

Cultural Subtexts and Social Functions of Domestic Music-making in Jane Austen's England

“I hope somebody cares for these minutiae,” Jane Austen once wrote to her sister, making fun of herself for filling a lengthy letter with every detail of a long journey.¹ This self-deprecating parenthetical could be the tag line for any one of her novels, all of which revel in recounting the every-day concerns of every-day people. Though her novels are widely considered classic works of fiction, their subject matter has led to them being grouped with novels by other female authors under the banner of “Women’s literature,” a sort of “special interest” genre, which, as a whole, is often overlooked as “minutiae” in the grand narrative of literary history. Although Harold Bloom groups Austen with the likes of Tolstoy and Proust as one of the greatest novelists in *The Western Canon*, her inclusion – unlike Tolstoy’s, for example – has nothing to do with the content of her novels and everything to do with the artistry of her novels *despite* the “narrowness” of their subject matter. Indeed, it would seem that her place in the canon has been contingent on the assumptions of critics since the 1820’s that Austen was happy to write within the prescribed “feminine” boundaries and never presumed or aspired to do more.²

¹ Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 20 May 1813. *Jane Austen’s Letters*, Ed. Deirdre LeFaye, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 210.

² For a detailed history of the reception and criticism of Austen through the nineteenth century see Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and for a delightful analysis of the resulting “myth of limitation” pervasive in Austen criticism see Donald Greene’s, “The Myth of Limitation,” in *Jane Austen Today*, ed. Joel Weinsheimer (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975) 142-175.

It is through no fault of Austen's that the content of her novels has been seen as a limitation to her genius; rather, it is indicative of a widespread cultural tendency to value the perspectives of men more highly than those of women. Virginia Woolf explores this tendency at length in *A Room of One's Own*:

And since a novel has this correspondence to real life, its values are to some extent those of real life [...] Yet it is the masculine values that prevail [...] And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction. This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room. A scene in a battle-field is more important than a scene in a shop--everywhere and much more subtly the difference of value persists.³

Woolf's description of the disregard for the "small" focus of women's literature could also be used to describe the traditional disregard, in music history, of nineteenth-century English music, which has been similarly relegated to the sidelines of the canonical "metanarrative." Despite overwhelming evidence that England enjoyed a vibrant musical culture during the long eighteenth century, the standard music history textbooks would have us believe that after the death of Henry Purcell the English gave up on music altogether, and that by the late eighteenth century they had to import all of their musicians and composers from Germany and Italy. I argue, however, that the problem was not that the English made no music but rather that they made the wrong kind of music. Austen's descriptions of musical scenes in her novels will serve as a point of convergence for the various kinds of evidence that I will use to support this claim.

³ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co, 1929) 73-74.

During the time when the performance canon was being set, German music theorists such as E.T.A. Hoffmann and A.B. Marx – whose philosophies increasingly came to dominate continental musical ideals – valued grand, large-scale musical masterpieces and the singular geniuses who composed them.⁴ The English, on the other hand, favored music that could be played and enjoyed in their drawing rooms, prioritizing the musical process over the musical work. Unfortunately for England, the musical values of Hoffmann and Marx prevailed in the end, and, subsequently, the heroes of German Romantic music became the main characters in the narrative of music history. These are the musical ideals that music historians have inherited, which is why, perhaps without realizing it, we too often make the distinction: this piece of music is “important” because it is a symphony, played by many professionals for a large, paying audience; while this piece of music is “insignificant” because it is a ballad, sung by an amateur, accompanying herself at the piano, for perhaps no audience at all.

In this study, I bring to light some of the similarities between these two cases of musical and literary historical sidelining, suggesting that Austen’s novels and the English music of her time period have been marginalized for the same reason: their association with women. I will argue that England’s absence from the standard music history is due not to the unmusicality of its people but rather to three primary social issues: England’s complex and longstanding cultural anxieties regarding music’s

⁴ For an in-depth analysis of the transformation of musical thought that grew out of German philosophy in the late eighteenth century see Mark Evan Bonds, *Music as Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

supposed ability to feminize men and empower women; the cultural invisibility of England's most musical citizens (women); and a vibrant culture of domestic music-making (dominated by women) that was incompatible with the new aesthetic values of nineteenth-century Romanticism, which placed greater importance on the autonomous musical product than the malleable musical process. In pursuing these arguments, I examine a variety of evidence, including nineteenth-century piano-sale statistics and conduct manuals, archived journals and letters, and Austen's novels themselves. I also analyze pieces of music from Austen's collection in order to gain a better understanding of her domestic soundscape, the music she enjoyed and pieces that she might have imagined her characters playing.

