

5.2 Early Music in Late Summer (2013)

What's happening here?
What kind of immortality is this
as sound climbs high
in Garrick's little temple dome beside the Thames?
What meets the watcher's eye
is simple – digits dance
upon the narrow octaves of a
harpsichord, and propagate the
foreplay and the flight, well-tempered
waves of sound which bear our spirits up:
that's what it is, or what it seems to be.

But more's at play, much more:
who is the master here?
Is it we, who all came here to sit
in expectation of a
summer evening's transport –
do we command? Without our ears
there'd be no sound, indeed
there'd be no score. And I, as part of this?
My eye has chosen not to close but
watch, to try and see what's happening here.
I watch the oriental face, electric as it
engages with the densely figured score,
initiates the whole experience – intaken
breath, the eye intent, and poised
not just the hands but all the frame
of this the key interpreter.

Or is it not the source of sound itself?
There's male and female here: the passive
waiting instrument implies three centuries
of craft, her body, throat and heart invite
analogies, but nothing contradicts her readiness,
so tightly wrought, to please and serve her
purpose, as soon as she is struck. Her
deeper registers, more womanly than virginal,
vibrate and resonate: she yields to touch, and
fully played upon can render up
the fullness of her self. This whole, a single
instrument, a single flow of energies which runs
from score, through fingers, notes and
subtlest physics, to reach the ready and attentive
ear, the mind and heart behind.

What more is there? Of course!
Who orchestrates, inspires, the whole?
Vast, his shadow on the dome reflects the
gleaming
river and the setting sun; he over-arches us –
that fleshy German smile, the rigorous eye,
observe
as yet again his priceless gift is given,
his art applied, to even such a few as we:
his the spirit, his the inner ear and voice
which animates the whole –
born of all those years of culture, faith,
and industry, and love. The immortality is his,
not only for today but till the very end of time.

Hampton - August 2013