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The Making of Jamaica's 'First Composer': Rethinking Samuel Felsted

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Abstract

This article examines the links between the music of Anglo-Jamaican organist and composer Samuel Felsted (1743–1802) and his environment of late eighteenth-century Kingston, building on research published since the 1980s. Although Felsted, a person of English-American heritage who was born in Jamaica, was part of the island's European-origin community, most of his local contemporaries were people of African descent. Like many of his friends, family members and acquaintances, Felsted was a slave owner, and, as I argue here, his various literary and artistic outputs demonstrate how he was influenced by the kinds of issues – such as slavery, servitude, sovereignty and nationhood – that surfaced in the public and private discourses of his time. Considering what Felsted's cultural legacy might mean today, I turn to his undated and virtually unknown oratorio *The Dedication*, for which he wrote both the text and the music. *The Dedication* contains literary themes that allow its connections to Felsted's world and its setting of ancient Babylon to be explored. I also suggest the early 1790s as a possible time of composition for this work.

Keywords: slavery; Jamaica; colonialism; oratorio; Samuel Felsted; George Frideric Handel; race and music; British Empire

Samuel Felsted has been hailed by researchers and performers of his music as Jamaica's 'first-documented' composer, as the author of 'the first complete oratorio composed in the Western Hemisphere', and as a 'true Jamaican'.¹ Yet, as a so-called 'creole white'² who was born in

I am grateful to all the readers of this material for their helpful comments and suggestions ahead of publication. I am also grateful to staff at the Jamaican Archives and Records Department, the Special Collections of the National Library of Jamaica and the University of the West Indies Library, Mona, Kingston, Jamaica for their assistance in finding research materials. Finally, I would like to thank the staff at the British Library who assisted my search for information about Felsted's manuscript of *The Dedication*.

¹ These accolades are widely used and appear frequently, for example in the writings of Rosina Moder, the executive director of Music Unites Jamaica Foundation. For an example of the description of Samuel Felsted as Jamaica's 'first-documented' composer see 'Samuel Felsted Concert Series 2017', *Diocese of Jamaica & the Cayman Islands – ANGLICAN* www.anglicandioceseja.org/?p=10886 (17 April 2023). Both the naming and programming of this concert series demonstrate how Felsted's legacy has been celebrated recently in Jamaica. For a reference to the Western hemisphere's 'first complete oratorio' see 'The Jamaican-Austrian Felsted Celebration', *Music Unites Jamaica Foundation* www.musicunitesjamaica.com/projects1/the-jamaican-austrian-felsted-celebration (25 October 2022). For a description of Felsted as a 'true Jamaican' see Thurston Dox, 'Samuel Felsted's *Jonah*: The Earliest American Oratorio', *Choral Journal* 32/7 (1992), 32. Dox explained that the excitement generated by a performance of *Jonah* that he had directed was 'the catalyst for the acceptance of this native-born English-American colonial composer as a true Jamaican' (32). Felsted was also acclaimed as a 'Renaissance man' on account of his wide-ranging talents in music, poetry, painting, botany and invention. See Pamela O'Gorman, 'Jonah: An Eighteenth-Century Jamaican Oratorio', *Jamaica Journal* 22/4 (1990), 43.

² Felsted was of Anglo-American parentage. I use the English term 'creole' here in its eighteenth-century sense, to mean a person (regardless of their national or racial heritage) born in the Americas. For further details see Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2005) and David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

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Jamaica and who lived at the peak of the slave-trade era, he remains an obscure and ambivalent figure in the island's colonial past. He is still virtually unknown to musicology: the gradual rediscovery of his 1775 oratorio *Jonah* in the 1980s–1990s and, more recently, the commemoration of the two hundred and twentieth anniversary of his death in 2022 passed with relatively little mention in academic circles, although in the same year a live-streamed concert of some of his works was held simultaneously in Jamaica and Austria.³

What is presently known about Felsted is set out in journal articles written by Thurston Dox (an American musicologist) and Pamela O'Gorman (a former director of the Jamaica School of Music). Together they brought the story of Felsted's rediscovery, his biography and his known musical works at the time – *Jonah* and a set of organ voluntaries – to the academic community.⁴ Dox's remark about Felsted having been a 'true Jamaican' might suggest sympathies with ideologies that are linked to Jamaica's post-independence nationalism. Jamaica declared its independence from the United Kingdom on 6 August 1962, and its national motto – 'Out of Many, One People' – sets a tone of acceptance and inclusivity with regard to the country's varied history leading up to that point. But Dox was writing over thirty years ago, which, incidentally, was around the last time Felsted received serious scholarly attention.

The fact is, neither Felsted's heritage (which is indisputable) nor the detail that he happens to be Jamaica's 'first composer' – that is, the first on record – make him particularly remarkable.⁵ There is currently a rising public interest in better documentation of the history of the slave-trade era and its present-day implications. Following the start of the Black Lives Matter movement and the widespread efforts for decolonization that it has sparked, Commonwealth nations like Jamaica are seeking a different kind of relationship with their former colonial power. Even though Felsted was 'a true Jamaican', the time is ripe, today, to reconsider what makes him relevant and noteworthy as a historical figure.

Current projects that aim to assert the relevance of Felsted's musical, cultural and historical legacies must evaluate him in isolation from the ideological pressures of Jamaican nationalism. Likewise, musicologists need to resist the temptation to situate his music simplistically within the 'fringes' of the canon of Western art music. There is little unique about the sound of Felsted's music. It is devoid of the kinds of African elements that might make it identifiable as Jamaican, and it draws, instead, emphatically on the musical idioms of urban eighteenth-century Britain. Stylistically, Felsted's music is reminiscent of the church and stage works of his English

³ The two hundred and twentieth anniversary of Samuel Felsted's death was commemorated in a live-streamed concert organized by Music Unites Jamaica Foundation (hereafter MUJF) at Kingston Parish Church on 29 March 2022. For details see 'MUJF/Austria Unite to Celebrate Jamaican Composer Samuel Felsted: Concert at Kingston Parish Church March 29', *Jamaica Gleaner* (16 March 2022) <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/entertainment/20220316/mujfaustria-unite-celebrate-jamaican-composer-samuel-felsted> (20 October 2022).

⁴ An original copy of the published score of the oratorio is held at the British Library (shelfmark I.258): Samuel Felsted, *Jonah an Oratorio, Disposed for a Voice and Harpsicord* (London: Longman, Lukey & Broderip, 1775). A copy of Felsted's *Six Organ Voluntaries* [sic] *for Organ or Harpsichord* (London: Thompson, [1794]) is bound in a volume of similar works which is catalogued with the shelfmark R6.9 at the Bristol Central Library; another copy is held at the Manchester Public Libraries (shelfmark BR710.5Ff85).

⁵ For examples of the ways in which Felsted has been – and continues to be – described see: 'News' www.musicunitesjamaica.com/ (21 April 2023); Rosina Christina Moder, 'Jamaican Composers Research: Project Background. The Reasons for the Urgency of Documenting Jamaican Composers', www.musicunitesjamaica.com/project-background.html (21 April 2023); 'Classy Concert Features Major Jamaican Composers', *Jamaica Gleaner* <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/entertainment/20161123/classy-concert-features-major-jamaican-composers> (21 April 2023); and Anne M. Powers, 'Samuel Felsted – Jamaica's First Classical Composer', *A Parcel of Ribbons: Eighteenth Century Jamaica Viewed Through Family Stories and Documents* <http://aparcelofribbons.co.uk/2012/10/samuel-felsted-jamaicas-first-classical-composer/> (21 April 2023). For evidence of a possible earlier Jamaican composer see Mary Caton Lingold, 'In Search of Mr Baptiste: On Early Caribbean Music, Race, and a Colonial Composer', *Early Music* 49/1 (2021), 49–66. The earliest Jamaican music is that of its earliest inhabitants – the Arawak-speaking Taino Indians. Details of their music are rare, but an undated list of titles of 'Arawak Songs' was documented by the Jamaican music historian Astley Clerk (1868–1944). Clerk preferred to lecture on his findings rather than to publish on them. His papers are archived at the National Library of Jamaica under the catalogue reference M.S.44 A-G.

contemporaries such as Thomas Arne, Samuel Arnold and William Shield. It also draws from George Frideric Handel (reflecting the increasing reverence for his works in the decades after his death in 1759) and from Continental composers who emigrated to or sojourned in Britain like Tommaso Giordani and Johann Christian Bach. In its sonic values, Felsted's music is inherently British. Yet, as I explore in some detail below, archival materials surrounding the composer's life link his music unequivocally with the location in which it was conceived, and this is what I would argue makes it interesting. His little-known second oratorio *The Dedication* is especially important because of the connections that can be drawn between the text's themes and Felsted's social context.⁶ This work survives in the British Library as a neatly handwritten and full orchestral score bound as a single volume and written on eighty-three folios; it does not bear a date.⁷

This article does not offer a detailed musical analysis,⁸ nor is it a political critique of the design of music curricula. Rather, I will explore a different model of colonial music historiography by reconceptualizing Felsted's life and by contextualizing his oratorio *The Dedication* in the process. At the time when Felsted lived in and around Kingston, the Jamaican economy was underpinned by profits accrued from the sale of enslaved people of African origin and products derived from their coerced labour, mainly connected with the manufacture of sugar.⁹ Enslaved people and their descendants made up the overwhelming majority of the Jamaican population. But the topic of Felsted's connection to his black contemporaries has continued to be carefully sidestepped by scholars of his life and performers of his music alike. As a musicologist of black British and specifically Jamaican heritage, I want to know more about how Felsted's music demonstrates his sources of influence and how he benefited from living in a society that was made up of people of African descent who were reduced to mere chattels.¹⁰

This article, therefore, takes the opportunity to offer a more complex and multiply informed evaluation of Felsted's life and output. I use an anti-colonialist lens to visualize this man and his

⁶ I make the case for studying the production of oratorio texts in the contexts of the societies in which they were written in my essay 'Contextualizing Late Eighteenth-Century Jamaican Oratorio: Obstacles and Opportunities', in *Colonial-Era Caribbean Theatre: Issues in Research, Writing and Methodology*, ed. Julia Prest (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2023), 135–157. Pamela O'Gorman noted that while searching for the published score of Felsted's *Jonah* during a visit to the British Library in the late 1980s, she spent several hours looking for 'a score by Felsted' in the 'Manuscripts Section'. Although she was able to retrieve the *Jonah* score (the importance of which had already been suggested by Sister Mary Dominic Ray several years earlier), it seems that Felsted's *Dedication* was overlooked. See O'Gorman, 'Jonah: An Eighteenth-Century Jamaican Oratorio', 41; Mary Dominic Ray, 'Six Tales That Wagged a Seventh', *The Sonneck Society Newsletter* 9/1 (1983), 25–27.

