



Anonymous Artist

Gerard ter Borch the Younger

Dutch, 1617 - 1681

## *The Music Lesson*

c. 1670

oil on canvas

overall: 69 x 55.1 cm (27 3/16 x 21 11/16 in.)

framed: 88 x 74.9 cm (34 5/8 x 29 1/2 in.)

Timken Collection 1960.6.10

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### ENTRY

Intently focused on her music book, an elegantly attired lady strums on her bent-necked theorbo to the beat established by her music instructor. The scene must have been familiar in the homes of well-to-do Dutch burghers, for the playing of music was a popular and socially acceptable activity among unmarried young people, particularly women. Numerous depictions of music lessons exist in Dutch art. Not only did the subject provide an opportunity to depict a leisure activity within a domestic setting, but it also was one in which the many symbolic allusions of music, from harmony to love and seduction, could be thematically exploited. It is not by accident, for example, that Ter Borch depicted an ace of hearts on the floor in a similar painting in the National Gallery, London [fig. 1]. *The Music Lesson*, however, does not include such a motif, nor the bed, the dog, and the young suitor seen in the London painting, indicating that romantic concerns were not the thematic thrust of this work. It focuses instead on the woman's intense concentration as she strives to master the harmonies of the music she is learning to play.

The comparison with the London painting reveals that the woman's pose as well as the general disposition of the room and still-life elements on the table in *The Music Lesson* are virtually identical. While Ter Borch did occasionally repeat compositions and readapt figures in his paintings, stylistic comparisons between the women in the two paintings demonstrate that different hands were at work. The modeling of the woman's face and hands in the London painting creates a greater sense of three-dimensionality than that in the Washington version, and the impression of sheen on the satin dress and the soft textural qualities of the fur jacket are more

convincingly rendered. Similar comparisons can be made with the outstretched hand of the music master, and with the candlestick and cloth on the table.

Connections between *The Music Lesson* and other Ter Borch paintings also exist. As Gudlaugsson has pointed out, the music master replicates in reverse a figure in the depiction of a music lesson formerly in the Roach Collection.[1] He concluded that *The Music Lesson* is a pastiche, a joining together of motifs from the Roach and London paintings. Just when such a pastiche would have been made is difficult to determine. Since Gudlaugsson brings into his discussion a later mezzotint by Jan Stolker (Netherlandish, 1724 - 1785) that reproduces the Roach painting in reverse, he seems to imply that *The Music Lesson* must have been produced long after Ter Borch's lifetime.[2] Nevertheless, the quality of the painting is sufficiently high to assume that an artist working under Ter Borch's supervision created it.

Little is known about Ter Borch's studio, but the large number of replicas and versions of his paintings indicates that a widespread demand existed for his works. Gaspar Netscher (Dutch, 1639 - 1684), who studied with Ter Borch before going to Italy in 1658 or 1659, made copies of his master's paintings.[3] Ter Borch continued to use assistants and students for such work, even to the extent of encouraging them to create new compositions by combining elements from a variety of his images. It is probable that one of Ter Borch's assistants derived his reversed image of the music master from a counterproof of Ter Borch's preliminary drawing.[4]

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

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## COMPARATIVE FIGURES



**fig. 1** Gerard ter Borch the Younger, *A Woman Playing a Theorbo to Two Men*, 1667–1668, oil on canvas, National Gallery, London. Photo © National Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY

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## NOTES

- [1] Reproduced by Sturla J. Gudlaugsson, *Geraert ter Borch*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1959–1960), 1:355, no. 221, as being in the collection of Mrs. W. J. Roach. This same figure is also found in at least three other paintings once attributed to Ter Borch (see Sturla J. Gudlaugsson, *Geraert ter Borch*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1959–1960), 2:203–206, for discussion of these and other paintings).
- [2] Sturla J. Gudlaugsson, *Geraert ter Borch*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1959–1960), 2: 203. In addition to his prints after Ter Borch, Stolker also executed mezzotints and drawings after paintings by other Dutch artists, including Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch, 1606 - 1669), Gerrit Dou (Dutch, 1613 - 1675), Jan Steen (Dutch, 1625/1626 - 1679) and Adriaen van Ostade (Dutch, 1610 - 1685).
- [3] Sturla J. Gudlaugsson, *Geraert ter Borch*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1959–1960), 2:288–289, identifies a number of signed copies Netscher made of Ter Borch compositions. As indicated in note 4 in the entry on *The Suitor's Visit*, Netscher made a signed copy of *The Suitor's Visit*.
- [4] Peter Schatborn, *Dutch Figure Drawings from the Seventeenth Century*, trans. by Janine Hamann-Orci (Amsterdam, 1981), 28–29, discusses the use of counterproof drawings by Gerrit Berckheyde and Adriaen van de Velde (Dutch, 1636 - 1672).
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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support, a fine-weight, tightly and plain-woven fabric, has been lined with the tacking margins trimmed. Three moderately sized complex tears in the background to the left and right of the man's head have become visible again due to the cleaving and lifting of paint along the tear edges. Thin, fluid paint is applied over a thin, smooth, white ground with little layering and no appreciable impasto or brushmarking. There is some moderate abrasion overall. The contour of the man's proper right shoulder and hair has been reinforced, and there is glazing over his costume, possibly to cover local abrasion. The varnish layer is matte and discolored. No treatment has been undertaken at the National Gallery of Art.

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## PROVENANCE

(Van Diemen, Berlin and New York), in 1929.[1] William R. Timken [1866-1949], New York; by inheritance to his wife, Lillian S. Guyer Timken [1881-1959], New York; bequest 1960 to NGA.

[1] While no earlier provenance is known for certain, Sturla J. Gudlaugsson, *Geraert ter Borch*, 2 vols., The Hague, 1959-1960: 2:206, proposed that this painting might be the one that was sold at auction in Rotterdam on 3 August 1811, no. 48 (HdG 1907-1927, 5: 55, no. 146). The dimensions (63.5 x 49.5 cm) of this depiction of a music lesson, however, were somewhat smaller than those of NGA 1960.6.10, so it may well have been yet another variant of the composition. In 1935 the Berlin branches of Van Diemen and its affiliated galleries were liquidated by order of the Nazis, with sales organized by Graupe on 25 January and 26 April. This painting was not in either of those sales, and thus had been sold from or sent to the New York branch before 1935.

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

1967 Loan for display with permanent collection, Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, Athens, 1967-1971.

1979 Loan for display with permanent collection, Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, Florida, 1979-1993.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- 1986 Ford, Terrence, compiler and ed. *Inventory of Music Iconography, no. 1*. National Gallery of Art, Washington. New York 1986: 6, no. 129.
- 1995 Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*. The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogue. Washington, 1995: 30-32, repro. 31.

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