**Abstract for NABMSA Online Symposium:**

**Music and Ideas of the Popular: Reconsidering British Music and Musical Practices**

**Masters, servants and the interactions of instrumental performance in 18th-century England,**

**1760-1800**

In 18th-century England, clearly defined rules of social hierarchy governed the respective roles of masters and servants. The divides between these distinct social classes were in many ways insurmountable. However, one popular leisure activity, instrumental performance, provided a medium for masters and servants to interact and connect across classes through music.

This paper will examine references to these interactions, highlighting masters and mistresses who paid for their servants to be taught how to play musical instruments as an investment which would benefit employers both musically and socially. The importance and encouragement of the acquisition of instrumental skills by household servants will be considered as well as the role of instrumental performance as a popular leisure activity which brought masters and servants into close and productive contact.

This paper will also discuss the desirability of possessing musical skills on various instruments as indicated by the presence of contemporary advertisements placed by servants looking for employment. The listing of instrumental skills alongside domestic capabilities proves that servants understood that they could use their musical skills to their advantage to make themselves more employable and appealing to potential masters and mistresses. This also confirms the growing importance of self-sufficient music making at home as a popular leisure activity during the 18th century.

Finally, instrumental performances given by servants and occasions on which masters and servants are reported to have performed together will be highlighted, demonstrating connections and interactions between different classes and levels of society.

Drawing on a variety of contemporary source material, this paper will demonstrate how instrumental performance fostered interactions between masters and servants, enabling servants to utilise a skill which was highly desirable and participate in a popular leisure pastime of the 18th century.