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***John Eccles. Incidental Music. Part 2 Plays H–P*. Edited by Estelle Murphy. A-R editions, 2021. xxiii + 449 pp. $430 (pb). ISBN 978-1-9872-0626-5**

After Henry Purcell's death in November 1695, John Eccles (1670–1735) assumed the mantle of London's leading theatre composer. His first known theatrical music dates from 1690, a setting of a lyric by William Congreve performed in Elkanah Settle's *Distressed Innocence*. Working for the United Company Eccles contributed music to several plays along with Purcell before emerging from the latter's shadow when he joined Thomas Betterton's break-away company at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1695. His star waxed in the theatre, where he collaborated regularly with William Congreve, and where Anne Bracegirdle became a leading interpreter of his songs. In 1700 he became Master of the King's Music, a post he held until his death, dutifully churning out royal birthday odes even while his theatrical output slowed to a trickle after 1707. This edition, the second of three devoted to Eccles's incidental music for the theatre, and the seventh issued by A-R Editions of his collected works, is a bumper volume containing music for twenty-four plays spanning a decade from 1694 to 1704.

Since the provision of incidental music in this period was frequently a collaborative process to which multiple composers contributed, the general editors of *The Works of John Eccles* have chosen to offer all extant music for plays for which Eccles composed. In this volume, alongside two sets of theatre tunes and forty-six songs by Eccles, there are six theatre suites by William Corbett, Gottfried Finger (2 sets), Francis Forcer, John Lenton and Thomas Tollett, and seventeen songs by Samuel Akeroyde, Bernard Berenclow, Jeremiah Clarke, Corbett, Finger, Nicholas Staggins, William Turner, John Weldon, John Wilford and anonymous. Only works by Henry Purcell escape the dragnet, since they are already available in volumes edited by the Purcell Society.

The drive for completeness extends to songs and dances preserved as tunes only. Each play is prefaced by an informative note introducing it with details of revivals and performers, contextualizing all the songs and dances, and providing texts of the former, whether or not a musical setting survives. Critical notes follow the music of each play with thorough lists of sources. One quibble regarding the presentation of the notes is the way in which variants of each source are given separately rather than integrated into a single list. This creates unnecessary duplication where sources share variants and masks relationships between sources sharing variants. Elsewhere the editor has helpfully supplied a viola part to movements of theatre suites that are preserved in three parts only. There are a few errors scattered about, most

easily corrected; readers will need to add a key signature of two flats to Staggins's 'As Amoret with Phillis sat' from Etherege's *The Man of the Mode*.

In terms of musical style Eccles learned from Purcell, who, even if not formally his teacher, must have been a significant mentor to the young composer. His style is, nevertheless, clearly his own, consistently direct in melody and harmony where Purcell revelled in affective harmony and melodic chromaticism. Though always well-crafted, Eccles's music does not always leap off the page, and the editors are surely correct to suggest in the Introduction (repeated from the first volume of incidental music) that the songs come into their own in performance, when singers – especially singing actors – contribute their interpretive powers. In this regard, Eccles's comic writing is particularly effective, exemplified by three dialogues for Peter Motteux's *Love's a Jest*, the best of which, 'Pretty miss let us talk together', provides a charming musical framework for a racy flirtation between a boy and a girl. Eccles could strike a more serious tone, as in the sorrowful F minor 'Beyond the desert mountains' for soprano and strings in four parts in which the vocal line is skilfully nestled within the string texture before dramatically rising above it at the song's climax. Though anonymous in the unique source, British Library, Add. MS 29738, the editor identifies it as Eccles's on the strength of its appearance with other music by him. Eccles could also turn his hand to dramatic instrumental effects. The extended duet, 'Hark! the big drums they beat to battle', for countertenor and bass accompanied by a pair of trumpets, timpani and continuo, begins with an eight-bar timpani solo. After the battle is over, the key shifts from D major to minor and violins replace the trumpets as the singers describe 'the blood and slaughter'.

Works by other composers also make a strong impression. It is valuable to have Turner's music for Shadwell's *The Libertine*, especially the trio and chorus 'Prepare, prepare, new guests draw near', his most ambitious work for the theatre. Finger's theatre tunes are consistently well crafted, as is his song 'I tell the Charmion' for Congreve's *Love for Love*. John Weldon's setting of 'Take, O take those lips away' from Gildon's adaptation of *Measure for Measure* is another little jewel. But will potential users find these works within the covers of a volume dedicated nominally to John Eccles? One hopes they will. This edition offers another riposte to the stubborn myth that imagines a gap in musical quality in the London theatres between Purcell's death and Handel's arrival.