While in music history textbooks nineteenth-century England is mostly silent, the England described by Austen reverberates with musical activity. Her novels overflow with scenes of domestic music-making, dialogues concerning the relative musical accomplishments of her characters, and discussions of instruments and repertoire. One notable real-life composer's name even makes its way into the Austen canon. However, these references are often so brief, or so tailored to the nineteenth-century reader, that modern readers often miss their important social implications. Why does Mary Crawford play the harp? Why does Lady Middleton give up the pianoforte "in celebration" of her marriage? What does it signify that Mary Bennett studies "thorough bass"? The scarcity of clarifying details Austen provides has allowed us to overlook these references as mere "minutiae," when, on the contrary, her very lack of explanation reveals the fact that Austen took for granted the pervasiveness and

importance of music in the everyday life of her characters. Analyzing her descriptions of commonplace domestic music-making gives us deep insight into nineteenth-century English performance practice, and demonstrates that the English were just as devoted to the musical arts as were their contemporaries in Germany, France, and Italy. Furthermore, by analyzing Austen's musical scenes in light of the powerful new music theory and philosophy that was transforming the condition of European music during her lifetime, we also gain a deeper understanding of her characters, and of the subtext of many of her most famous scenes. Her characters' musical sensibilities would have given the nineteenth-century reader valuable insight into their personalities, and contributed to their three-dimensionality.

Most studies of music in Austen focus exclusively on the musical scenes described in her novels or analyses of examples from the Austen family music collection with very little historical context. Even the two most thorough examples of Austen scholarship relating to music, *Jane Austen and Mozart* (Wallace) and *The Innocent Diversion* (Piggott) do not attempt to draw specific connections between the music Austen herself played with the music found in her novels. Wallace, for example, compares Austen and Mozart as two artists who both "compose" in the Classical style. While he makes a compelling argument, and constructs a fascinating thought-experiment, Wallace himself admits that Austen herself had no opinion of Mozart and probably never played his music.⁵ Piggott's contribution is a wonderfully exhaustive

⁵ Robert Wallace, *Jane Austen and Mozart: Classical Equilibrium in Fiction and Music* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1983), 249.

collection of musical moments in the novels and letters but his discussion of this music focuses primarily on bemoaning her “philistine” taste.⁶ I believe that a serious study of Austen’s musical life must begin with a desire to hear music as she heard it. Only then can we understand its complicated role in her world, the world of her novels, and, ultimately, the world of music history broadly considered.

Chapter 1: Material Evidence

The English are not a musical people, and the English are not an artistic people [...] A country is not musical or artistic when you can get its people to look at pictures or listen to music, but when its people are themselves composers and artists.

Rev. Hugh Reginald Haweis, *Music and Morals*, London 1871

From this quotation we might conclude, as many have before, that the English were simply “not a musical people,” and therefore that they contributed nothing to the history of Western music. However, what I find most intriguing and useful about this quotation is Haweis’s assertion that “a country is not musical” unless “its people are themselves composers,” a sentiment that savors strongly of the new musical ideals

⁶ “‘Taste’ is not very evident in her choice of music, too many of the items in her collection being no more than superficially pretty [...] We may be disconcerted by, and critical of the absence of music by such composers as Mozart and Beethoven [...] but we must remember that she did own pieces by other great composers, among them Handel, Haydn and Gluck.” Patrick Piggot, *The Innocent Diversion* (Ludlow: Moonrise Press, 1979), 153.

being generated by certain German Romantics in the early nineteenth century. These new aesthetic values, expressed with evangelical zeal in the writings of theorists and critics such as E.T.A. Hoffmann and A.B. Marx, emerged both as a reaction to the rationalism of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought and, perhaps even more significantly, as a display of German nationalism.⁷ Within this new paradigm of musical culture the highest form of art was the symphony, a large-scale, autonomous instrumental work unfettered by text, staging, dance steps, or any other such “extra musical” considerations.