⁷ It is held in Archives and Manuscripts with the shelfmark R.M.21.f.2. Nothing is known about the provenance of the score beyond the fact that it forms part of the Royal Music Collection, an assemblage of manuscript and printed sheet music presented to the British Library in 1957 by Queen Elizabeth II. The watermarks of the paper, its countermark, 'JWHATMAN', and the marbled paper binding of the volume broadly date it to the second half of the eighteenth century. See William A. Churchill, *Watermarks in Paper in Holland, England, France, etc. in the XVII and XVIII Centuries and Their Interconnection* (Amsterdam: Menno Hertzberger, 1967), 40–41, and Thomas Balston, *James Whatman, Father & Son* (London: Methuen, 1957).

⁸ This article lays the groundwork for my ongoing analysis and edition of the manuscript score of Felsted's *Dedication*, currently in progress.

⁹ David Hunter, 'The Beckfords in England and Italy: A Case Study in the Musical Uses of the Profits of Slavery', *Early Music* 46/2 (2018), 285–298, and 'Music and the Use of the Profits of the Anglo-American Slave Economy (ca. 1610–ca. 1810)', in *The Oxford Handbook of Economic Ethnomusicology*, ed. Anna Morcom and Timothy D. Taylor (online edition, Oxford Academic, 2020) <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190859633.013.5>.

¹⁰ For a detailed study of the transatlantic slave trade and Jamaica's role as an intermediate, but not the final, destination for many of the Africans who were trafficked to the Americas see Gregory O'Malley, *Final Passages: The Intercolonial Slave Trade of British America, 1619–1807* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2014). See also the *Legacies of British Slavery Database*, Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery <http://www.depts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/search/> (30 October 2022). Various institutions on both sides of the Atlantic have launched highly publicized research projects into the legacies of enslavement. In the United Kingdom these include Exeter College Oxford and the University of Cambridge. See respectively 'Legacies of Slavery Project', *Exeter College Oxford* www.exeter.ox.ac.uk/about/history/legacies-of-slavery-project/ (30 October 2022) and 'Cambridge Responds to Legacies of Enslavement Inquiry', *University of Cambridge* www.cam.ac.uk/stories/legacies-of-enslavement-inquiry (30 October 2022).

social environment through a kind of ‘black gaze’.¹¹ That is to say, my historicization of Felsted is fixated on the indefinite, yet palpable black presence surrounding him and his activities. My choice of the term ‘anti-colonialist’ here refers to the lens through which I approach the colonial music archive. It is intended to acknowledge, but also to create, a distinction from the work of decolonization, which, I would argue, is not possible in the context of a colonial composer such as this one. My aim is to write about Felsted, his music and his colonial context in ways that minimize the risk of reinscribing the harmful effects and perspectives of colonialism.¹² Rereading the colonial music archive ‘along the bias grain’, this article attempts the long overdue task of exploring the extent to which it is possible to reverse the erasure of the black presence in Felsted’s biography.¹³

The relevance of Jamaican music history to global issues of African slavery and the rise of capitalism has featured in the work of scholars of various disciplines, and this article contributes to discussions recently set out by David Hunter, Maria Ryan and Mary Caton Lingold.¹⁴ Prior to their work, European musical culture in late eighteenth-century Jamaica had been examined by only a handful of scholars.¹⁵ The most informative overview of the music of the time and place was provided by Richardson Wright, in his book *Revels in Jamaica* (first published in 1937).¹⁶ Yet this work, as well as the two monographs that followed it – Ivy Baxter’s *Arts of an Island* (1970) and Errol Hill’s *The Jamaican Stage* (1992) – are all dominated by discussion of historic Jamaican theatre. They neither contain detailed references to sacred music nor mention Felsted.¹⁷ In fact, the only detailed source of information about the music of the Church of England in eighteenth-century Jamaica is a ten-page segment of Richard Minter’s *Episcopacy without Episcopate* (1990).¹⁸ Minter’s study is important because it contains an overview of church-vestry accounts held at the Jamaica Archives and Records Department that are now too fragile to be consulted.

¹¹ Tina M. Campt, *A Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021). By using ‘black gaze’ in this context I am referring to my own heightened awareness of the black people who existed in Felsted’s world.

¹² For more about narrating the experiences of black or subjugated people in colonial history writing see (among others) Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) and ‘Venus in Two Acts’, *Small Axe* 12/2 (2008), 1–14; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007); and Rosalind C. Morris and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). For specific musical examples see Lingold, ‘In Search of Mr Baptiste’ and Maria Ryan, ‘“The Influence of Melody upon Man in the Wild State of Nature”: Enslaved Parishioners, Anglican Violence, and Racialized Listening in a Jamaica Parish’, *Journal of the Society for American Music* 15/3 (2021), 268–286.

¹³ For the quoted text see Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 182, note 46.

¹⁴ See Hunter, ‘The Beckfords in England and Italy’; Hunter, ‘Music and the Use of the Profits of the Anglo-American Slave Economy’; David Hunter, ‘Profiting from the Slave Economy and Subscribing to Music: The British Experience in the Eighteenth Century’, in *Music by Subscription: Composers and their Networks in the British Music-Publishing Trade, 1676–1820*, ed. Simon D. I. Fleming and Martin Perkins (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 198–220; Ryan, ‘The Influence of Melody’; and Lingold, ‘In Search of Mr Baptiste’.

¹⁵ Since Robert Murrell Stevenson’s broad survey of Caribbean music history (‘Caribbean Music History: A Selective Annotated Bibliography’, *Inter-American Music Review* 4/1 (1981), 1–84) research in the field has branched in several directions as scholars have demonstrated how the various forms of European colonialism affected music in the region. Specific examples of recent colonial Caribbean music literature include: Bernard Camier, ‘Les concerts dans les capitales de Saint-Domingue à la fin du XVIIIe siècle’, *Revue de Musicologie* 93/1 (2007), 75–98; Lisa M. Lorenzino, ‘Esteban Salas and His Legacy of Music Education in Cuba’, *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 34/2 (2013), 101–118; and Julia Prest, ‘Iphigénie en Haïti: Performing Gluck’s Paris Operas in the French Colonial Caribbean’, *Eighteenth-Century Music* 14/1 (2017), 13–29. For more work in the field see Prest, ed., *Colonial-Era Caribbean Theatre*.

¹⁶ Richardson Wright, *Revels in Jamaica, 1682–1838*, new edition (Kingston: Bolivar Press, 1986).

¹⁷ Ivy Baxter, *The Arts of an Island: The Development of the Culture and of the Folk and Creative Arts in Jamaica, 1494–1962 (Independence)* (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1970) and Errol Hill, *The Jamaican Stage, 1655–1900: Profile of a Colonial Theatre* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992).

¹⁸ Richard A. Minter, *Episcopacy without Episcopate: The Church of England in Jamaica before 1824* (Cambridge: author, 1990), 273–283.

What follows is structured in three parts. In the first part I sketch some relevant information about life in late eighteenth-century Kingston. In the second, I set out details about some of Felsted's connections to non-white¹⁹ Kingstonians, focusing on people of African and Afro-European descent. Then, in the final part, I show why Felsted's *Dedication* might reveal details about how he was influenced by his environment, and the seismic political change that Jamaicans witnessed around the time of the Haitian Revolution.

Eighteenth-Century Kingston

Located in a natural harbour on the south coast of Jamaica (see [Figure 1](#)), eighteenth-century Kingston was a kind of social crucible. Home to 'blacks, browns, Jews and whites', a 'cacophony of voices' and a 'jumble of complexions', eighteenth-century Kingston had the largest enslaved population in Jamaica and was the 'fourth largest town in the British Atlantic'.²⁰ For the period between 1774 and 1789 Jamaica's total population has been estimated at 250,000, with around ten per cent of that figure (26,000) making up the number of Kingston's inhabitants.²¹ This made it comparable in size with New Orleans at the time,²² but Kingston's many more enslaved persons (estimated to have been 16,659 around 1788) would have made its look and feel altogether quite different.²³ As the chief port in the anglophone Caribbean, Kingston sat at the centre of Britain's vast commercial and trading network in the Americas (see [Figure 2](#)). Day by day ships arrived bringing precious cargoes of food, clothing, stationery, books, music and news, and carrying passengers both European and African, free and enslaved. Announcements and 'for sale' notices were published in local newspapers such as *The Daily Advertiser* (examples of which can be seen in [Figures 3](#) and [4](#)).

Away from the busy harbourside, the northern part of Kingston – close to Half-Way Tree (a town in the neighbouring parish of St Andrew) – was a comfortable home for some of the colony's wealthiest merchants. But Jamaica was still a hostile place. While blacks were either subjected to brutal regimes of slave labour or marginalized as so-called 'free' citizens, whites lived in constant fear of death at the hands of black rebels, tropical disease and Jamaica's supposedly degenerative climate.²⁴ Inevitably, the sensation of displacement was also felt by some of the black inhabitants, who, longing to return to their homelands, reportedly composed songs about their captivity and the

¹⁹ By my use of the term 'non-white' here I am including people of Ibero-Jewish heritage, as Maria Nugent did in her diary when she wrote about the 'Blacks, Whites and Jews' alongside whom she attended the theatre in Spanish Town in February 1803. Maria Nugent, *Lady Nugent's Journal: Jamaica One Hundred Years Ago*, ed. Frank Cundall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 193. However, other writers of the period, like the Jamaican estate owner Bryan Edwards (1743–1800), regarded Jamaica's Jewish population as being part of the white community. For more on this issue see my essay 'Contextualizing Late Eighteenth-Century Jamaican Oratorio', and also Stephen H. Gregg, 'Introduction', in *Empire and Identity: An Eighteenth-Century Sourcebook*, ed. Gregg (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2005), 1–25.

²⁰ Nugent, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 193; Trevor Burnard and John Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine: Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 58; Trevor Burnard, 'Slaves and Slavery in Kingston, 1770–1815', *International Review of Social History* 65/Special Issue S28 (2020), 40.

