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## The Canterbury Catch Club Print – a performance of class

The Canterbury Catch Club was a musical society which flourished in the city from 1779 to 1865. Even allowing for the enthusiastic claims of an entrepreneurial newsagent, we may accept to some extent that the Club enjoyed a reputation beyond the city walls: Henry Ward, who commissioned the print we will be examining, drew visitors' attention to "the old established Catch and Glee Club, so frequently visited by strangers passing through Canterbury on Wednesdays" in his *City Guide* of 1843.<sup>1</sup> These clubs were common in Britain at the time: self-consciously modelled on the London Noblemen and Gentlemen's Catch Club (or 'Nobs and Gents', as it came to be known) they could be found in towns and cities throughout Britain and Ireland in the late eighteenth and early-to-mid-nineteenth centuries.

"Catch Clubs" take their name from a musical genre which has been very well known to the English drinking classes – which is to say, everyone – since at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier (the closely-related genre, the glee, will be discussed later). The most famous use of the word "catch" is to be found in Shakespeare, when, in *Twelfth Night*, Act 2, Scene 3, Sir Toby Belch greets the arrival of the Fool with a cheerful "Welcome, ass. Now let's have a catch." It is, quite simply, a round for grown-ups: as in any nursery school example (*Frere Jacques*, to pick a well-known European illustration) this consists of one continuous melody whose constituent phrases (usually 3 or 4) harmonise with each other, thanks to the repeated harmonic sequence underpinning them. This means that one singer can start and be followed by others, each beginning as successive phrases are completed, thus creating instant harmony. The name may have originated from the Italian, *caccia*, since that is a good description of what the voices do: they chase each other, round and round. Musically, the harmonic basis of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century catches may be rather more sophisticated than the one chord required in *Frere Jacques*, but what is abundantly clear from the repertoire is that the attraction of this diminutive genre lay as much in its text as its music. It became, by custom and usage, a vehicle for celebration of the time-honoured convivial combination of wine, women, and song, in the course of which it was entirely possible that the bounds of genteel good taste may have been crossed. Hence the reputation of the catch – mainly (though not solely) thanks to Henry Purcell – for salacious and offensive content: in 1795 one William Jackson inveighed against them as pieces of music which "when quartered, have three parts obscenity and one part music".<sup>2</sup> This was music ideally suited to the sort of company Sir Toby Belch keeps in *Twelfth Night*. Regrettably, this dismal reputation was reinforced by many visual representations of catch singing which depicted scenes of frankly drunken debauchery, such as this one by Gillray depicting the Anacreontics Club [fig. 1], and this poor impression has persisted to the present day. Even more regrettably, it is beyond the scope of this article to show that this is not entirely fair.

The Canterbury Catch Club is unusual in that it has a lithograph dedicated to it [fig. 2], purporting to show a Club night in full swing: 95 well-dressed gentlemen sit at long tables arranged in an orderly fashion the length of a generously proportioned room smoking, exchanging snuff, chatting, or gazing thoughtfully into the middle distance while a sizeable ensemble of 25 instrumentalists, dimly crowded into a slightly raised area at the back of the room, performs an orchestral piece for the members' delectation. The setting is redolent of bourgeois gentility: portraits adorn the walls; the Club motto, "Harmony and Unanimity", is to be seen enscribed across the proscenium arch; statuary (which may or may not be *trompe l'oeuil*) decorates the corners, and a chandelier dominates the interior decoration, testifying not only to the affluence of the club but emphasising the size of the room depicted. The members are well-dressed, exuding an air of self-assured, cultured sophistication; the scene is orderly and calm. This must have been a representation with which the club members would have been well pleased.