It is no wonder that Rev. Haweis, an English music critic and amateur musician writing in the latter half of the nineteenth century, considered his people unmusical: it is true that although they listened to symphonies, patronized the composers of symphonies, and had symphonies printed in chamber arrangements to play at home, they composed none themselves. The musical culture that flourished in England was incompatible with new aesthetic values of nineteenth-century Romanticism, and the English populace’s inability – or unwillingness – to assimilate resulted in a

⁷ Although Celia Applegate compellingly argues that Hoffmann and Marx were not being intentionally—or even exclusively—nationalistic in their reshaping of musical ideals, there can be no doubt that these new values quickly came to the aid of burgeoning German nationalist agendas. See: Celia Applegate, “How German is It? Nationalism and the Idea of Serious Music in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 21 No. 3 (1998): 274-296; Stephen Rumph; “A Kingdom Not of This World: The Political subtext of E.T. A. Hoffmann’s Beethoven Criticism,” *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 19 No. 1 (1995): 50-67; and Sanna Pederson, “A.B. Marx, Berlin Concert Life, and German National Identity,” *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 18 No. 2 (1994): 87-107.

“historiographical black hole” similar to the one Richard Taruskin identifies surrounding C.P.E. Bach.⁸

In this chapter, I will lay the foundation for this discussion by presenting material evidence of England’s enormous consumption of musical materials such as instruments and sheet music. For instruments, I will focus on data concerning pianos and flutes; because pianos – played almost exclusively by women – were by far the most popular instrument of the time their manufacture was most accurately recorded, and flutes, played exclusively by men, were the second most common instrument. By also investigating the music printing and publishing industry in England I will demonstrate how high the public demand was for various genres of music, thereby painting a more detailed picture of the nineteenth-century English soundscape.

Pianos

Piano building began on the continent early in the eighteenth century, when Johann Andreas Silbermann can be credited with developing the technology that was first pioneered by Bartolomeo Cristofori at the Medici court in 1700. While Silbermann introduced several of his own mechanical innovations, his most considerable contribution for the purpose of the present study was the host of pupils who apprenticed with him before taking their trade to England. A number of Silbermann’s students, namely Johannes Zumpe and Americus Backers, fled Germany

⁸ Richard Taruskin uses this phrase to describe the absence of C.P.E. Bach and other composers of the “pre-classical” era (1730-1760) from the narrative of music history. (*Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), Vol. 2 Ch. 8.)

during the Seven Years' War, immigrating to London where economic prosperity was generating new and lucrative opportunities for instrument builders.⁹ Setting up shop in Hanover Square in 1761 Johannes Zumpe became England's first maker and seller of square fortepianos. Two years later, Americus Backers began producing pianos out of his own London workshop, and in 1776 (along with his apprentices, Robert Stodart and John Broadwood) he invented the English grand action, which would become a mainstay of piano technology for the next century.¹⁰

The most complete record of piano manufacturing in England is of the instruments made by John Broadwood & Sons.¹¹ Broadwood's pianos were consistently marked with serial numbers and, according to the company's online archive, between the years 1780-1865 they produced a total of 127,607 pianos. Clementi & Co. had produced about 30,000 pianos by 1831 when, after Clementi's death, the workshop was taken over by Collard & Collard, who continued producing pianos at a rate of roughly 1,000 per year until the end of the nineteenth century.¹² Broadwood, Clementi, and Collard are just three examples of the nearly two hundred piano makers working in

⁹ David Dubal, *The Art of the Piano: its Performers, Literature, and Recordings* (New York: Summit Books, 1989), 27.

¹⁰ Martha Novak Clinkscale, *Makers of the Piano 1700-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 329-330.

¹¹ On their website, Broadwood compiles serial numbers for every piano sold: www.broadwood.co.uk/serial_numbers.html

¹² Leif Sahlqvist, "Clementi & Co 1798-1830: Pianoforte Manufacture in London," *SquarePianoTech.com* (May 26, 2013). http://www.squarepianotech.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Clementi__Co_©_Leif_Sahlqvist_20131small.pdf

England during the nineteenth century.¹³ If we were to estimate based on the average annual output of these three London makers multiplied by the number of makers working in London during the same years, the total number of pianos made in London alone between 1780-1865 would be nearly 400,000.

