortunately, it is shot through with typographical errors, misinformation, and questionable organization. It's hard to understand why the services of a proofreader and editor were not employed. The book is not without value but will be of the most use to researchers already well-versed in the field of early pedal harps.

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