It becomes immediately clear that this image may offer a fascinating illumination of Canterbury's cultural life in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Happily, there is a wealth of other evidence in the Cathedral archives and City Library to support the socio-cultural historian in this endeavour: Minutes Books give detailed accounts of the Committee's deliberations from 1802 until its closure in 1865; those portraits – along with a dozen others, representing Committee members and one of the Directors of Music – still survive, as do a desk and a gavel; concert records tell us exactly what musical fare was enjoyed by members from 1825 to 1837, and then again from 1859-63; some membership records still survive; and there is a very large collection of music to be scrutinised, comprising 3,000 vocal pieces collected in 70 volumes and some 700 orchestral pieces in over 200 part-books. It is an impressive archive, and its corroborative evidence is invaluable for an interrogation of the print.

There is, of course, other related evidence. Representations of evenings such as this are to be found in writing spanning several decades from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries: the diaries of John Marsh and of R.J.S. Stevens are the most obvious examples, the former giving an invaluable first-hand account of a club night in 1783, as we will see later. But perhaps the best-known account of a "harmonic meeting" is to be found in Dickens. His *Sketches by Boz* were serialised in the mid-1830s, and one of the very first shows us London by night. That chapter ends with the following:

One o'clock! Parties returning from the different theatres foot it through the muddy streets; cabs, hackney-coaches, carriages, and theatre omnibuses, roll swiftly by... The more musical portion of the play-going community betake themselves to some harmonic meeting. As a matter of curiosity let us follow them thither for a few moments...

In a lofty room of spacious dimensions, are seated some eighty or a hundred guests knocking little pewter measures on the tables, and hammering away, with the handles of their knives, as if they were so many trunk-makers. They are applauding a glee, which has just been executed by the three "professional gentlemen" at the top of the centre table, one of whom is in the chair – the little pompous man with the bald head just emerging from the collar of his green coat. ...

"Pray give your orders, gen'l'm'n – pray give your orders," says the pale-faced man with the red head; and demands for "goes" of gin and "goes" of brandy, and pints of stout, and cigars of peculiar mildness, are vociferously made from all parts of the room. ...

That little round-faced man, with the small brown surtout, white stockings and shoes, is in the comic line; after a considerable quantity of coughing by way of symphony, and the most facetious sniff or two, which afford general delight, [he] sings a comic song, with a fal-de-ral-tol-de-rol chorus at the end of every verse, much longer than the verse itself. It is received with unbounded applause, and after some aspiring genius has volunteered a recitation, and failed dismally therein, the little pompous man gives another knock, and says "Gen'l'm'n, we will attempt a glee, if you please." This announcement calls forth tumultuous applause, and the more energetic spirits express the unqualified approbation it affords them, by knocking one or two stout glasses off their legs – a humorous device; but one which frequently occasions some slight altercation when the form of paying the damage is proposed to be gone through by the waiter.

Scenes like these are continued until three or four o'clock in the morning; and even when they close, fresh ones are open to the inquisitive novice. But as a description of all of them, however slight, would require a volume, the contents of which, however instructive, would be by no means pleasing, we make our bow, and drop the curtain.<sup>3</sup>

A comparison of the scene depicted here with the studied formality of the Canterbury image raises questions, especially when one knows the music of the Canterbury Catch Club archives – there is a startling resemblance in Dickens' description to one of the Canterbury songs, *The Cork Leg*, to which we shall return. Here we find a marked contrast between the genteel atmosphere earnestly evoked in the Canterbury image and the somewhat anarchic chaos of Dickens' scene. Even when we allow for the imperatives of the popular periodical for which Dickens was writing (the *Monthly Magazine* from 1833-35, then the *Chronicle*), the disparity is glaring. Stevens' and Marsh's accounts of such evenings are hardly more complimentary: Richard John Samuel Stevens, in his *Diaries*, had been rather more forthright in his condemnation of the character of this drinking culture some twenty-five years previously, describing the songs sung at the London Je Ne Sais Quoi Club as "very disgusting, disgraceful, and horrible to hear."<sup>4</sup> For anyone who knows the literature, then, the gentility depicted in this print is dubious.