²¹ For further demographic information about Kingston during the period in question see Colin G. Clarke, *Kingston, Jamaica: Urban Development and Social Change, 1692–2002* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 6, and B. W. Higman, 'Jamaican Port Towns in the Early Nineteenth Century', in *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650–1850*, ed. Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 119.

²² Stephen Banfield, 'Anglophone Musical Culture in Jamaica', in *Art and Emancipation in Jamaica: Isaac Mendes Belisario and His Worlds*, ed. T. J. Barringer and Gillian Forrester (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 137–148.

²³ Wilma R. Bailey, 'Kingston, 1692–1843: A Colonial City' (PhD dissertation, University of the West Indies, 1974), 205.

²⁴ Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). For more about European 'degeneration' in the early Americas see Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 15, and Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), 14.

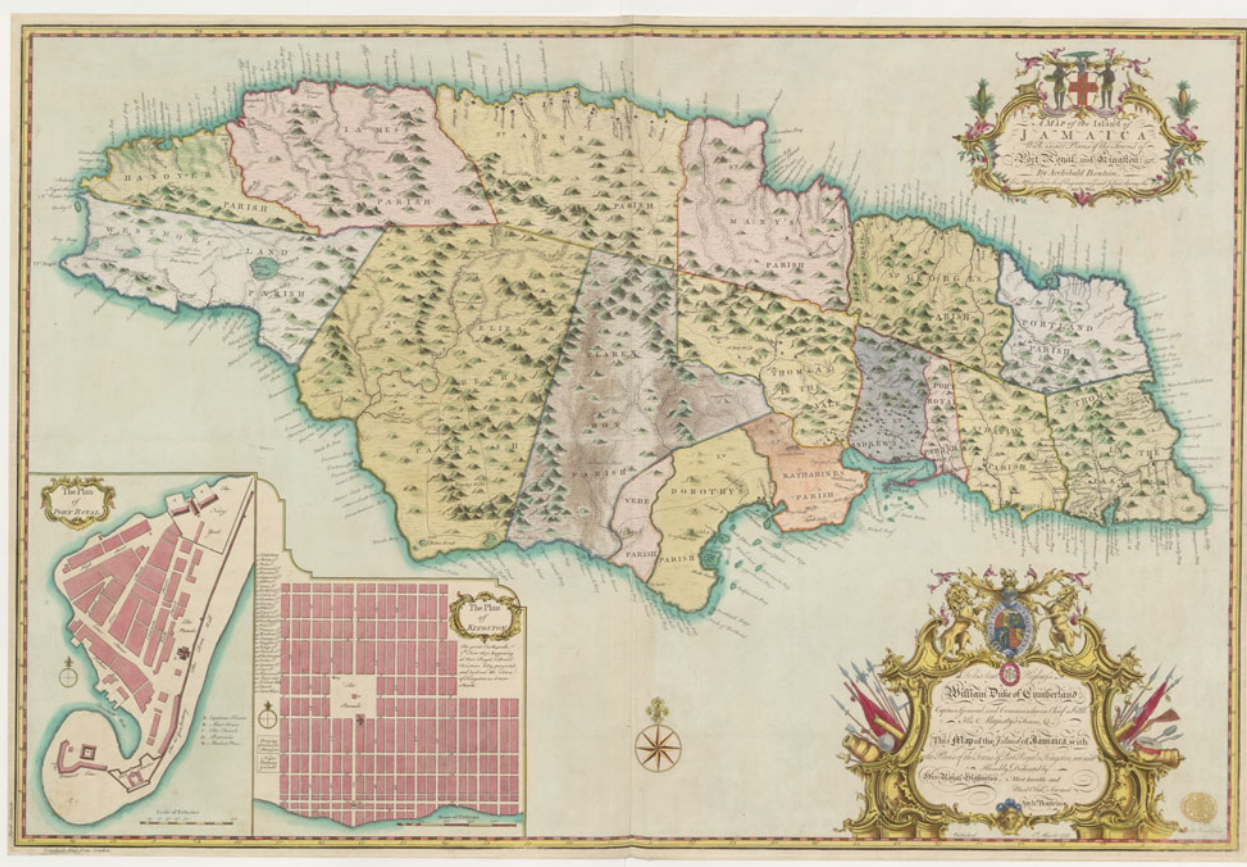


Figure 1. Archibald Bontein, *A Map of the Island of Jamaica* (1753), The British Library, Maps K.Top.123.50. © British Library Board. Used by permission

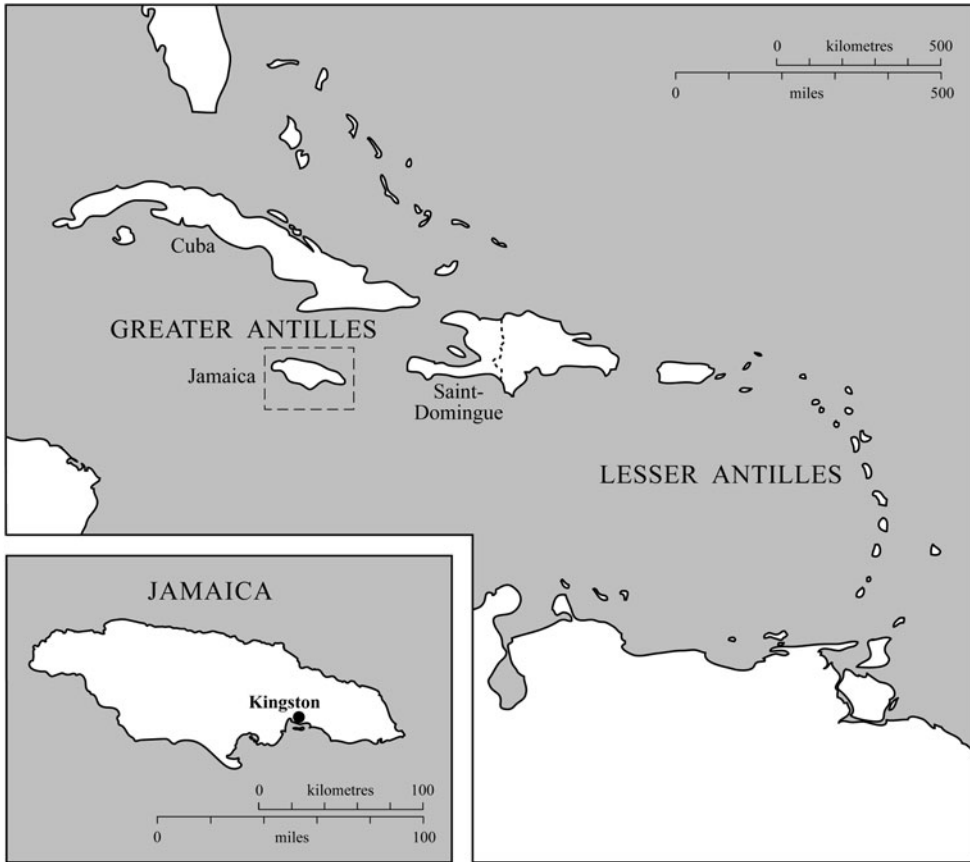


Figure 2. Map showing Jamaica and Kingston in their broader geographical contexts

absenteeism of their white owners.²⁵ An example of one such song was printed in the book *West India Customs and Manners* by J. B. Moreton, as follows:

If me want for go in a * Ebo,
 Me can't go there!
 Since them tief me from a Guinea,
 Me can't go there!
 If me want for go in a * Congo,
 Me can't go there!
 Since dem tief me from my tatta,
 Me can't go there!
 If me want for go in a Kingston,
 Me can't go there!
 Since massa go in a England,
 Me can't go there!²⁶

²⁵ Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society*, 213; Jean D'Costa, *Voices in Exile: Jamaican Texts of the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 12–13.

²⁶ Anonymous, 'If me want for go in a Ebo', transcribed in J. B. Moreton, *West India Customs and Manners*, new edition (London: Parsons, 1793), 153. The asterisks before 'Ebo' and 'Congo' point to a footnote on this page that defines them as 'Countries in Africa'. 'Ebo' likely refers to the lands of the Igbo people in southern Nigeria.

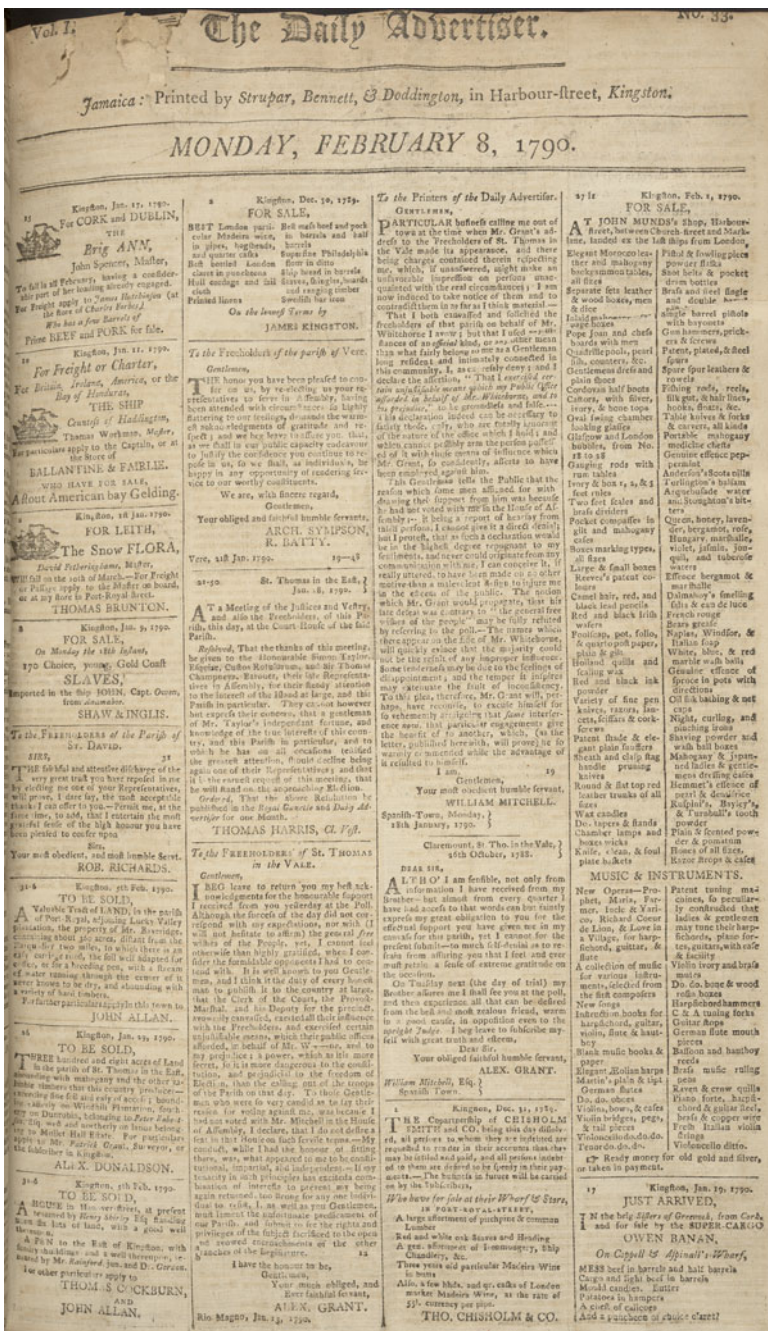


Figure 3. Cover page of *The Daily Advertiser* (Kingston, 8 February 1790). © British Library Board (PENN.NT328, fol. 64). Used by permission

Because of the various challenges that their host environment presented, many of Jamaica's white inhabitants imagined the island as a temporary place of residence. Acknowledging this helps to underline why, at the time, they appear to have looked beyond Jamaica for sources of their culture. As Trevor Burnard has explained, 'the colony was full of transients with relatively little commitment

MUSIC & INSTRUMENTS.