Much of the piano's tremendous success can be attributed to the fact that it arrived at a crucial juncture in the social history of England. The Industrial Revolution produced a new social stratum of middle class citizens whose wealth had been made in trade rather than inherited; they were often as wealthy as the landed gentry but had not received the same aristocratic education. Developing musical cultivation at home was thus a primary means by which members of the merchant class could climb the social ladder.

Flutes

Far less is known about the transverse flute in England during this period but we can infer much from extant instruments and printed materials. For example, Jacques Hotteterre's seminal 1707 flute treatise, *Principes de la flûte traversière*, was translated and published in England in 1729. Over the next four decades it was republished at least thirty times, until flute makers in England had made so many technological innovations to the instrument and developed their own unique way of

¹³ Stuart Isacoff, *A Natural history of the piano: The Instrument, the Music, the Musicians – from Mozart to Modern Jazz and Everything in Between* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2011), 52.

playing that the *Principes* was supplanted by countless flute treatises by English makers.¹⁴

By Jane Austen's day, the flute was the second-most-prevalent instrument in England, and was played primarily by middle and upper class men. An 1829 review in *The Athenaeum* (an English literary magazine) claimed, "We take for granted that one man out of ten plays the flute," and this may not have been an exaggeration given the vast market for flutes, flute lessons, printed flute music, and concerts featuring flute players. There was even a *Flutist's Magazine*, whereas there was no comparable journal for other wind instruments.¹⁵ Although flutes were not marked with serial numbers until the very end of the nineteenth century, between 1780-1865 there were at least sixty known makers working in London, and they produced so many instruments that today English flutes make up the vast majority of nineteenth-century flutes in museums and private collections.¹⁶

There are a number of reasons why the flute came to be considered an ideal instrument for well-to-do men in Regency England. First, they were relatively inexpensive (between 10-14 guineas), very portable, and their sound quality (especially by the late eighteenth century) was well suited for accompanying English fortepianos

¹⁴ Ardal Powell, *The Flute* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 112.

¹⁵ Robert Bigio, *Readings in the History of the Flute* (London: Tony Bingham, 2006), ix.

¹⁶ Flute makers estimated from William Waterhouse, and Lyndesay G. Langwill, *The New Langwill Index: Dictionary of musical wind-instrument makers and inventors* (London: Tony Bingham, 1993).

of the period.¹⁷ Additionally, the flute might have appealed to the upwardly mobile men of the mercantile class because of its popularity among the English nobility, played by such figures as George III and several members of the Peerage.¹⁸

Printed Music

Music publishing came rather late to England and was slow to catch on. Very little music was printed before the seventeenth century and the vast majority of it was sacred vocal music intended for use in a liturgical context. There was virtually no demand for printed secular or instrumental music until the mid-seventeenth century, when an extraordinary rebirth of music publishing occurred. Curiously, this sudden interest in music publishing coincided with the peak of the Civil Wars and Puritan power in England, during which time the theatres were shut down, Court entertainments ceased, organs were removed from churches, and most musicians found themselves unemployed.

The correlation between these events, though counterintuitive, is no accident. The newly unemployed musicians, desperate for work, established “music meetings” in taverns at which they charged admission to patrons. The public was, for the first time, financing musical performances, and they were not interested in the sacred music or madrigals that had predominated until that period. As Humphries and Smith point

¹⁷ Powell, *The Flute*, 135-136.

¹⁸ Gerald G. Newman, and Leslie Ellen Brown, *Britain in the Hanoverian Age, 1714-1837: an Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997), 471.

out, the musical needs of the paying public in mid-seventeenth-century England were quite varied:

It was an entirely new thing – the beginning of the practice and publication of music for all and sundry – for the tavern, the home, the musical club, the theatre, and anywhere else; and it was not confined to any type or class of music¹⁹

John Playford’s music publishing enterprise in 1651, which paved the way for England to lead the industry for the next two centuries, was a direct result of these concerts.²⁰ He seized on the opportunity to provide the public with the music it wanted during this unprecedented cultural revolution and established a tradition of music publishing in England that was distinctly capitalist in its philosophy.

Subsequent generations of music publishers in England took on more varied roles within the broader industry of music. By the late eighteenth century publishers not only sold music but also sold and rented instruments, acted as ticket agents, ran music libraries, invented “improvements” to instruments, and some were also

¹⁹ Charles Humphries and William Smith Humphries, Charles, and William C. Smith, *Music Publishing in the British Isles from the beginning until the middle of the nineteenth century: a dictionary of engravers, printers, publishers, and music sellers, with a historical introduction* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970).