With seeds of doubt now sown, we turn our attention more closely to the print. The provenance of the image seems clear. Date (1826), artist (Thomas Mann Baynes), printer (Charles Hullmandel) and publisher (Henry Ward) are clearly identified at the foot of the image, and other records corroborate this

information: Henry Ward, as we have seen, was a bookseller and stationer based in Sun Street, just round the corner from the Prince of Wales pub in Orange Street, whose upper room is depicted in this print; we find his name in Stapleton's Directory of 1838 (see below). The Canterbury Catch Club Minutes Books record that on the 28<sup>th</sup> November 1825, "Permission was given to Mr. Ward to publish a lithographic print of the Catch Club Room and to dedicate it to the president and members."<sup>5</sup> Given the date and the masterful workmanship of both artist and printer – Baynes and Hullmandel respectively, both highly reputable London-based craftsmen – it seems clear that Mr. Henry Ward wasted no time in commissioning the best he could find for the job.

In the annals of art history Thomas Mann Baynes merits barely a footnote: the *Dictionary of British Watercolour Artists up to 1920* notes that he exhibited at the Royal Academy and the 'Old' Society of Painters in Watercolours (founded 1804) in 1820, and mentions a book he illustrated.<sup>6</sup> This pitiful record seems curmudgeonly, given the alacrity with which 21<sup>st</sup>-century search engines respond to his name with a plethora of images drawn from the books of travel and curiosity which were a feature of the Victorian age; he was undoubtedly a most sought-after artist whose finely crafted illustrations may be readily found in antiquarian sources. Ward himself was to use Baynes again four years later for what became one of his most famous works: a set of drawings of the first Canterbury to Whitstable railway journey in 1830, commemorating the opening of the first passenger railway in England, using Stevenson's 'Invicta' – the immediate successor to the 'Rocket' – to pull the cheery travellers in their carriages. Similarly, the émigré German printer and businessman Charles Hullmandel was recognised at the time as a master of the recently developed lithographic process: James Hamilton quotes Michel Faraday's fulsome praise: "[I] should expect your process to possess the superiority which the testimony of Artists, competent to judge, assure me that it has."<sup>7</sup> Clearly, Ward spared no expense in the commission, and the result would seem to justify his investment: the members of the club are drawn with exquisite detail, and the scene, with all its furniture and decoration, is, as we have noted, rendered with great care. The wickerwork on the chairs is clearly discernible, as are the broken fragments of clay pipe strewn about the floor and the glassware on the tables. The lithograph is a fine piece of work.

Delightfully – but, alas, rather more mysteriously – the Canterbury print has, for an indeterminate period of time, been accompanied by a hand-drawn sketch with typewritten names identifying 42 of the 120 figures in the picture [fig. 3]. The only attribution for this sketch so far discovered is to be found in the Cathedral Chronicle of September 1943, which names Charles Delasaux (number 22 in the sketch, gazing intently at the viewer) as the originator. Unfortunately, several of the details given in the 1943 article are incorrect, so the sketch remains a questionable piece of evidence, but many of the names are corroborated by the

records of the Club itself, by the Electoral Roll for 1826, and by Stapleton's Directory of 1838 [fig. 4]. It seems reasonable, therefore, to allow this strange document some credence for now.

The archival evidence makes it clear that the club really did exist from 1779 to 1865, and that it organised weekly concerts throughout the winter months: 30 of them each season. We know many of the members, and the room shown here, in which they met in the years 1779-1833, still survives in the city, on the first floor of what is now Oddfellows Hall (the 'Loyal City of Canterbury' Lodge bought the building in 1876). The portraits also survive to the present day: a sizeable collection, including not only the two shown in the print (St Cecilia on the right and Corelli on the left) but also one of Handel and several more of Club Committee members, including the Musical Director of the time, a mild-mannered-looking gentleman with a violin by the name of Thomas Goodban [fig. 5]. In life, the picture of Saint Cecilia [fig. 6]), patron saint of music – and of the Canterbury Catch Club, who celebrated her Saint's Day every year with a sumptuous dinner – can be clearly seen seated at a keyboard instrument, with a couple of cherubs and a verse from Dryden hovering over her head, in a non-too-subtle invocation of classical models. When Baynes drew the image of the Catch Club meeting, he had a number of portraits from which to choose.