<p>New Operas—Prophet, Maria, Farmer, Ince & Yari-co, Richard Coeur de Lion, & Love in a Village, for harp-fichord, guttar, & flute</p> <p>A collection of music for various instru-ments, selected from the first composers</p> <p>New songs</p> <p>Instruction books for harpfichord, guitar, violin, flute & haut-boy</p> <p>Blank music books & paper</p> <p>Elegant Æolian harps</p> <p>Martin's plain & tipt German flutes</p> <p>Do. do. oboes</p> <p>Violins, bows, & cafes</p> <p>Violin bridges, pegs, & tail pieces</p> <p>Violoncello do. do. do.</p> <p>Tenor do. do. do.</p>	<p>Patent tuning ma-chines, so peculiar-ly constructed that ladies & gentlemen may tune their harp-fichords, piano for-tes, guitars, with ease & facility</p> <p>Violin ivory and brasa mutes</p> <p>Do. do. bone & wood rosin boxes</p> <p>Harpfichord hammers</p> <p>C & A tuning forks</p> <p>Guitar stops</p> <p>German flute mouth pieces</p> <p>Bassoon and hautboy reeds</p> <p>Brasa music ruling pens</p> <p>Raven & crow quills</p> <p>Piano forte, harpfi-chord & guitar steel, brasa & copper wire</p> <p>Fresh Italian violin strings</p> <p>Violoncello ditto.</p>
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☞ Ready money for old gold and silver, or taken in payment.

Figure 4. Cover page of *The Daily Advertiser* (Kingston, 8 February 1790), detail

to developing a coherent community ethos and collective identity in the ways that happened in established colonies of British North America.²⁷

Nevertheless, Kingston was home to a thriving commercial European music scene.²⁸ It was underpinned by the efforts of entrepreneurs such as the shop owners James Costard (died 1775) and John Munds (1760–1821), military musicians like Henry Andrew Francken (c1720–1795) and sojourning actor-singers including David Douglass (c1720–1786), Lewis Hallam (1740–1808) and James Mahon (fl. 1767–1799).²⁹ Most of the surviving details about day-to-day musical performances relate to the

²⁷ For more information about the ways in which white men organized, maintained and experienced Jamaican society during the eighteenth century see Trevor Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves: Plantation Societies in British America, 1650–1820* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 157.

²⁸ Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World, 1649–1849* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 165–214.

²⁹ From the inventory of James Costard (also Collard), it is clear that most orchestral instruments of the period were available to buy at his shop in addition to domestic and military instruments like guitars, harps, fifes and drums. Costard sold songs, country dances, various other kinds of sheet music and other accoutrements like music desks, mutes, wire, quills,

ballroom, concert hall and theatre.³⁰ Specific evidence of Felsted's involvement with the Kingston theatre has not survived. Nevertheless, evidence that he was influenced by the theatre can be deduced from the fact that each of the six scenes of *The Dedication* opens with a brief but detailed note about staging.³¹ Felsted's dramatic stipulations are likely to have been influenced by the oratorios of Handel, which were known in Jamaica at the time.³² It is also known that Felsted owned manuscripts produced by Handel or his copyists.³³

Though they are the easiest people to trace in the archive, the white male musicians of eighteenth-century Jamaica (such as those named above) did not exist on their own. They had wives and families who were also musically active. They were attended by servants and slaves of African and mixed heritage, and many white males were the fathers of illegitimate children of mixed ancestry.³⁴ Very few non-white Jamaicans were able to transcend the boundaries that were imposed by the white male property-owning society; slaves were only manumitted in exceptional circumstances, by private acts passed by the island's governing assembly. The only portion of Jamaican society to see any natural growth during the period in question was the racially mixed 'people of colour' group. Meanwhile, around the end of the American Revolution, Kingston's black population as a whole was bolstered by newly arrived evacuees, many of whom had been granted their freedom by fighting as part of the loyalist campaign. In the following section, I will explain some of the links between Felsted and his black contemporaries living in Kingston. These connections existed through enslavement and its related social contexts but also through Felsted's religious and military associations.

The Afro-Jamaican Presence in Felsted's World

It was into the cosmopolitan environment that I have sketched out here – with all its dynamics of white privilege, power imbalances, racial inequality and black subjugation – that Samuel Felsted's music was born. The oratorio *Jonah*, which Felsted described as his 'first attempt at composition', was probably completed and sent to London for publication sometime in 1774. At this point, Felsted was serving as the organist of the St Andrew Parish Church in Half-Way Tree,³⁵ a role

bows and reeds. Inventory of James Costard, 10 September 1775, Jamaica Archives and Records Department, Spanish Town (JARD) 1B/11/3/56 fol. 113B–14B. The Dutch freemason Henry Andriese (Andrew) Francken (c1720–1795) was a military bandmaster and served as the island's official Master of Revels in 1784 and again between 1793 and 1793. The detail that Francken was a bandmaster is clear from commentary written in the issues of Kingston's *Royal Gazette* of 19 and 28 January 1791. The activities of theatre managers like Douglass, Hallam and Mahon are well documented. See Wright, *Revels in Jamaica*, 21, 292 and 297; Philip H. Highfill junior, Kalman A. Burnim and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800*, sixteen volumes, volume 10 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 55–56; and Sterling E. Murray, 'Love in a Village and a New Direction for Musical Theater in Eighteenth-Century America', in *Rethinking American Music*, ed. Tara Browner and Thomas L. Riis (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 77–102.

³⁰ See *A Grand Jamaica Ball!*, attributed to Abraham Jones (London, 1802). This is discussed in Maria Ryan, 'Hearing Power, Sounding Freedom: Black Practices of Listening, Ear-Training, and Music-Making in the British Colonial Caribbean' (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2021), 25–26.

³¹ For a shorter example of the staging directions see [Figure 9](#) below.

³² Handel's four coronation anthems were performed in Jamaica as part of a ceremony marking the coronation of George III in 1761. Barry W. Higman, *Proslavery Priest: The Atlantic World of John Lindsay, 1729–1788* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2011), 119–120.

³³ See Hunter, 'Music and the Use of the Profits of the Anglo-American Slave Economy'. Music from several of Handel's oratorios featured in the funeral of the Countess of Effingham (died 13 October 1791), which was held at the St Catherine Parish Church in Spanish Town (now Spanish Town Cathedral) a few weeks after her death. See *St Jago de la Vega Gazette* (4 November 1791). Further details about the performance of Handel's music in late eighteenth-century Jamaica are forthcoming in my PhD dissertation, 'Space, Race and the Music of Late Eighteenth-Century Kingston, Jamaica' (University of Cambridge).

³⁴ Daniel Livesay, *Children of Uncertain Fortune: Mixed-Race Jamaicans in Britain and the Atlantic Family, 1733–1833* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

³⁵ Historically the parishes of St Andrew and Kingston shared a border; today, Half-Way Tree is a district within the Kingston metropolis. The church remains active.

he had assumed after his father's death in 1767.³⁶ The cost of publishing *Jonah* appears to have been met by a subscription of more than 240 individuals, who collectively ordered over 280 copies of the work, to be printed by Longman, Lukey and Broderip of Cheapside, London.³⁷

It is unknown whether any of the subscribers were people of colour, though several were parents of children with mixed Afro-European heritage.³⁸ Hugh Clarke, probably a relation of Dugald Clarke (died c1798), could have been one such non-white subscriber. Dugald Clarke – a self-identified 'free mulatto' – was an engineer and inventor who had been granted special rights as a 'free person of colour' by a private act passed by the Jamaican Assembly in 1772.³⁹ Effectively this meant that Clarke's race was rarely mentioned thereafter. However, despite his freedom and special privileges, a reference in Robert Hibbert's diary to an occasion when he and others 'declined an invitation from Livingstone in consequence of his hav[in]g. expressly excluded Clarke on acc[oun]t. of his colour', illustrates the kind of social stigma that Clarke still faced.⁴⁰ Though Felsted's link with Hugh Clarke is uncertain, it is plausible that his interests in engineering and invention would have led to encounters with the Clarke family.⁴¹

During his tenure at the St Andrew Parish Church, Felsted set about producing an oil painting of a townhouse owned by Emanuel Baruh Lousada (Figure 5).⁴² His name and the date of 1778 are clearly noted in the lower left-hand corner (see Figure 6). Details about the connections between Felsted and Lousada have not survived, but the latter was a merchant of Jewish-Iberian heritage and a prominent member of Kingston's Sephardic community. His house stood on the road linking Kingston and Half-Way Tree (Felsted's hometown), and it is likely to have been a building that Felsted passed frequently. The composer's artworks provide a helpful stimulus for thinking broadly about the kinds of non-white people that might have been involved with his music or affected by it. What is important about the Lousada painting for me here is not the house, its imposing point of focus. Rather, it is the two black figures – a coach driver and the attending page – whom Felsted

³⁶ Dox, 'Samuel Felsted's *Jonah*', 27.