²⁰ This fascinating and insightful argument was first put forth by Mary Chan in “A Mid-Seventeenth-Century Music Meeting and Playford’s Publishing,” in *The Well Enchanting Skill: music, poetry, and drama in the culture of the Renaissance : essays in honour of F.W. Sternfeld*, ed. Frederick W. Sternfeld, John Caldwell, Edward Olleson, and Susan Wollenberg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 231-244.

composers.²¹ The English music publishing industry was so large that often composers from the continent published more music in England than in their own countries.²²

The most published genres of music throughout the eighteenth century up until the 1770's were the trio sonatas and the solo sonatas of (in order of popularity) Arcangelo Corelli, George Handel, Johann Christian Bach, Joseph Haydn, and Wolfgang Mozart. Curiously, the names on the subscription lists in the last quarter of the eighteenth century went from being exclusively male to being overwhelmingly female, and the most published genres became instead the piano sonata (with or without the accompaniment of flute, violin, or cello), and the ballad.²³ This transformation is indexical of the highly gendered culture of music making that developed in England during this period, which I will examine in the following chapter.

The kind and quantity of musical materials that were produced and consumed in England during the Georgian era reveal an extraordinarily vibrant musical culture. They also expose a tremendous and complex cultural shift in the wake of the Industrial Revolution that resulted in music becoming largely associated with women and domesticity. While the evidence I have presented creates a clearer picture of *what* was

²¹ Newman and Brown, *Britain in the Hanoverian Age*, 480.

²² Handel in London published more than the three most published figures of eighteenth-century German music (Telemann, Mattheson, and Johann Sebastian Bach) combined. Hans Lenneberg, *On the Publishing and Dissemination of Music 1500-1850* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2003), 65.

²³ Newman and Brown, *Britain in the Hanoverian Age*, 472-477. Interestingly, this shift can also be seen in piano production during the last quarter of the eighteenth century: John Broadwood & Sons sold at least *fifteen times* more pianos between 1780-1785 than they did between 1775-1780. See www.broadwood.co.uk/serial_numbers.html.

available for music-making, we must turn to other sources in order to understand *how* it was used and, crucially, by whom.

Chapter 2: Conduct Manuals

Given the vast quantity of musical materials produced and consumed in England during the nineteenth century it is no wonder that domestic music-making was such a common social activity and so often alluded to in novels from the period. Like every other social activity of the time, music-making was regulated by a strict set of rules, which were outlined in numerous conduct books.

Conduct books were manuals meant to instruct young people on socially prescribed behavior and etiquette, and they rose to an unprecedented level of prominence in England during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²⁴ The increase in the consumption of conduct books during this time can be largely attributed to the Industrial Revolution, which created a new, distinctly gendered division of labor, in which men went out into the world to work waged jobs while women stayed home and performed unwaged domestic labor. This newly-divided economic system increased middle-class women's dependence on men; since they were unable to earn money, they had to be economically provided for by their fathers or husbands (or brothers, if no husbands came along). This new notion of gendered economic roles within English society reinforced existing perceptions of masculinity and femininity, which held that women are irrational and limited by their bodies while men are logical and physically superior.²⁵ Ultimately, the two genders came to inhabit

²⁴ Gerald G. Newman, and Leslie Ellen Brown, *Britain in the Hanoverian Age, 1714-1837: an Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997), 434-437.

²⁵ Robert Brink Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society: the emergence of separate spheres?* (London: Longman, 1998), 20-21.

separate social and economic spheres, and conduct manuals instructed them on how to behave in such a way that the separate spheres would be maintained and the boundary between them strengthened.²⁶

One effect of this strengthening of the boundary between public and private space was that middle-class women increasingly found themselves with large amounts of free time. Where they would once have spent their days performing work of various kinds, middle-class women now displayed their commitment to fashion, appearance, and leisure as visual proof of their husbands' economic status. In the art historian Bram Dijkstra's words,

There were no automated credit checks, and the Bank of England had only just been founded. One's worth was established by word of mouth, and the words in everyone's mouth were determined by the evidence of the eye. Wives who earlier, in plain dress, would have helped run the family business now became fashion plates: The more yards of silk, lace, and brocade they could wear, the fancier their newly acquired carriages could look, [...] the more likely it was that their husbands would secure the credit they needed for their next business venture.²⁷

The woman's role, in this newly gendered stratification of society, was to be unemployed, in the truest sense of the word. Servants and nannies took on all domestic labor for the women of the rising middle class, and increasingly, the ability to support an idle and fashionable wife became a major marker of a husband's economic success.