That last point is only one of many which lead us to conclude that the image is carefully constructed to convey the most serious impression: it employs every device to portray a gathering of sophisticated, culturally literate gentlemen enjoying a concert provided by professional musicians in convivial surroundings. The orchestra in the background testifies to the prosperity of a club which could afford to hire a sizeable ensemble for its weekly entertainment and then, if this image is anything to go by, largely ignore it. And we might note that most of the members seem extraordinarily pleased with themselves as they neglect whatever music is being so earnestly played: they chat; they gaze at the fire or into the middle distance; they exchange snuff; or they drink, puffing at their pipes all the while.

But, with our suspicions aroused by the reputation of the music after which the club is named; by earlier visual representations of such music-making; and by the conspicuous lack of catch singing in this picture, we are minded to interrogate this print more severely. And when we do, our suspicions grow. The Club records show that the clear atmosphere depicted here would actually have been thick with the smoke from all those pipes – the air pumps' dismal failure to clear the smog was a recurrent concern for about eighty

years. Then there was the orchestra: local musicians accorded no more respect than musicians generally were in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, they were a perpetual irritation to the committee of local worthies running the Club: the Minutes record the deliberations necessitated by the players' entreaties for higher weekly wages in response to the annual invitations to re-form the Orchestra for the new season, and the very fact that Rules were required for the governance of the Orchestra – requiring a level of professionalism we would nowadays assume – clearly suggests that such professionalism was conspicuously lacking. Women, we find, formed part of the audience and – quite exceptionally – were frequently heard performing (as singers, and better paid than the men) in this provincial gathering; they are not to be seen here. In fact, vocal music actually comprised the larger part of the evening's formal concert, as we shall see; in this image, no-one is singing anything. Meanwhile, there is absolutely no clue here to the informal, ribald, post-concert communal singing of catches which we know went on after the concert until the early hours of the following morning. Two sources make this clear.

The first, and best-known, is the John Marsh diaries mentioned earlier. Marsh was a barrister by profession, though his diaries make only passing mention of this, concerned as they are with an invaluable (for musicologists) account of his extensive amateur music-making. In the mid-1780s, he lived near Canterbury, and became very actively involved with the musical life of the city. One of his many visits to the Canterbury Catch Club took place on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 1783, which he describes with his usual caustic detail:

About half past 6 an overture was played by the band (in a small orchestra railed off at one end of the room) afterwards followed another glee and then a catch, which constituted the first act; the second of which after a short cessation began with another overture, next to which Mrs. Goodban [the publican's wife] generally made her appearance and sung a song, after which another glee and a catch or chorus concluded the concert. The generality of the audience and performers however commonly remained till 11 or 12 o'clock, smoking pipes (which they did all the time of the concert, except during Mrs Goodban's song, immediately preceding which the company were always desired by the president to lay down their pipes) during which time single songs were sung as called for by the president. The price of admission to this club was only 6d., for which besides the music an unlimited quantity of pipes and tobacco and beer was allowed, in consequence of which many of the members, amongst the lower kinds of tradesmen, etc., used from 40 or 50 pipes (which was always enough to stifle a person at first entering the room and was very disagreeable to the non-smokers) there were three ventilators in the ceiling in order, in some degree, to get rid of the smoke, but the room was so low-pitched and bad that notwithstanding this, it appeared as if we were all in a fog there.<sup>8</sup>

Another, later, first-hand account is far less well-known. Writing in 1920, in *The Music Student*, Percy Scholes records how he visited Canterbury one day and happened upon the Catch Club print in the Beaney

Institute. Upon enquiry, he was directed by a helpful librarian to the house of an elderly gentleman who turned out to be one of the last surviving members of the club, one Mr John E. Wiltshire. In the nick of time — for Mr Wiltshire died very shortly afterwards — Scholes was given the only other first-hand report of a club evening: written by a Mr Welby, it offers a delightful counterpoise to Marsh’s account of some decades previously. Given the reference to the lack of a local constabulary, it seems to describe a club evening from around the early 1830s – only a decade, perhaps, after the print was drawn:

