

Introduction

Johann Christoph (John Christopher) Pepusch was born in Berlin in 1666 or 1667, the son of a Lutheran pastor. He became a court musician at an early age, but left Prussia after witnessing 'a terrible act of despotism', according to Charles Burney. He supposedly arrived in England by way of Holland shortly after the Treaty of Ryswick was signed in 1697, though he is not recorded working in London until 1704, and he only came to prominence when he produced the pasticcio *Thomyris, Queen of Scythia* at Drury Lane in April 1707; shortly after, he became involved with the new Italian opera company at the Haymarket Theatre. He moved back to Drury Lane in 1714, where he wrote a series of attractive Italian masques, the model for Handel's *Acis and Galatea*. He moved to the Lincolns Inn Fields Theatre in 1717, working there on and off until 1732, and was responsible for the music for *The Beggar's Opera*, first performed on 29 January 1728. During this time Pepusch contributed a great deal to London's concert life, and between 1719 and 1723 he was musical director at Cannons, the Duke Chandos's estate at Edgware in Middlesex. His later life was largely taken up with teaching and scholarship. He was one of the founders of the Academy of Ancient Music, and was its director until shortly before his death. He died on 20 July 1752.

Britannia and Augusta is one of Pepusch's first major works. It is a setting of an elegiac ode by John Hughes (1667-1720) in memory of William Cavendish, fourth Earl and first Duke of Devonshire (1641-1707). Cavendish, a prominent Whig politician who played an important role in bringing about the Glorious Revolution of 1688, died in London on 18 August 1707 and was buried on 1 September at All Hallows, Derby. Hughes, a Whig writer and associate of Addison and Steele, provided Pepusch with many texts to set, including no fewer than twelve cantatas and the masque *Apollo and Daphne* (1707). Cavendish was interested in literature and music, and would have probably have come into contact with both poet and composer at literary gatherings or concerts. We know from the printed text that *Britannia* was sung by Margherita de l'Epine (Pepusch's future wife) and *Augusta* by Catherine Tofts, and from Hughes's correspondence that the venue was Stationers' Hall; no record of the performance has survived, but it was presumably during the autumn of 1707. Given that the singers and the composer were members of the Italian opera company, then being formed, it is likely that the accompaniment was also provided by members of its future orchestra. The principal source of Pepusch's music is a score in the hand of an unidentified contemporary copyist (Brussels Conservatoire, MS 1030), though there is also a copy apparently made from it by Henry Needler (British Library, Add. MS 5052).

Hughes's ode is said to be 'After the Italian Manner' because it consists of a sequence of recitatives and *da capo* or *dal segno* arias. The fine four-movement overture begins with an Adagio in the manner of a funeral march and ends with a Presto evoking the tolling of bells. In the first part of the ode *Britannia* and *Augusta* mourn Cavendish in elegiac solos and a lilting duet, all in C minor. In the second part they move to describing Cavendish's monument and extolling his successor. Appropriately, the music moves to the major, ending with a lively duet in gavotte rhythm. Hughes was no Dryden, and his verses are embarrassingly trite at times, though he provides some vivid images which Pepusch responds to with some imaginative and accomplished music. In particular, he makes the most of his wind players, with obligato parts in many of the numbers. The opera orchestra as first formed was quite large (apparently 5-5-2-3-2 strings with 2 oboes, 3 bassoons, trumpet and continuo), though the ode works well with just two wind players (oboes doubling recorders), four strings, and a keyboard.

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Further reading:

J. Hughes, *Poems on Several Occasions, with some Select Essays in Prose*, 2 vols. (London, 1735).

Vice Chamberlain Coke's Theatrical Papers 1706-1715, ed. J. Milhous and R.D. Hume (Carbondale and Edwardsville IL, 1982).

D.F. Cook, 'The Life and Works of Johann Christoph Pepusch (1667-1752), with Special Reference to his Dramatic Works and Cantatas', Ph.D. diss (King's College, University of London, 1982).