²⁶ For a fascinating, book-length study on the gendering of English society as a result of the Industrial Revolution, see Katrina Honeyman's *Women, Gender and Industrialisation in England 1700-1870* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

²⁷ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-siecle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 7.

Much of women's newly-acquired leisure time was, by necessity, spent at home, and thus music-making became ever-more important as an acquired feminine skill. Contemporary conduct books make it clear that music not only makes a woman more attractive, but that its practice could also fill hours of free time that might otherwise be spent in less felicitous activities. The manuals are very clear as to which kinds of musical behaviors are appropriate (and inappropriate).

Musical behavior, as prescribed by these conduct books, differed significantly for men and women in terms of when, where, and what kind of music-making was appropriate.

Music is not only a harmless amusement; but capable of being eminently beneficial to [our] fair Countrywomen. It may be the means of preventing that vacuity of mind, which is too frequently the parent of libertinism; of precluding the intrusion of idle and dangerous imaginations; and, by occupying a considerable portion of time, may prove an antidote to the poison insidiously administered by the innumerable licentious Novels, which are hourly sapping the foundations of every moral and religious principle.²⁸

All of the conduct books published in England during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that I have encountered echo this sentiment. Young women were strongly encouraged to sing and practice at the piano, not as a means of attaining great musical virtuosity, but rather to keep their impressionable minds pleasantly occupied and safe from the "dangerous imaginations" brought on by too much free time. One of the most famous conduct book writers of the time, Erasmus Darwin,

²⁸ Allatson Burgh, *Anecdotes of Music, Historical and Biographical: In a Series of Letters from a Gentleman to His Daughter* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1814), vi-vii.

pronounced the prescribed female activities (music, dancing, drawing, sewing, etc.) as having no other purpose than that of “relieving each other; and of producing by such means an uninterrupted cheerfulness of mind; which is the principal charm that fits us [women] for society, and the great source of earthly happiness.”²⁹

However, many conduct book writers also expressed some degree of skepticism regarding the value of music as a female accomplishment. Music is the very last accomplishment James Fordyce mentions in his vastly influential *Sermons to Young Women* (1793) with the caveat that it “is to be recommended with more discrimination than the rest, how much soever such a notion may contradict the prevailing opinion.”³⁰ His criticism is especially severe on the common practice of printing popular songs to be played at home:

What lover of this enchanting art but must lament, that the most insipid song which can disgrace it, is no sooner heard in places of public entertainment, than every young lady who has learnt the common notes, is immediately taught to repeat it in a manner still more insipid.³¹

Fordyce goes on to implore music-masters to teach their female pupils only “whatever is most beautiful and noble in the article of melody,” paying little attention to technique and knowledge of harmony, which can come later if they are “ambitious of advancing so far.”³²

²⁹ Erasmus Darwin, *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education, in Boarding Schools, Private Families, and Public Seminaries* (Philadelphia, PA, 1798), 125. Quoted in Richard Leppert, *Music and Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 29.

³⁰ James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women* (London: Printed for A. Millar, W. Law, and R. Cater, 1793) 218.

³¹ Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, 222.

³² *Ibid.*

Others recommended caution when playing or singing, noting that music had the potential to corrupt innocent female minds with vanity. Mrs. Chapone advises in her *Letters on the improvement of the mind* (1801):

If you have any acquired talent of entertainment, such as music, your own family are those, before whom you should most wish to excel, and for whom you should always be ready to exert yourself [...] if the accomplishments you have gained [...] lie dormant till the arrival of a stranger [...] you may be sure vanity is the only motive of the exertion.³³

Chapone later concedes that music is an “innocent amusement,” agreeing with Allatson Burgh that it is primarily useful for “filling up agreeably those intervals of time, which too often hang heavily on the hands of women.” However, in her final statement on music as a female accomplishment she warns the reader to not let it “interfere with a rational scheme of life, nor lead [them] into dissipation, with all of its attendant evils of vanity and luxury.”³⁴

But what about the men? As I detailed in my previous chapter, the vast quantity of flutes, printed flute music, and advertisements for flute lessons in Georgian era England indicate a large population of avid flute players during this period. Someone had to be playing all of those flutes, and we know it wasn't the women.³⁵ This is where the conduct books begin to contradict the material evidence of England's music

³³ Hester Chapone [published as Mrs Chapone], *Letters on the improvement of the mind: addressed to a lady* (London: Printed by C. Whittingham for J. Walker, J. Scatcherd, T.N. Longman and O. Rees, 1801) 150-151.