The club was renowned throughout England for its famous music, and for its gentlemanly atmosphere; and visitors were numerous, consisting of officers of the Army, country gentry, and commercial travellers ... When the program was concluded the early birds retired, and for some forty years the after evening was celebrated by amateur free and easy singing, the mirth growing fast and furious till the small hours. No Bruce [police] being then in existence, our grandfathers made a night, and often, too, a morning of it.<sup>9</sup>

All this puts the print in an interesting perspective: no other written records survive of the post-concert conviviality, but it seems to have been much less restrained than the activity – or lack of it – depicted in the print.

Moreover, the music we *do* know about gives us pause for thought. [Figure 7](#) shows the first page of a handwritten book recording the concert programmes for 1825-1837), we know exactly what the club members heard in the 1825-1826 concert season. Here [\[Table 1\]](#) is the programme for the first of the season’s concerts, transcribed from those records.

**Table 1: Canterbury Catch Club Concert programme 28<sup>th</sup> September 1825:**

Genre	Composer	Born	Died	Title	From	Performer	Solo Inst.
Orchestra	Handel, G.F.	1685	1759	Occasional Overture			
Glee	Goodban, Thomas	1784	1863	Charter Glee			
Glee	Wellesley, Garret Colley, Earl of Mornington	1735	1781	Here in Cool Grot			
Song	Alford			Merry Little Soldier		Master Henry Goodban	
Glee	Webbe, Samuel (Snr.)	1740	1816	O Liberty			
Round	Bishop, Henry Rowley	1786	1855	Yes! 'Tis the Indian Drum	Cortez, or the Conquest of Mexico		
Orchestra	Winter, Peter	1754	1825	Overture	Zaire		
Song	Weber, Carl Maria von	1786	1826	Life is Darken'd	Der Freischütz	Mr Jones	
Glee	Bishop, Henry Rowley	1786	1855	Hark from Yonder Holy Pile			



Song	?			?		Miss Longhurst	
Solo	?			Air and Variations		? Hawkshaw	Flute
Song	Whitaker, John	1776	1847	Fly Away Dove		Master Longhurst	
Duet	Parry, John	1777	1856	We Are Two Roving Minstrels			
Glee	Webbe, Samuel (Snr.)	1740	1816	Glorious Apollo			
Orchestra	Mozart, W. A.	1756	1791	Overture	Figaro		
National Anthem	?			God Save the King			

It is a typical programme; the other 360+ records for the next 12 years detail a fairly substantial semi-formal concert each Wednesday evening, and the four years' worth of records for 1859-63 show little change in format. We should note that most of this programme is vocal music: solo songs, glees, a duet, and the National Anthem heavily outnumber the four instrumental items.

As we turn our attention to the Catch Club programmes, we should make a couple of observations about that quintessentially English genre, the glee. We first met the glee, badly performed, in the extract from Dickens, above. The glee is an altogether more serious piece of music than its disreputable cousin, the catch: descendant of the madrigal and progenitor of the English part-song, it flourished at the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth. It is an unaccompanied piece, almost always secular in nature, intended for three, four or five (very occasionally more) solo voices, the top voice usually being the distinctive, male, counter-tenor. This is one of the things which clearly suggests a strong connection with English cathedral music, and it is clear from Canterbury Cathedral records that most of the orchestral players in the Catch Club were Lay Clerks (gentlemen singers) in the cathedral choir. We should especially note that the glee was not usually a piece intended for alcohol-fuelled participation; it expected an audience, and its subject-matter could be very serious indeed.

