

SUMMARIES

HERDER AND STREETSONGS (*GASSENHAUER/ GASSENLIEDER*)

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Within the global Herder discourse, the thematic field “Herder and music” appears as moderately developed. My collection of studies directly focusing on that field includes about five dozen literary units. (This does not include studies on “Herder and folksong” which is considered a separate field.) The most frequently considered aspects are: Herder on the relationship between music and poetry, Herder’s ideas of the role of music in education, Herder on music and religion (including: Herder and the Lutheran church song), his ideas about music history, musical works with Herder’s lyrics, composers and musicians in Herder’s immediate circle and his communication with them, Herder and his impact on later German music life (festivals celebrating him), the folklorization of Herder’s lyrics, Herder on opera and drama, Herder as a forerunner of the romantic attitude towards music, romantic music reception and other. What is almost completely omitted until now, is the topic “Herder as music practitioner”, and that is what this essay focuses, namely: the young Herder as a practitioner of the *Gassenhauer/Gassenlieder* – street or popular songs – in his Riga period (1764–1769). The evidence of him singing *Gassenhauer/Gassenlieder* is found in his correspondence with Hamann in spring 1766 before and after their meeting in Mitau where Hamann served as a secretary to Hofrat Christoph Anton Tottien (1721–1790). In March of that year, Hamann wrote to Herder that he should better sing church songs from a songbook rather than the “witty *Gassenhauer*” that he used to practice together with his friend and publisher Johann Friedrich Hartknoch. Herder answers Hamann’s advice indirectly by ironizing and tells him in a letter from mid-May 1766 that on the way to Riga (after visiting Hamann) in a clattering carriage on a bumpy road he has sung a dozen *Gassenlieder*. This episode points clearly to the young Herder as a rather experienced participant of a popular singing practice who was in command of a considerable repertoire. To my knowledge, later in his writings Herder has never made any reference to himself practicing street songs again. The term *Gassenhauer* or *Gassenlieder* never appears in his later writings either, however, he indirectly alludes to it in the introduction of his unpublished folksong compilation *Alte Volkslieder* of 1774 when claiming to show through that compilation “what a difference there is” between “the true folk song and the recent sickly-sweetish street tone (*Gassenton*).” Thus, a profound change has taken place in Herder’s thinking and value system between 1766 and 1774. The source of that change seems to be Herder’s in-depth study of Macpherson’s *Ossian* and Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, with which he had become fascinated in the meantime.