³⁴ Chapone, *Letters on the improvement of the mind*, 193-195.

³⁵ “There are some [instruments] that are very unbecoming to the Fair Sex; as the Flute, Violin, and Hautboy, the last of which is too Manlike, and would look indecent in a Woman's Mouth; and the Flute is very improper...” John Essex, *Young Ladies Conduct*, (London: John Brotherton, 1722), 84-85.

culture. In spite of (or perhaps because of) the popularity of the flute among middle-upper class men, the conduct books insist that men should not cultivate musical skill:

If you love music, hear it; go to operas, concerts, and pay fiddlers to play for you; but I insist upon your neither piping nor fiddling. It puts a gentleman in a very frivolous, contemptible light; brings him into a great deal of bad company; and takes up a great deal of time, which might be much better employed. Few things would mortify me more, than to see you bearing a part in a concert, with a fiddle under your chin, or a pipe in your mouth.³⁶

Here Lord Chesterfield outlines the two central arguments, echoed by many other conduct manuals, against gentlemen learning to play an instrument: that it feminizes him, and that it is too closely associated with “work.” Richard Leppert has discussed this latter argument (specifically as it is voiced in Lord Chesterfield’s letters) at length in his book, *Music and Image*. He points out that during the Georgian era most middle and upper class men – “Gentlemen” – did not work for money. Rather, they inherited an estate and the estate accrued wealth from the tenants who lived there. It was a mark of distinction that a Gentleman had no profession other than the managing of his estate, which he might even choose to pay someone else (a steward) to do for him. I have observed this attitude in Austen’s novels as well; “second sons” who must work because they will not inherit their father’s estate are pitied, and men who work or wish to work even when they don’t need to are labeled eccentric.

Building the case that music-making was not a “work of the mind, proper to a gentleman,” but rather, a form of “physical labor, proper only to those beneath him,”

³⁶ Philip Dormer Stanhope, *Letters to his Son by the Earl of Chesterfield on the Fine Art of Becoming a Man of the World and a Gentleman* (London: W. Scott Publishing Co., 1900), 170.

Leppert draws on the Rev. William Darrell's hugely successful eighteenth-century conduct manual in which the practice of music and dancing are treated with skepticism because of their physical nature:

Let a Man rather trim up his Mind, than his Body: Those Embellishments are more noble and rich that lie in the Brain, than those that sink into the Feet, or perch on the Finger's End.³⁷

When Lord Chesterfield says to his son that, for a man, music "takes up a great deal of time, which might be much better employed" he is not suggesting that his son give up "piping and fiddling" and get a real job – rather, he is warning his son against spending any amount of time engaged in physical labor, especially a kind of labor that he clearly considers effeminate.

These letters and conduct manuals also imply that music can be emasculating, a belief that I argue played an equal part in constructing the English social taboo against gentlemanly musical virtuosity. Lord Chesterfield uses the word "frivolous" forty-six times in his published letters: half of those times he is referring specifically to women, and the other twenty three times he is describing musicians, and/or Italians. Thus "frivolous," for him, is a negative adjective, and one that is clearly linked to both to both music and women.

The late eighteenth-century conduct book writer John Burton more explicitly observes the connection between frivolity, women, and music in his *Lectures on Female Education and Manners* (1796):

³⁷ Rev. William Darrell, *A Gentleman Instructed in the Conduct of a Virtuous and Happy Life* (London, 1704), 38-39. Quoted in Richard Leppert, *Music and Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), 22.