'Glee' is probably of Saxon origin, from the word 'glio', meaning 'entertainment'. Its subject-matter went far beyond the Arcadian scenes, fairy stories, and courtly love of that earlier genre to explore a greater dramatic and emotional landscape. Although there is much exhortation to sociable consort, other pieces plumb greater depths, embracing such themes as mortality, politics, fantasy, and death. The serious aspirations of the glee did not preclude humour, and finally, there are glees that exuberantly celebrate a popular pastime: several are rollicking good hunting songs. It was a genre intended for a literate audience,

and many composers did not hesitate to provide their own texts. When they looked elsewhere for literary inspiration, it came from some of the finest poets of their own and previous ages: of the lyrics whose authors are readily identifiable in the Canterbury collection (which includes some 500 glees amongst the 3000 vocal pieces), Shakespeare tops the list, followed by, amongst others, Thomas Moore, “Ossian” (the fictitious creation of James Macpherson), Milton and Spencer.

Vaughan Williams described the glee as an “exclusively English” art form, “small in scope, and not of heroic build.” Despite its enormous popularity in the latter half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it has suffered by comparison with its ancestor (the madrigal), with its contemporary (the music of nineteenth-century mainland Europe), and with its descendant (the later English partsong repertoire). It also undoubtedly suffered from the lack of discrimination we see in the Canterbury collection: glees were published, and eagerly consumed, with little regard for their inherent quality. But composers such as Elgar and Pearsall learned their craft, in part, in the English glee clubs which, like Canterbury’s, survived well into the nineteenth century and – also like Canterbury’s – nurtured young talent. Whatever our view of it now, this diminutive genre was extremely important to the Catch and/or Glee Clubs which were found throughout the land in the decades either side of 1800, as the Catch Club programmes make clear.

Having made the case for a most serious re-appraisal of the glee, it has to be conceded that the programmes we have in the Canterbury archives suggest that the taste of the audience tended towards the light-hearted in nature. In this regard, it is instructive to consider which composers appear at the top of the Canterbury Catch Club hit parade in 1825-6, judging by the number of pieces played that season.

**Table 2: The 18 most popular composers represented in the Canterbury Catch Club season 1825-6, by number of pieces played:**

Composer	No. of pieces played
Bishop, Henry Rowley (1786-1855)	63
Callcott, John Wall (1766-1821)	23
Webbe, Samuel (Snr.) (1740-1816)	16
Weber, Carl Maria von (1786-1826)	16
Braham, John (1777-1856)	13
Stevenson, Sir John Andrew (1761-1833)	12
Mazzinghi, Joseph (1765-1844)	11
Winter, Peter (1754-1825)	11
Cooke, Thomas Simpson (1782-1848)	8
Handel, G.F. (1685-1759)	8
Rossini, Gioachino (1792-1868)	8

Mozart, W. A. (1756-1791)	7
Paer, Ferdinando (1771-1839)	7
Stevens, Richard John Samuel (1757-1837)	6
Arne, Thomas (1710-1778)	5
Horn, Charles Edward (1786-1849)	5
Méhul, Étienne Nicolas (1763-1817)	5
Shield, William (1748-1829)	5

The most striking aspect of this raw data is the pre-eminence of Henry Bishop: his popularity far outstrips that of his two nearest rivals – the foremost glee composers of their day – John Wall Callcott and Samuel Webbe in the taste of the Canterbury Catch Club. Clearly, this is a composer to whom we should pay some attention. As an example of his output, we might consider the glee *Mynheer Van Dunck*, which was performed no fewer than six times in the 1825-6 season [fig. 8].<sup>10</sup> It is the opening chorus in George Colman’s play-with-music-by-Bishop, *The Law of Java*. The play is lamentably poor, and Bishop’s music does little to redeem it, but there is no denying his understanding of theatrical imperatives: as the curtain opens on the Dutch soldiers, dismally consigned to their faraway outpost of colonial rule, thumping out their faux-traditional drinking song at the start of the show, things get off to a rollicking start. With its simple, two-verse, solo-chorus structure, its infuriatingly infectious iambic tetrameters (te-TUM-te-TUM-tiddle-IDdle-iddle-UM), and its lamentable doggerel – not to mention the pandering to the racial stereotype of the drunken Dutchman – this piece was guaranteed to be a sure-fire hit. More to the point, for a Catch Club audience it offered a tremendous opportunity (in the chorus) to join in: demanding much enthusiasm and very little sensitivity, its appeal to the drinking classes is clear.

