John Playford, Music Publisher: A Bibliographical Catalogue
(1983)

John Playford (1623-1686/87) was England’s foremost music publisher of the seventeenth century who in 1650 began to revive English music printing. The present work contains a catalogue of Playford’s extant and possible lost music publications, along with historical background surrounding his career.

A summary of the few music books printed in England from 1620-1650 reveals the decline which occurred in music printing after its initial peak during the Elizabethan era. Social and political events throughout Playford’s lifetime had an enormous impact upon music, the general printing trade, and music printing in particular. This influence on Playford’s business associates and competitors along with other significant individuals involved with seventeenth-century music printing in England is investigated. Misconceptions regarding Playford’s career are resolved.

Since Playford’s financial success depended upon catering to the public’s changing musical tastes, his music publications reflect the kinds of music popular with England’s many amateur musicians of the Commonwealth and Restoration periods. The catalogue of his publications therefore provides a revealing insight to this musical culture. All known extant music publications of John Playford are presented in this catalogue. Descriptive bibliographical methods were employed in order to differentiate between variants of an edition, and to supply detailed descriptions of each title. The twelve facets of data listed for each catalogue entry are explained prior to the catalogue. There are a total of 84 catalogue entries for extant titles, all accompanied by photocopied facsimiles of their title pages. The listing of extant publications is followed by a compilation of 25 possible lost music publications of Playford. The catalogue updates secondary sources relating to Playford’s music publications and corrects a number of errors discovered in previous scholarship.

To compile this catalogue, libraries possessing important collections of John Playford’s music publications were visited, including 26 libraries in Great Britain and the United States. In all, over 400 original (not facsimile or photocopied) music publications of Playford were examined personally. Listed are holdings of original Playford publications in libraries of Great Britain and the United States. Composers cited within these books are indexed as well.