³⁷ Felsted, *Jonah*. The subscriber list appears on the first four pages, following the engraved title-page. In my transcription of it I have counted 242 entries, all pertaining to individuals apart from one company (the publisher of the score: Longman, Lukey and Broderip). However, Dox noted 213 subscribers and O'Gorman counted 243. Dox, 'Samuel Felsted's *Jonah*', 29; O'Gorman, 'Jonah: An Eighteenth-Century Jamaican Oratorio', 44.

³⁸ Examples include the Jamaican estate owner and mortgagee, John Allen (died Bristol c1796), whose 'natural children', Jane and John, were born to Jane McDonald, a 'free woman of colour' living in Kingston. Allen set out details about how these children, together with his daughter, Betsy (presumably born to his wife), would be provided for after his death. Allen is a family name that surfaces repeatedly in sources relating to late eighteenth-century musicians in Kingston. Together with Henry Francken (named above), John Allen helped to prepare James Costard's estate inventory. A further example is the Kingston merchant Nathaniel Milward (1738–1775), who fathered three 'quadroon' children. Milward set out his intentions for his children's care after his death in his will. 'Nathaniel Milward', *Legacies of British Slavery Database* <http://www.depts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146662359> (20 October 2022). Also see Livesay, *Children of Uncertain Fortune*, 102–105. For information about some of the subscribers to Felsted's *Jonah* see O'Gorman, 'Jonah: An Eighteenth-Century Jamaican Oratorio', 42.

³⁹ Livesay, *Children of Uncertain Fortune*, 21; David Beck Ryden, 'Manumission in Late Eighteenth-Century Jamaica', *New West Indian Guide* 92/3–4 (2018), 215; and Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society*, 172–173.

⁴⁰ Robert Hibbert noted this information in his diary entry of Sunday, 28 July 1772. See Nick Hibbert Steele, *The Jamaican Diaries of Robert Hibbert 1772–1780: Detailing a Merchant Family's Involvement in and Defence of the Colonial Slave Trade Based Economy* (Melbourne: Asset Sales, 2020), 253–254.

⁴¹ For details about Felsted's interests in invention see Thurston Dox, 'Samuel Felsted of Jamaica', *The American Music Research Center Journal* 1 (1991), 45.

⁴² The Emanuel Baruh Lousada I am writing about here was probably the man who lived between 1743 and 1797 and whose death was reported in Kingston's *Columbian Magazine* in September 1797. However, another Emanuel Baruh Lousada was recorded to have died around 1806. It is possible, but not clear, whether these were in fact the same person. See 'Emanuel Baruh Lousada of Kingston Jamaica', *Legacies of British Slavery Database* <http://www.depts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/21466632983> (1 September 2022). For details about Felsted's painting see O'Gorman, 'Jonah: An Eighteenth-Century Jamaican Oratorio', 43, and Stanley Mirvis, *The Jews of Eighteenth-Century Jamaica: A Testamentary History of a Diaspora in Transition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 193–194.



Figure 5. Samuel Felsted, *A North-East View of the House of Mr Emanuel Lousada* (1778). Private collection; courtesy of Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York. Photograph by Eric Baumgartner. Used by permission



Figure 6. Felsted, *A North-East View of the House of Mr Emanuel Lousada*, detail

captured in the lower right corner of his work, and the opportunities they afford for what Saidiya Hartman has termed ‘critical fabulation’.⁴³

Dwarfed by the house, the two figures are depicted in motion, appearing – quite unlike other contemporaneous illustrations of blacks – to bustle purposefully into the frame.⁴⁴ Dressed in bright blue house livery, they ride on a beautifully decorated carriage (Figure 7). Felsted’s choice to portray these men could have reflected an artistic convention: they might simply have been intended to

⁴³ For an explanation of ‘critical fabulation’ see Hartman, ‘Venus in Two Acts’, 11.

⁴⁴ Felsted’s decision to depict the two black male figures in his painting is striking and raises questions about his motives. Similar illustrations of Jamaican buildings from the time do not contain a human figure, for example, Pierre Eugène Du Simitière’s *A South West View of the House of Augustin Meridian in Kingston*, of March 1760. See James Knight, *The Natural, Moral, and Political History of Jamaica and the Territories Thereon Depending: From the First Discovery of the Island by Christopher Columbus, to the Year 1746*, ed. Jack P. Greene and Taylor Stoermer (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2021), 402. Where people of African origin did appear in urban scenarios wearing European dress, they were often portrayed as destitute and in many cases in a satirical manner. Consider, for example: *A Grand Jamaica Ball!*, attributed to Abraham Jones (London, 1802); *A Dance in Jamaica* (undated) by Emeric Essex Vidal (1791–1861); and the illustrations published in John Spilsbury’s *Views of Jamaica* (London, 1770).



Figure 7. Felsted, *A North-East View of the House of Mr Emanuel Lousada*, detail

allow the viewer to gauge the scale of the house. However, it is also conceivable that they were known to him personally. Perhaps they were free people of colour who, in another context, formed part of a local militia regiment. They might have attended the sorts of mustering ceremonies that Felsted was required to superintend from 1782 as Kingston's Deputy Mustermaster-General.⁴⁵ The driver and page might also have been musicians themselves, performing as drummers or trumpeters.⁴⁶ Perhaps, on the other hand, they were enslaved domestic servants attached to the Lousada household and, as part of their duties, were required to convey their owners to concerts, operas and assemblies.⁴⁷ It is reasonable to assume that while waiting outside for their owner's return, they overheard whatever music was going on inside. They therefore could also have been present when Felsted's oratorio *Jonah* was performed for the first time.

⁴⁵ The Jamaican militia 'consisted of local free men – white, coloured, black and Jew – between the ages of sixteen and sixty'. Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society*, 26. Citing Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* of 1775, George Metcalf has explained how Kingston was said to boast the best regiment on the island. Its muster roll contained some 'two thousand white men and five hundred free Negroes and mulattos, all well-trained and well-equipped'. George Metcalf, *Royal Government and Political Conflict in Jamaica, 1729–1783* (London: Royal Commonwealth Society and Longmans, 1965), 18. It is not clear whether Felsted's role existed prior to this time, but he was listed as part of the militia in the Jamaican almanacs that were published between 1782 and 1802.

⁴⁶ John Ellis, 'Drummers for the Devil? The Black Soldiers of the 29th (Worcestershire) Regiment of Foot, 1759–1843', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 80/323 (2002), 186–202, and Steven Baule, 'Drummers in the British Army During the American Revolution', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 86/345 (2008), 20–33.

⁴⁷ As well as containing frequent references to dances and assemblies, the diary of Robert Hibbert (1750–1835) mentions several concerts that were held in Kingston between 1772 and 1780 and that were attended by Jewish women. For example, in an entry dated Friday 15 January 1773 Hibbert went 'to the Concert in the evening. Mrs McLasham, Mrs Fitch, the Misses Gregs, Miss Rogers, etc. there, & plenty of Jewesses'. Hibbert was a flautist and a particularly prominent member of Kingston's white elite. Steele, *The Jamaican Diaries of Robert Hibbert 1772–1780*, 265, 365.

Whilst Felsted's painting of the Lousada mansion brings the question of his relationship with the local black inhabitants into high relief, there are various other kinds of link to be drawn. Felsted, like various members of his extended family, was a slaveowner. His ownership of slaves is mentioned in his will, which he signed on 29 May 1797.⁴⁸ Of these people, Felsted singled out one – a woman named Patience – for special mention. Felsted explained that his slaves could, if necessary, be sold in order to repay his outstanding debts after his death but in 'acknowledgement' of her continued 'attention', Felsted bequeathed Patience to his wife. The document does not contain further details about Patience beyond the fact that she had nursed Felsted through an illness that he referred to as a 'long continued indisposition'.⁴⁹

Margaret Felsted, a 'free black woman' who was baptised in Kingston in 1806, is another person whose enslavement bound her to the Felsted family.⁵⁰ Her birth year (c1741) is close to Samuel Felsted's (1743) and her name is strikingly similar to that of his wife, who appears variously in historic documents as Margaret, Mary (in the list of subscribers to Felsted's *Jonah*) and Maria.⁵¹ The Kingston slave register for 1817, for instance, documents a woman named Margaret Mary Felsted as owning thirteen slaves.⁵² Dox identified Felsted's wife as 'Maria Laurence' the daughter of Richard Laurence (a Jamaican estate owner), which might lead historians to the conclusion that she was a white woman.⁵³ However, a manumission record for 'Mary' – also referred to by the name 'Maria' – that dates from 1762 explains that her freedom was secured by Felsted's father, William, for ten shillings in the local currency.⁵⁴ Could this formerly enslaved woman have become Samuel Felsted's wife? Or could she have been the illegitimate child of William Felsted and a woman of African heritage?⁵⁵ Perhaps the simplest answer is that the woman's former owner granted her permission to pay William Felsted to arrange and oversee the process of her manumission. In any case, it is clear that the woman was closely connected to the Felsteds, if only through the act of her emancipation.

In his role as the organist of Kingston Parish Church, to which he had been appointed in 1783,⁵⁶ Felsted would have performed from the church's west-end gallery (an acoustic vantage point). This space would have been peopled by the Afro-Jamaican congregants during services.⁵⁷ The conspicuous presence of African-descended worshippers would have been a familiar aspect of the weekly Divine Services that took place in Jamaica's spaces of Anglican worship. In the words of one Jamaican rector living during Felsted's lifetime, 'on Sundays the people of Colour make three fourths of my

⁴⁸ Will of Samuel Felsted, 14 March 1805. JARD, Wills of Jamaica Supreme Court 1756–1930, microfilm 1937926, images 281–283. Jamaica, Church of England Parish Register Transcripts, 1664–1880, available at www.familysearch.org (1 September 2022).

⁴⁹ Will of Samuel Felsted, image 282. It is important to acknowledge here that the name Patience may have been neither the woman's birth name nor how she would have chosen to refer to herself.

⁵⁰ For further details see www.familysearch.org: Jamaica, Church of England Parish Register Transcripts, 1664–1880, Kingston Baptisms 1793–1825, volume 2.

⁵¹ Dox, 'Samuel Felsted of Jamaica', 41.

⁵² For details see *Former British Colonial Dependencies, Slave Registers, 1813–1834* (Jamaica, Kingston, 1817, E–M, fol. 117), available at www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1129/.

⁵³ Dox, 'Samuel Felsted of Jamaica', 41.

