



## A Short Outline of the Life of Dr Pepusch (1667-1752)

Pepusch had a successful early career as a composer of sonatas and concertos, many published in Amsterdam, many left in manuscript.

He came to London, developing a career as a theatre musician in Drury Lane Theatre (1704-1708), then the Queen's Theatre (1708-1713), back to Drury Lane as musical director (1714-1716), writing a series of English masques, including *Venus and Adonis* and *The Death of Dido*. Finally he became musical director at Lincoln's Inn Fields (1716-1733), taking time out in 1717 onwards to work for the soon-to-be Duke of Chandos who made him his Master of the Musick at Cannons in 1719.

Pepusch took his Doctorate at Oxford in 1713 at the same time as William Croft (scandalising the city with his theatre musicians in tow). Hawkins recorded in his *History* that 'to assist in the performance of the exercise for his degree, he took from London many of the performers from the theatres, and had concerts in the city for his benefit, which was censured as a very unacademical practice, and unwarranted by any precedent. His conduct in this respect being contrasted with that of Croft, whose exercise was performed by singers from the chapel royal, and who declined all pecuniary emoluments on the occasion, gave great offence to the university.'

He married the Italian-born soprano Margherita de L'Epine (c.1680-1746), possibly in 1718, and she brought him a fortune, which Hawkins wrote 'enabled the doctor to live in a style of elegance which till his marriage he had been a stranger to: this change in his circumstances was no interruption to his studies; he loved music, and he pursued the knowledge of it with ardour'. Hawkins also recorded an epigram *On Orpheus and Signora Francesca Margarita* by Lord Halifax which references Margherita as the 'tawny Tuscan'. In a footnote, Hawkins states that 'this epithet of tawny is very characteristic of her, for she was remarkably swarthy, and in general so destitute of personal charms, that Dr Pepusch, who afterwards married her, seldom called her by any other name than Hecate, which she answered to very readily'.

Pepusch built up a remarkable music library which included what was later named the 'Fitzwilliam Virginal Book' (much played by Margherita).

He enthusiastically led the Academy of Ancient Music, initially founded as the Academy of Vocal Musick in 1726 (see information on the webpage).

He researched Greek musical theory and promulgated the use of hexachords and solmisation.

Appointed organist of the Charterhouse in 1737, he taught a generation of young composers, including Boyce, Cooke, Roman and Travers.

Pepusch was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1745, presenting a paper *Of the various Genera and Species of Music among the Ancients*, with some Observations concerning their Scale. (The paper is available online in *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*.)

David Byers, March 2019