On the subject of vocal music, we should return to the solo song mentioned by Charles Dickens in the passage quoted above. Here, Dickens characterises the piece as “a comic song, with a fal-de-ral–tol-de-rol chorus at the end of every verse, much longer than the verse itself.” None of these songs are anthologized in the Catch Club archive at Canterbury, but the twelve years of concert records show quite clearly that the membership could expect to be treated to three or four songs as part of the concert programme each week. *The Steam Arm*<sup>11</sup> makes an appearance on the 17<sup>th</sup> February 1836, and happens to fit Dickens’ description perfectly, so there is no need to appal the reader with a reproduction of the music and lyrics; suffice it to say that whilst this particular example does not quite bear out Dickens’ assertion that the chorus exceeds the verse in length (the verse wins by 8 bars to 6), it must have felt that way, as the thirteen

tedious verses tell the nonsensical tale of a prosthetic limb which takes on a life of its own. Such comedy has lost its appeal in the intervening two centuries, but there is no reason to doubt its popularity at the time; the arranger, Mr T. Westrop, was clearly capitalising on this when he fitted a second song, *The Cork Leg*, to exactly the same banal melody. And according to the Canterbury records, the song was encored that evening.

Dangerous as it is to extrapolate a general conclusion from only two examples, the rest of the recorded repertoire shares this quality of exuberant humour. Caring little for subtlety or nuance, this music embraces a range of emotional affect we would characterise as sentimental, slapstick, and immediately appealing.

The instrumental music in the Catch Club programmes has much the same character. By far the most popular orchestral item is the overture: 83 of them comprehensively outnumber the other 12 orchestral pieces played that season. It is tempting to draw a parallel with the nature of the vocal repertoire. The rhetoric of the overture is distinctive: it entices, it anticipates, it cajoles the audience, by heraldry, by drama, by extravagant gesture. This makes it perfect for a convivial concert such as the Catch Club's, which is not at all interested in any profundity of musical engagement. In short, none of this is repertoire which makes great demands on its audience.

The various pieces of evidence seem to call into question the level of cultural sophistication this gathering is working so hard to depict. Perhaps this is understandable: the club would hardly wish to publicise the smokiness of the room or the pay disputes with its musicians, and the absence of women is hardly surprising, given their position in British society at this time. But, presented with such a self-conscious portrait, we still have to ask: why might these worthy citizens feel any need to advertise themselves at all? Especially in such an idealised manner? Why the trappings of portraiture, statuary, enscolled motto, and chandelier? Are all those high collars, pipes, glasses and top hats absolutely necessary? And – given the primacy of vocal music in the concert records and the surviving music archive – why not include the singers? In short, why is the Catch Club membership putting on some sort of highly stylised best behaviour?

Charles Dickens offers a clue. In one of those *Sketches by Boz* he muses upon the sad disappearance of May Day traditions such as dancing round a Maypole. "Well; many years ago," he says, "we began to be a steady

and matter-of-fact sort of people, and dancing in spring being beneath our dignity we gave it up...".<sup>12</sup> The Catch Club was an institution born of the 18th century – the Georgian period of English history – and as the historian Vic Gatrell points out, Georgian manners, tastes and behaviour happily embraced the lewd and lascivious at all levels of society.<sup>13</sup> For Gatrell, as for Dickens, the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought about a seismic shift in manners and outward morals which reflected the intellectual developments in science and technology, in secular scholarship, and in the arguments for political and social reform. The consequent doubt as to the continuity of the old order encouraged, in the middle classes, a rush to respectability in which bourgeois identity was “affirmed and remoralised”.<sup>14</sup> This all meant that being middle-class was a perilous existence. As John Rule and Susie Steinbach have pointed out, in a low-level commercial world which depended on a network of credit, the threat of imprisonment for debt was ever-present. Appearances mattered, and Catch Club membership was visible evidence which validated a social position, providing a safe space in which a carefully self-selecting membership could rehearse and perform their social status with a greater sense of security. Here we see an affirmation of an emerging social and political identity.