⁵⁴ References within the manumission record to a codicil document suggest that the woman had also been the 'property' of Elizabeth Watkins, whose house on Church Street, Kingston was subsequently owned by Samuel Felsted. 'Felsted William to Mary', 20 May 1762, JARD, 'Manumission Book' volume 7 (1760–1765, 1772), 1B/11/6/7, fol. 122.

⁵⁵ My survey of the sizeable body of probate and Jamaican law-court documents for further information about Samuel Felsted, his family and his wider circle of acquaintances, which begins with those named in the published list of subscribers to his first oratorio *Jonah*, is currently in progress.

⁵⁶ Minter, *Episcopacy without Episcopate*, 279.

⁵⁷ West-end organ galleries are a common architectural feature in Jamaica's earliest Anglican churches. Though the instrument has been replaced, the west-end gallery in Spanish Town Cathedral remains the location of the church's organ today. Whilst the most detailed historic references about this issue survive from after 1802, it is likely that the practice of racial segregation adopted in the theatres of Felsted's day was also applied in the churches. See Wright, *Revels in Jamaica*, 319; Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society*, 187; and Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787–1834* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 12–13.

Congregation, nay, many times I would not have A Congregation without Them'.⁵⁸ The fact that it has gone undocumented in archival sources does not preclude the likelihood that Jamaican organists such as the Felsteds performed the labour of psalm and hymn accompaniment from within an acoustic enclave of black singing. Could the organists have provided musical instruction for the black congregants as they were sometimes required to do for the 'poor children of the parish'?⁵⁹ Could a version of the English church-gallery choir have existed in the black space of Jamaica's pre-emancipation organ loft?⁶⁰ The surviving sources do not offer concrete evidence to answer these questions. But they do allow us to imagine how, with their supposed 'good ears' for 'tune and time', worshippers of African descent – at least in the minds of whites – learned hymns and psalms quickly. Singing from memory, they would likely have performed this church song in their own characteristic manner.⁶¹

Writing in the 1760s and early 1770s, Edward Long (1734–1813) – the pre-eminent historian of Jamaica at the time – explained that municipal organists were generally required to play for the funerals of non-white Christians, and they received additional pay on top of their reasonable up-to-£130 salary for doing so.⁶² In Jamaica, Christians who were black appear to have been laid to rest in the same burial grounds as those who were white.⁶³ And church sextons, like Samuel Felsted's father (who was also an organist), were paid per burial.⁶⁴ The Kingston vestry's mandate of 1781 – that 'the Church Bell' was to be tolled for 'no longer than five Minutes' unless for funerals 'of white persons' – implies that the bell might have been deliberately rung for people who were not white for long periods.⁶⁵ Whether enslaved or free, Kingston's bellringers were probably people of colour.⁶⁶ Kingston Parish Church could, therefore, have become a kind of contested space in which

⁵⁸ Nicholas M. Beasley, *Christian Ritual and the Creation of British Slave Societies, 1650–1780* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 33 and 153, note 46.

⁵⁹ Dox, 'Samuel Felsted of Jamaica', 41. Kingston boasted at least one surpliced choir of 'twelve singing youths' in 1788. This group performed in a ceremony to mark the laying of the foundation of the Scotch Kirk. Evidence that the neighbouring parish of St Catherine's deliberated briefly over whether to appoint a competent non-white organist at the church in Spanish Town (Jamaica's capital at the time) is apparent in sources dating from around the second decade of the nineteenth century. Minter, *Episcopacy without Episcopate*, 280–282.

⁶⁰ On the gallery tradition in England see Nicholas Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church*, two volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), volume 1, 154–158.

⁶¹ For more on imagining black soundscapes in colonial spaces see (among those studies already mentioned) Bonnie Gordon, 'What Mr. Jefferson Didn't Hear', in *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, ed. Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe and Jeffrey Kallberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For the quoted text see William Beckford, *A Descriptive Account of the Island of Jamaica: with Remarks upon the Cultivation of the Sugar-cane, Throughout the Different Seasons of the Year, and Chiefly Considered in a Picturesque Point of View and Reflections on What Would Probably Be the Effects of an Abolition of the Slave Trade, and of the Emancipation of the Slaves*, two volumes (London: T. & J. Egerton, 1790), volume 2, 387.

⁶² Edward Long, in his *History of Jamaica* (originally published in 1774), offered the information that organists were paid £120 in the local currency per annum with additional annuities for funerals and other special services. Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica: Or, General Survey of the Ancient and Modern State of That Island, with Reflections on Its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government*, three volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), volume 2, 5. However, the inventory of Felsted's predecessor John Daniel D'Luski (died 1781) shows that he was paid £130. (Inventory of John Daniel D'Luski, 11 October 1784, JARD, 1B/11/3/65, fols 44r–45v.) Samuel Felsted's initial salary for serving as the Kingston Parish Church organist was £100 and was probably increased later. See Minter, *Episcopacy without Episcopate*, 278. Although organists' salaries fluctuated, they received wages that positioned them comfortably among Jamaica's wealthier so-called 'poor whites'. By the late eighteenth century the overseer of a large estate might earn between £200 and £300 per annum. Meanwhile, a bookkeeper might have received as little as £50. Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society*, 142. For contextual information about the Jamaican estate inventories of the period see Richard B. Sheridan, 'The Wealth of Jamaica in the Eighteenth Century', *The Economic History Review* 18/2 (1965), 299–300.

⁶³ See Beasley *Christian Ritual and the Creation of British Slave Societies*, 123, 125.

⁶⁴ Beasley, *Christian Ritual and the Creation of British Slave Societies*, 30–31, 118.

⁶⁵ Beasley, *Christian Ritual and the Creation of British Slave Societies*, 115.

⁶⁶ Some sextons, like Nathaniel Swivany of the Port Royal Parish Church in the 1730s, owned slaves. These are the people who probably performed the laborious tasks of bell-ringing and grave-digging. Free people of colour are also likely to have

certain aspects of white hegemony might become distorted or even deliberately subverted by certain acts of black autonomy.

Given that Felsted was 'baptised an Anabaptist in 1763', his personal faith also probably brought him into proximity with George Liele (1750–1828) and other Anabaptists of African descent who were part of the church he established in Kingston around 1783.⁶⁷ Liele was a free black man who, having arrived in Jamaica after the evacuation of Savanna in 1782, held a variety of professions. These included being a militia trumpeter and a preacher.⁶⁸ Given their military and religious associations, and the fact that Liele seems to have been known to Felsted's brother-in-law, Stephen Cooke,⁶⁹ Felsted and Liele may plausibly have been acquainted.

Further evidence of Felsted's connection to the black community in Kingston can be found in newspapers detailing the events surrounding his dismissal (or resignation) from the post of organist at Kingston Parish Church in late 1790.⁷⁰ Newspaper articles published around this time mentioning Felsted's name seem to portray him as a public figure, a kind of philanthropist, called upon to arbitrate on the behalf of an unknown individual in a dispute over the use of funds by the trustees of the local free school. In the *Daily Advertiser* issue of 7 October 1790, there appeared an anonymous article entitled 'Certain Questions to Certain Persons' and signed 'A. B. C'. This text publicly criticized the Wolmer's School board – an act which must have met with the consternation of the rector of the parish at the time – and also the local assembly for their poor handling of 'disserted, sick, disabled and aged negro and other slaves'.⁷¹ It is telling, then, that when Felsted was summoned to answer to the Kingston vestry at the local courthouse (on 9 October 1790), he sought to assert his rights as a free subject of the king, 'free to think, or act as any of themselves'.⁷² In the summary of court proceedings that was published in the *Daily Advertiser* on 18 October 1790, Felsted 'voluntarily, acknowledged that he was the author of the Queries inserted in the *Daily Advertiser* of the 7th inst'.⁷³ Later (on 22 November 1790), the *Daily Advertiser* published a column titled 'Origin of the Asylum' that contained a list of twenty male and female slaves who had been left to perish on Kingston's streets from January to November of that year. Felsted's name appears in block capitals underneath letters calling for support to remedy what is described as a 'growing evil' and declaring it 'a disgrace . . . th[at] this nu[i]s[a]nce has been so long suffered [t]o exist . . . a disgrace to our police, as well as to our feelings as men, for the sufferings of our fellow creatures'.⁷⁴ Notably, the texts refer to the slaves as 'miserable wretches . . . superannuated and past labour' and, in an uncommon reversal of the language of the time, their owners are branded as 'inhuman'.⁷⁵ In using the word 'nuisance', however, it does not seem as if the author is describing the individuals as

been engaged in this sort of employment. For more on this matter see Beasley, *Christian Ritual and the Creation of British Slave Societies*, 118 and 183, note 41.

⁶⁷ Dox, 'Samuel Felsted of Jamaica', 41; Clement Gayle, *George Liele, Pioneer Missionary to Jamaica* (Kingston: Jamaica Baptist Union, 1982), 14.

⁶⁸ David T. Shannon, Julia Frazier White and Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven, *George Liele's Life and Legacy: An Unsung Hero* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2013), 62.

⁶⁹ Beasley, *Christian Ritual and the Creation of British Slave Societies*, 115.

⁷⁰ The presumption of previous authors that Felsted remained as the Kingston Parish Church organist for life (which can be traced back to Dox, as cited below) is contradicted in Kingston newspapers dating from October 1790 to January 1791. See Dox, 'Samuel Felsted's *Jonah*', 27, and Banfield, 'Anglophone Musical Culture in Jamaica'. Further information about this issue is provided in my forthcoming doctoral dissertation.

⁷¹ *The Daily Advertiser* (Kingston) (22 October 1790). The Wolmer's trustees (and members of the assembly) would have included not only the rector (the person to whom Felsted was directly responsible as the parish organist), but also some of the most highly respected and influential gentlemen in the town. Wolmer's School (now schools) remains in operation today. For details about the school's history see Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, 115–116, 270, and Frank Cundall, *Historic Jamaica* (London: Institute of Jamaica, West India Committee, 1915).

⁷² Felsted's court appearance is documented at length in the *Daily Advertiser* issue of 16 October 1790.

⁷³ *The Daily Advertiser* (18 October 1790).

⁷⁴ *The Daily Advertiser* (22 October 1790).

⁷⁵ *The Daily Advertiser* (22 October 1790).

such, but rather the situation as a whole. Of course, this kind of ambivalence in the sources relating to Felsted does not allow us to make an absolute judgment about his relationship with people of African descent in Kingston.

