

## JOHN PLAYFORD

### THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY MUSIC PUBLISHER

#### Part II

ANOTHER early work was *Court Ayres*, 1655, republished many times. In 1657 appeared Playford's edition of John Gamble's *Ayres*, and a second book in 1659. The original first book was issued in 1656. I cannot give here a catalogue of the many publications of Playford. He published all classes of music, from simple instructors to the various instruments then in use---the Cithern, the Flageolet, the Virginals or Spinet---the violin, vocal music.

These books contained instructions in quaint wording and many 'lessons' which in the different editions, were changed, as fashion changed. Some of these books had beautifully engraved frontispieces. I can recall the charming little work, measuring about six inches by four, namely Thomas Greetings' *Pleasant Companion, or New Lessons for the Flageolet*. There were six or eight editions of this, though it is now very scarce. *Apollo's Banquet* is another small book which originally formed the appendix to the 1665 edition of the *Dancing Master*. This ran through numerous editions.

Playford's *Whole Book of Psalms* was another famous work which from its first publication in 1677 attained its twentieth edition in 1757.

John Playford was not merely a Publisher; he was no mean composer, and some of his compositions may be seen in his *Musical Companion*, of 1672.

The three-part song 'Comely swain, why sittest thou so' attained some popularity, and is one of his sixteen or eighteen songs in the *Musical Companion*.

I must here emphasise the fact that throughout the whole of his life John Playford had the music publishing trade to himself, as it was not until after his death in 1686 that any one ventured into the field.

In the fifth book of *Choice Ayres and Songs*, dated 1684, Playford bids farewell to the public. He complains that the late frost had delayed the publication of the book, and that it had laid an 'embargo on the press for more than ten weeks.' The Thames was frozen over, be it remembered, in 1684. He also says that 'age and the infirmities of nature will not allow me the strength to undergo my former labours, I shall leave it to two young men, my own son and Mr. Carr's son, who is one of his Majesty's Musick, and an ingenious person, who you may rely upon, that what they publish of this nature shall be carefully corrected and well done.' Playford had been associated in the latter portion of his life with John Carr, possibly a brother-in-law who had a music shop a few steps from Playford's, at the Middle Temple Gate, Fleet Street. The son to whom Playford alludes as being in conjunction with his own son (Henry) is Robert Carr, who was violist in the King's band.

The son, Robert Carr, was not, however, very long in possession of the music shop, as his father resumed it and had an assistant, Sam Scott, who had the business solely in 1696.

John Playford appears to have failed in health from this time. He died on November 5th, 1686. Many poetical pieces were written on his death, and Henry Purcell set a 'Pastoral Elegy on the death of John Playford' to music. From one piece we learn that Playford was a performer:---

*Oh never more (my friend) must my ear be charm'd.  
Thy cheerful voice and skilful musick hear.  
For ever silent is that tuneful lyre  
Which men instead of beasts admire.  
When Playford's hand the well-strung harp adorned.  
The principle of life and sense we scorned.*

Playford married in 1655-6. His wife, Hannah, kept a boarding school for young gentlewomen, near Islington Church. She probably died in 1680-81, for in April, 1681, the school house is advertised for sale. By the description given it seems to have been a most noble house. Perhaps Playford found his shop so crammed with books that he was glad to live at Islington with his wife. After her death he removed to a street off the Strand.

We have five portraits of Playford, taken at different periods of his life. These were placed in various editions of his *Introduction to the Skill of Music*. The first of these is by Gaywood, prefixed to the 1660 edition. Playford's age is here stated to be 38. In the 1663-1664 and 1666 editions this portrait is touched up and the age marked as 40. In 1669 the portrait is by Van Hove with the age marked at 47. This retouched is used with the 1670 and 1672 editions. Another portrait by D. Loggan with the age as 57 is used in the 1680 and 1687 editions. Later editions have this portrait, but the age is erased. The 1720 and 1730 editions have a portrait by J. Clark. The portrait given by Hawkins is the D. Loggan one, but is reversed.

John Playford left his business to his son Henry, who reprinted many of his father's publications, with alterations and additions.

He also issued a great number of books which were his alone. Although Henry Playford pushed forward the business which his father left, he did not long continue in the music trade. It is said that he embarked in the picture trade, for at that time the Continent was searched for the old master pictures that are now housed in our public galleries, or in the possession of noble families. About 1707 we find the Playford books for sale by John Cullen, and after that by John Young and William Pearson, who publish some of the later editions of *The Dancing Master*.

There was another of the Playford family; John Playford, junior. Whether he was a son or nephew of the elder Playford is doubtful. He was apprenticed to William Godbid, whom the elder Playford employed for printing his books. Thomas Harper had printed the early publications, but Godbid printed the later issues.

William Godbid died and was succeeded by his widow, Anne Godbid, who took into partnership John Playford, junior. They continued the printing of the elder Playford's works.

Anne Godbid retired from the business, which was then carried on by young Playford alone. The printing office was situate in Little Britain. Playford junior died in 1686, and his sister Eleanor attempted to carry on the work, but was opposed by other printers. She issued a fine folio, the opera *Albion and Albanus*, by Louis Grabu, dated 1687. Her petition was dismissed, for what reason we of the present day cannot conjecture.

So ends the record of the Playford family for whose pluck and energy we are indebted for an interesting period of English music.

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