It was a hard-fought battle. As we have already intimated, we can see the tension in the Club committee’s treatment of the Orchestra – who were, as far as the committee were concerned, merely paid artisans of a lower social class. Throughout the Minutes Books, the committee has to grapple with thorny questions such as where the players might sit if they wanted to watch when not performing (answer: at an unwanted table by the door of the Ladies’ Room<sup>15</sup>), whether they should applaud other performers from their positions in the orchestra (no, they shouldn’t<sup>16</sup>), or whether a member of the Orchestra should be allowed to be a member of the Club (again, no<sup>17</sup>). During the Orchestra Mutiny of 1843 – they actually refused to play – one newspaper correspondent contemptuously reminded the players that they were only worth what anyone was prepared to pay them: when funds are low, “they must, of course, receive a smaller remuneration for their services,” he said.<sup>18</sup> Worst of all, perhaps, was their treatment of their Musical Director, Thomas Goodban, who we met earlier. In 1843 he found himself excluded from the Committee, after forty years’ service. Back in 1819, they’d given him a silver bowl and spoon as a token of their enormous appreciation. In 1843, they put him firmly in his (lower) social place. After all, he was only an innkeeper’s son, however hard he’d tried to earn his respectability. Thoroughly hurt, he resigned. And – after forty years – they let him go.

With all that in mind, it becomes clear that the performance at the back of the room in this print is not the most important one. The real performers are front and centre, as intended: a nascent middle class membership anxious to present a serious club both to themselves and to the outside world. Remembering the portraits, we might note that no expense was spared in strengthening that tenuous grip on social respectability. This is more than self-promotion: with political reform in the air, this print is a propaganda poster in the class war, every bit as manipulative in its intent as any carefully posed royal portrait, up to and including the present day. Here, with all the trappings of nineteenth-century culture clearly on display in this print, we see the Canterbury Catch Club giving a masterclass in the performance of class.

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<sup>1</sup> Ward., H., *Canterbury Guide*, 1843, p.19.

<sup>2</sup> William Jackson, *Letters on Various Subjects: On Catches*, 3rd edn. (London: T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, 1795), p. 61-71 in <<https://archive.org/details/thirtylettersonv00jack>> [accessed 8<sup>th</sup> Feb 2016].

<sup>3</sup> Dickens, C.: *Sketches by Boz* (Macmillan & Co., London 1892; Elibron Classics Replica Edition 2006) pp. 52-4.

<sup>4</sup> Argent, M. (ed.), *Recollections of R.J.S. Stevens; An Organist in Georgian London* (USI, Carbondale, 1992), p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Canterbury Catch Club Minute Book, 1802-1840; Canterbury Cathedral Archives Cat No. CCA-CC-W7-1, p. 62

<sup>6</sup> Mallalieu, H.L., *Dictionary of British Watercolour Artists up to 1920* (Baron Publishing, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1976)

<sup>7</sup> Hamilton, J., *A Strange Business; Making Money and Art in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Atlantic Books: London, 2014), p. 205

<sup>8</sup> Robins, B. (ed.), *The John Marsh Diaries*, Vol 1 (Pendragon Press, Hillsdale, NY, 2011), p.302

<sup>9</sup> Scholes, Percy, *The Canterbury Catch Club*, (*The Music Student*, Vol. XII No. 8, May 1920, BL Shelfmark P.P.1948.blb.)

<sup>10</sup> Canterbury Cathedral Library Catalogue No. **XXXX** Volume 40, p. 75,

<sup>11</sup> Westrop, *Cork Leg & Steam Arm* (BL Shelfmark H.1260.d.(57.))

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17

<sup>14</sup> Gattrell, V., *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth Century London* (Atlantic Books, London, 2006), p. 421

<sup>15</sup> Catch Club Minutes, Nov 15, 1841

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb 8, 1841

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 17, 1833

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<sup>18</sup> *The Kentish Gazette*, 24 October 1843