It is not clear what other grievances were brought against him in the days that followed, but Felsted's post as organist was advertised in the same newspaper that set out the information about his court appearance, and by January 1791 it is clear that he had been replaced.⁷⁶ It is likely that, as a municipal organist, Felsted was viewed by the vestry as a public servant. He might simply have been dismissed because his outspoken views struck defiantly at his employers (the vestry) and at the centre of the very establishment of which he was ostensibly a part. It is with these contexts in mind that I will now show how Felsted's non-white and Afro-Jamaican connections might have inspired and influenced his composition of *The Dedication*.

Slavery, Freedom and *The Dedication*

Set in ancient Babylon, Felsted's *Dedication* is an adapted and poeticized version of the Old Testament narrative about Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (friends of the prophet Daniel), and their condemnation to death in a furnace. The sentence was handed down by King Nebuchadnezzar II as punishment for the men's refusal to worship his idol (such a practice is forbidden by Jewish law).⁷⁷ Seeing their religious devotion, God took pity on the men and sent an angel who appeared beside them inside the furnace, 'divinely bright' (to quote Felsted's text; see Figure 8).⁷⁸

Astonished by their survival and convinced of God's intervention, the king called for the men to be released and promoted them to the highest positions within his court. Then he made the proclamation (as set by Felsted; see Figure 9) that all his subjects 'reverence Jehovah's Name, Whose Works omnipotence proclaim'.⁷⁹ The essential message of the text thus invites its audience to follow God's commandments and to put their trust in him. After all, it was precisely their trust in God that had saved the Israelites in their time of greatest peril.

Rather than its sonic properties, what resonates most with Felsted's world in *The Dedication* is the biblical material on which his libretto is based, and this is where we must look in order to consider the significance of the work within the social contexts in which it was produced. Babylon's Israelite inhabitants – like the many Africans who arrived on the Jamaican shore in Felsted's lifetime – were captives. Once removed to Babylon they were renamed.⁸⁰ Daniel, who was a prince (and thus a royal captive), and his three friends were all highly educated. Their experiences were less severe than those of the other Jewish exiles. For instance, rather than working as labourers, they were allocated roles within the Babylonian administration. Meanwhile, the rest (who were coerced labourers), were forced to live in hardship and were thus essentially slaves. The fact that the king refers to the Israelites as slaves at various points in the libretto makes it clear that Felsted intended for them to be perceived as such.

Although influential Jamaicans attended churches, prayer houses and synagogues, surviving sources offer few explicit suggestions that they made comparisons between biblical depictions of

⁷⁶ The *Daily Advertiser* issue of 18 October 1790 announced that 'a vestry [would] be held at the Court-House, Friday 22nd of October instant, for [the] purpose of electing an organist for the pa[rish] in the room of Samuel Felsted'. Later, in the issue of 18 January 1791, the notice that 'Yesterday at the election for Parish officers Mr John Evans was chosen Organist' provides clear evidence that Felsted had been replaced. Evans, who appears to have been a theatrical keyboard player, is likely to have been the 'Mr J. Evans, Organist of Spanish Town' who subscribed to two copies of Felsted's *Jonah*. O'Gorman, 'Jonah: An Eighteenth-Century Jamaican Oratorio', 42, and Wright, *Revels in Jamaica*, 292.

⁷⁷ Exodus 20.4 (the text from the King James Version of the Bible is quoted here and below): 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image . . . thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them'.

⁷⁸ Samuel Felsted, *The Dedication* (no date), 110 (fol. 127v).

⁷⁹ Samuel Felsted, *The Dedication* (no date), 120 (fol. 137v).

⁸⁰ Daniel 1.6–7.



Figure 8. Samuel Felsted, *The Dedication*, The British Library, R.M.21.f.2, 110 (fol. 127v). © British Library Board. Used by permission



Figure 9. Felsted, *The Dedication*, 120 (fol. 137v)

slavery and the kind that existed in their own world. Nevertheless, Felsted’s decision to compose an oratorio based on the book of Daniel – the narrative of someone who could be considered akin to a slave, being a captive and an exile – might have been motivated by several factors. Felsted may have taken inspiration from people living around him (such as those I have already mentioned), people

who had lived (or were indeed still living) in Jamaica who were said to be descended from African royalty, and people who were written about in the British publications that were read in Jamaica.

An example of a text about an enslaved person of African royal descent that was known in Britain during the period in question is Aphra Behn's tragic novella *Oroonoko* (1688). Having been adapted for the stage, the work was performed for the first time in London in 1695. *Oroonoko* may have been the earliest source of the Royal Slave trope (in anglophone literary sources), but one of the most popular ballad operas that was performed in Kingston in Felsted's own day was *Inkle and Yarico* (1787) by Samuel Arnold (1740–1802) and George Colman the younger (1762–1836). In this work, Yarico, an Indigenous woman (who might have been portrayed as an African princess in later stagings), falls in love with an English sailor named Thomas Inkle, having rescued him from a shipwreck. Though the two are supposedly in love, the plot takes a sinister turn when the money-thirsty Inkle wickedly conspires to sell Yarico and their unborn child into slavery.⁸¹

In addition to the examples already mentioned, Felsted may have learned of the real-life and widely publicized (though exceptional) case of William Ansah Sessarakoo (c1736–1770), who, having escaped enslavement in Barbados, travelled to England, where he was ushered into the metropolitan elite.⁸² Another example, the child-prodigy violinist George Bridgetower (1778–1860), was reported in newspapers announcing his first public concerts in England in late 1789 and early 1790 to be the grandson of an African prince.⁸³ A further example of a person descended from African royalty who was discussed in the metropolitan literature of Felsted's day is Toussaint Louverture (1743–1803), undoubtedly because of his central role in the Haitian Revolution (c1789–1804).

It is worth considering whether the developing crisis in Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) in the late 1780s and early 1790s might have been a source of motivation for Felsted to compose *The Dedication*, especially since many Jamaicans were, in fact, better informed of the events than the local newspapers of the time suggest.⁸⁴ With regard to Felsted's motivations, I am referring to three issues in particular. The first concerns the various kinds of trial and suffering (particularly those involving fire) that occurred during the conflict. Felsted's decision to preface the score of *The Dedication* with biblical passages referring to 'the fiery trial' and 'sufferings of this present time' (see Figure 10) resonates as much with the real-life trials of the various disenfranchised inhabitants – the 'poor whites', 'slaves' and 'free blacks' – of late eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue (and Jamaica) as with the plot of the oratorio.⁸⁵ Although I am

⁸¹ *Inkle and Yarico* was first performed in Jamaica on 2 August 1788, just a year after its London premiere in 1787. Wright, *Revels in Jamaica*, 265. Its narrative is based on an essay published by Richard Steele in *The Spectator* on 13 March 1711. Steele's essay was in turn based on the reportedly honest account that had been published in 1657 by Richard Ligon, in *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbados: Illustrated with a Mapp of the Island, as Also the Principall Trees and Plants There, Set Forth in Their Due Proportions and Shapes, Drawne out by Their Severall and Respective Scales. Together with the Ingenio That Makes the Sugar, with the Plots of Severall Houses, Roomes, and Other Places, That Are Used in the Whole Processe of Sugar-Making; viz. The Grinding-Room, the Boyling-Room, the Filling-Room, the Curing-House, Still-House, and Furnaces; All Cut in Copper* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1657), 55. *The Padlock* (1768), by Charles Dibdin (1745–1814) and Isaac Bickerstaffe (1733–1808), is another example of a successful ballad opera containing themes relating to human difference and slavery that was performed in 1780s Kingston (specifically in 1783 and 1788). Wright, *Revels in Jamaica*, 262–263, and Hill, *The Jamaican Stage*, 301. For more about the racialization of human difference in eighteenth-century British theatre see Stephen Gregg, 'Introduction', in *Empire and Identity*, 1–25, and Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

⁸² Ryan Hanley, 'The Royal Slave: Nobility, Diplomacy and the "African Prince" in Britain, 1748–1752', *Itinerario* 39/2 (2015), 329–347.

⁸³ See, for example, the *General Evening Post* (8–10 December 1789), 1.

⁸⁴ Less than two weeks elapsed between the start of the violence on 22 August and 'initial indications that white Jamaicans were discussing the revolt and circulating news of the event among themselves'. Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (London: Verso, 2018), 144–148.

⁸⁵ The cited texts are 1 Peter 4.12 ('Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you') and Romans 8.19 ('For I reckon, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us').

