

# Bassoons and Hymn-Tunes

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## In Wesley's Day

tion saying that he was the finest of his day. He was quickly signed on by John Rich, the manager of Covent Garden Theatre, for whom he was soon composing as well as playing. Rich introduced him to that popular librettist Henry Carey, author of "Sally in Our Alley," and their collaboration was a pale foreshadowing of the Gilbert-Sullivan phenomenon. Their most successful effort was a musical skit on Italian opera, called "The Dragon of Wantley," on which Handel smiled approvingly.

It was probably through Rich's converted wife that Lampe was introduced to another important influence in his career—Methodism. The immediate cause of his conversion from that philosophy of indifference called Deism was one of John Wesley's books. After an interview with him on November 29, 1745, Wesley wrote in his Journal—

"I spent an hour with Mr. Lampe, who had been a Deist for many years, until it pleased God, by the Earwest Appeal, to bring him to a better mind."

His new-found religious zeal turned Lampe's musical abilities for the time being from bassoons and pantomime-songs to hymn-tunes. He had gravitated within the orbit of Mrs. Rich's spiritual father, Charles Wesley, in whom he apparently found a more congenial spirit than his brother John. He set twenty-four of Charles's hymns to music, the results of

this new collaboration being published in 1746 with the title *Hymns on the Great Festivals, and other occasions*. Although florid after the fashion of the opera of the day, the tunes became popular, and were pushed by the Wesleys. They are now for the most part forgotten, though two of them linger on in the Methodist Hymn Book, while Lampe's name is also associated with that well-known tune Irish.

With Lampe in mind Charles Wesley wrote a hymn for a converted musician, who agrees no longer to—

"smooth with music's hand the way  
To everlasting death."

but pleads instead with his Maker—

"Teach me the new, the Gospel song,  
And let my heart, my hand, my  
tongue,  
Move only to Thy praise."

Mrs. Rich told Wesley how she gave the hymn to Lampe—

"who at the reading shed some tears,  
and said . . . he loved you as if you  
was his own brother."

A year or two later Wesley had to admit, however, that Lampe's spiritual promise had not been fulfilled, though he still seemed "designed for better things than feeding swine; that is, entertaining the gay world." Vain hope! It was just this that Lampe was doing immediately before his death in 1751, at Edinburgh this time, where he was buried in Canongate churchyard. Charles did not quite cast him off, however, writing an "elegy," "On the death of Mr. Lampe"—not one of his happiest efforts, it must be admitted. It begins—

"Tis done! the sovereign will's obey'd  
The soul, by angel-guards convey'd,  
Has took its seat on high;  
The brother of my choice is gone  
To music sweeter than his own,  
And concerts in the sky."

F. B.

“Bassoons and Hymn-Tunes.” *Methodist Recorder* (November 29, 1945): 1

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<sup>1</sup>This is an extract from *Redemption Hymns* (1747), 34–35; stanzas 3b, 4b.

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F[rank] B[aker]

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<sup>2</sup>This is an extract from *Funeral Hymns* (1759), 30; stanza 1.