

# Scribes, Musicians and Dancers

## Early Printed Music and Musical Manuscripts in New Zealand

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Some time in the early twelfth century a scribe at Christ Church Cathedral Priory in Canterbury, England, completed his beautifully illuminated copy of one of the most influential classical treatises on music, the *De Institutione Musica* of Boethius. Nearly nine hundred years later, in 1989, this same manuscript, now part of the collections of the Alexander Turnbull Library, is given pride of place in a lavishly produced catalogue of medieval and renaissance manuscripts in New Zealand, in which the authors of the catalogue describe it as 'probably now the most important book in the country'.<sup>1</sup>

In 1697 the English music publisher John Walsh obtained, by fair means or foul, a set of 'Instructions for Learners' written by the recently deceased Henry Purcell. He published them for the first time, along with twenty-one pieces by Purcell and his contemporaries, in one of his earliest publishing ventures, *The Harpsichord Master*. For nearly three hundred years all the copies of this volume were believed lost, until in 1977 a single remaining copy was discovered to be sitting on a shelf in the Rare Books Room of the Auckland Public Library.

In London in 1708 the apprentice dancing master Kellom Tomlinson copied into his manuscript album a short treatise on the relationship of the music and dance of his time. He continued to add to this album over the following thirteen years, finishing in 1721 with six dances of his own composition which were preserved in no other source. Shortly after this he completed his treatise, *The Art of Dancing*, one of the most important works to be published on baroque dance. His manuscript album with its unique contents disappeared, but in 1989, again nearly three hundred years later, it emerged as part of a collection of dance-related materials owned by a New Zealand family for several generations.<sup>2</sup> It is now on long-term deposit in the Alexander Turnbull Library.

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These are three examples of a phenomenon which has led J. M. Thomson to observe that 'New Zealand has proved a remarkable source of unique musical material'.<sup>3</sup> This article makes no attempt to provide a comprehensive survey of New Zealand holdings of early,