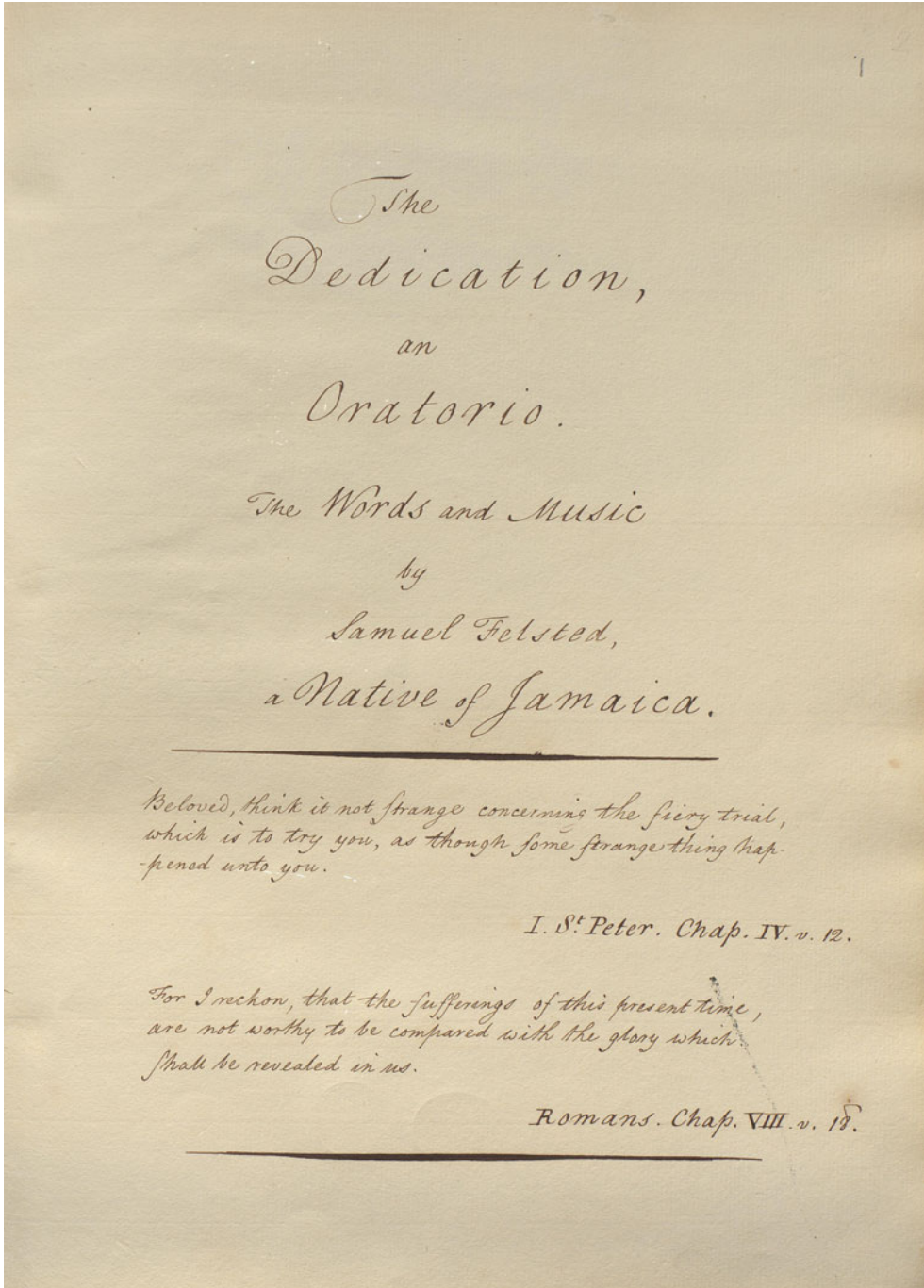


Figure 10. Felsted, title-page of *The Dedication*, fol. 3r

highlighting the events of the Saint-Domingue Rebellion in this article (because of its particularly wide-reaching impact on the Jamaican society), various other disturbances could have led Felsted to compose *The Dedication*. These include several fires that broke out in Kingston in the 1780s and the particularly devastating fire that left most of Montego Bay 'reduced

to ashes and bare walls' in 1795.⁸⁶ The latter anticipated a large-scale rebellion of the Maroon communities living nearby.⁸⁷

Though the possibilities are numerous, the fact that Felsted felt the need to assert his own freedom during his courthouse appearance suggests that he could have been aware of the worsening situation in neighbouring Saint-Domingue and, in particular, traumatic events like the burnings of Cap-Français (now Cap-Haïtien) of August 1791 and June 1793.⁸⁸ Though Felsted was reasonably well paid, he too was a 'poor white', and as such may have sympathized in various ways with his neighbouring colonists in Saint-Domingue.

Another issue related to Haiti concerns the fact that the rebels were eventually led by Toussaint Louverture. Louverture was a devout Christian, and, reportedly, a former slave descended from African royalty. As such, his fame stretched across the Caribbean, and he was known to Jamaican colonists.⁸⁹ Both this point about Louverture and my final point on this matter – the collective faith of the black insurgents – are related. Being enslaved or the descendants of slaves, the insurgents in Haiti were initially concerned (like the author of the articles undersigned by Felsted in the *Daily Advertiser*) with securing better treatment.⁹⁰ A letter that they addressed to the governor of Saint-Domingue in 1791 set out their compulsion to trust that 'God who fights for the innocent [would be] their guide', in precisely the way that God had guided the Israelites in the various scenarios of the Old Testament.⁹¹ It is telling that when the rebels chose to express themselves, they did so in a manner that was so heavily steeped in biblical – and specifically Old Testament – rhetoric.

It is because of these various resonances that I suggest that Felsted composed *The Dedication* during the early 1790s. Of course, while oratorios appear to have been scarce in the British

⁸⁶ For information about the fire that started on 16 May 1780 in Kingston, for instance, see *The Royal Gazette* issue of 20 May 1780. The chief town of Westmoreland Parish, Savanna-La-Mar, was devastated by fire (as well as by hurricanes and flooding) in 1779 and 1780. The Westmoreland Vestry advertised a call for aid for 'the relief of the poor Sufferers by fire' in the *Supplement to the Royal Gazette* of 1–8 July 1780. Details about a fire that spread rapidly from 'the kitchen of Mr Jonas Hart' in Montego Bay (St James' Parish) on 6 June 1795 were published in *The Scots Magazine* 57 (September 1795), 599. The increased reporting of fires is probably what led to the appearance of a Phoenix Fire Office (London) advertisement for insurance in *Jamaica Gazette* issues on and around 27 September 1788. For general details about civil unrest in urban locations in Jamaica during the period in question see Aaron Graham, 'Towns, Government, Legislation and the "Police" in Jamaica and the British Atlantic, 1770–1805', *Urban History* 47/1 (2020), 41–62.

⁸⁷ For more on the Second Maroon War see Clare Taylor, 'Planter Comment upon Slave Revolts in 18th Century Jamaica', *Slavery & Abolition* 3/3 (1982), 243–253; Katherine Wilson, 'The Performance of Freedom: Maroons and the Colonial Order in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica and the Atlantic Sound', *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66/1 (2009), 45–86; and Helen McKee, 'From Violence to Alliance: Maroons and White Settlers in Jamaica, 1739–1795', *Slavery & Abolition* 39/1 (2018), 27–52. It is not currently known whether Felsted's *Dedication* was in some way connected with the satirical comments about the 'society of *Shadrach*, *Meshach*, and *Abednego*' that were published in Kingston's *Daily Advertiser* issue of 6 August 1790. However, this seems unlikely because the comments appear in the 'European Intelligence' column. No further details about this society have been traced in Jamaican newspapers from the period.

⁸⁸ As a port city and a centre of commerce and trade, Cap-Français functioned in a similar way economically (and thus also socially) to Kingston. It seems unlikely that someone like Samuel Felsted would have remained unaware of the uprising for long, given that just months later Jamaican slaves were reported by the commander of the Jamaican garrison to 'have composed songs of the . . . rebellion at Hispaniola with their usual chorus to it'. David Patrick Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014), 186, and Scott, *The Common Wind*, 144.

⁸⁹ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 171–172.

⁹⁰ Although authors like Philippe Girard have questioned Louverture's royal ancestry, it remains possible (if uncertain) whether such specific information would have been known to Jamaicans living at the time. Charles Forsdick and Christian Høgsbjerg, *Toussaint Louverture: A Black Jacobin in the Age of Revolutions* (London: Pluto, 2017), 19–20, and Toussaint Louverture, *The Memoir of General Toussaint Louverture*, ed. Philippe Girard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 8.

⁹¹ David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*, revised edition (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), and J. R. Gelin, *Haiti Once Again* ([Maitland]: Xulon Press, 2012), 72–74. Gelin has also suggested that the story of *Shadrach*, *Meshach* and *Abednego* might serve as an analogy for the Haitian Revolution, though without any further contextualization.

American colonies of his day, Felsted was not the first composer to turn to the Bible in order to create some kind of commentary on the world in which he lived. Handel's oratorios, for instance, might have conveyed similar political themes.⁹² Such ideas could, of course, be dangerous to express at the time, which might explain why *The Dedication* seems not to have received any public attention in the composer's lifetime. One possible explanation for why the piece ended up in England as a neat manuscript might be because it was sent for publication in London, like Felsted's earlier works.

Concluding Remarks

I introduced Samuel Felsted at the start of this article with a critique of some of the accolades that were apportioned to him when his first oratorio, *Jonah*, was rediscovered in the late twentieth century. Although meaningful on a surface level, these kinds of tributes reveal little about what I would argue is the real importance of Felsted's historical legacy. What they do show us, however, is that Felsted has been valorized in ambivalent, elitist, nationalistic and specifically Eurocentric terms in the past.

As part of my exploration of his pertinence to today's music historians, I have offered a new kind of biographical study of Felsted: in short, it is one that takes a critical approach to the reading of the archive in order to lift the contradictory veil of silence that has enshrouded the experiences (and even the existences) of enslaved people and their descendants living around him. Whether or not it changes the record on Felsted's modern-day reception, it is not right that we continue to hail him as Jamaica's 'first composer' without acknowledging the contributions of his African-origin contemporaries. Be it in his conversation with the black coach driver and page who he chose to paint, in the labour of the enslaved woman he called Patience and bequeathed to his wife, or through his interactions with musicians such as George Liele and the singing black worshippers of the Kingston Parish Church organ gallery, Felsted's creative and social outputs were shaped by people of African origin. This is illustrated compellingly from his choice of biblical subject material for his second large-scale oratorio, *The Dedication*. As I have suggested, Felsted is likely to have composed this work in the 1790s in response to reports of the rising insurgency in Saint-Domingue.

The emerging picture of the real Felsted is, inevitably, an ambiguous one. He neither championed the chattel slavery system on which he and his society relied (as his newspaper criticism suggests), nor did he condemn it outright (as is clear from his slave ownership). What he did do, however, was sympathize with and comment on the suffering that he witnessed in the world around him. The point I want to emphasize at the end of this article is, needless to say, not a new one. We as scholars and performers of historical music today must choose carefully how we shape the musical legacy that is inherited by future generations. The relevance of Felsted's compositional output lies in the exploration and juxtaposition of both its overtly European elements and – although obscured by their fleetingness in the archive – its Afro-Jamaican contributions, which are no less relevant. As I hope to have demonstrated here, we surely need to scrutinize and re-evaluate colonial musicians like Samuel Felsted from multiple and diverse perspectives.

Trained in historically informed performance and as a secondary-school music teacher, **Wayne Weaver** is a PhD student at Wolfson College Cambridge. His doctoral research on music in late eighteenth-century Jamaica explores the activities of Euro-colonials such as the Kingston organist and composer Samuel Felsted. Meanwhile, he addresses the gaps in the archive and in previous research on the subject of the contributions – musical and otherwise – of people of African descent to musical performances in colonial Kingston.

⁹² This issue is discussed in more detail in my forthcoming doctoral dissertation. See also Ruth Smith, 'Intellectual Contexts of Handel's English Oratorios', in *Music in Eighteenth-Century England: Essays in Memory of Charles Cudworth*, ed. Christopher Hogwood and Richard Lockett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 115–134; Ruth Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Deborah W. Rooke, *Handel's Israelite Oratorio Libretti: Sacred Drama and Biblical Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).