We find in your Sex a natural vivacity of temper. Hence it is, that many young Women are fond of associating with those who are of the same volatile temper as themselves; so that he who is loquacious and full of laughter, who can sing and dance [...] is generally a female favorite.³⁸

Burton suggests that many women enjoy the company of men who display what he considers female qualities of “vivacity of temper,” and musicality. He goes on to warn women that associating with this kind of man, who is too “fond of pleasure and dissipation,” is “frequently the cause of future distress.”³⁹

The nineteenth-century writers who defended music as a subject worthy of a gentleman’s study were generally referring to the study of music theory, or the “science of music,” as opposed to performance on an instrument. Thomas Danvers Worgan, in *The Musical Reformer*, qualifies:

I do not mean to say that music is not a proper accomplishment for a gentleman; tout au contraire; but I contend that, in men, it ought to be an elegant superstructure, founded on the basis of intellect.⁴⁰

He also goes so far as to suggest that if music were taught (to men) as a science it would become “the manly art which it once was, instead of the effeminate gewgaw which it now is.”⁴¹

Curiously, the only time the gentlemanly *practice* of music was justified was if it was done for a man’s own personal pleasure when he was alone:

Also it will not be amiss to learn to play upon an Instrument [...] when he is alone in his chamber, he may use it sometimes for a diversion. Some also give

³⁸ John Burton, *Lectures on female education and manners* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1793) 179-180.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Thomas Danvers Worgan, *The Musical Reformer* (London: S. Maunders, 1829), 35.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 33

themselves to vocal Musick [...] and though they have no very good voice, 'tis well to learn the Rules; for sometimes a man in his retirement singeth to please himself, and not others.⁴²

This sentiment implies that the ideal musical behaviors observed by men and women served opposite purposes. Besides keeping her mind innocently occupied, the primary purpose of female music-making was to entertain her family and acquaintances. John Burton even described music specifically as “one of the most agreeable arts of pleasing practiced by the fair sex.”⁴³ Men on the other hand were instructed to use music-making as means of pleasing themselves, *not* others. This fundamental difference in men and women’s relationship to music has contributed significantly to the “historiographical black hole” surrounding English music during the Georgian era.

Conduct books instructed women to acquire just enough musical skill to entertain – more than that was considered unnecessary, or even dangerous, as it might lead to vanity. Additionally, the conduct manuals would have us believe that men were not at all involved in domestic music-making, or if they were, it was only as a solitary amusement that happened behind closed doors. However, the extraordinary quantity of flutes and flute music being produced in London at this time indicates that many of the consumers of music in England were male. Therefore, in order to reconcile these seemingly contradictory pieces of evidence, we must look elsewhere.

⁴² Jean Gailhard, *The Complete Gentleman: or Directions for the Education of Youth* (London, 1678), 52. Quoted in Leppert, *Music and Image*, 27.

⁴³ Burton, *Lectures on female education and manners*, 118.

In the following chapter I will examine musical scenes in the novels of Jane Austen. By analyzing her descriptions of domestic music-making and comparing them to the ideals expressed in contemporary conduct manuals I will demonstrate how day-to-day Georgian music-making was practiced within these strictly gendered social parameters.

Chapter 3: Music in Austen's Novels

Conduct books reflect the lofty ideals that a society would like for its citizens to uphold in their daily lives and therefore they are not necessarily the most dependable documents of reality. I have found that the novels from this era often offer candid descriptions of how conduct book ideals were actually realized (or thwarted) in everyday life. Jane Austen's novels in particular overflow with scenes of meaningful domestic music, discussions of repertoire, comments on the number of musicians at a ball as well as their relative degrees of skill, the kinds of pianos owned by various characters, and those characters' musical tastes and abilities. Austen's intricate layering of these details produces a rich and sonorous soundscape within which we can better understand her characters and the world they inhabited.

Most studies of the music in Austen's novels fall short when it comes to interpreting these scenes from the perspective of a nineteenth-century reader. Even the two most comprehensive examples of Austen scholarship relating to music, Robert Wallace's *Jane Austen and Mozart* (1983) and Patrick Piggott's *The Innocent Diversion* (1979), view the musical scenes in her novels through a distinctly twentieth-century lens.⁴⁴ Wallace, for example, compares Austen and Mozart, arguing that they are artists who both "compose" in the Classical style. While he makes compelling points, and constructs a fascinating thought-experiment, Wallace also admits that Austen herself

⁴⁴ Robert Wallace, *Jane Austen and Mozart: Classical Equilibrium in Fiction and Music* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1983); Patrick Piggott

had no opinion of Mozart and probably never played his music.⁴⁵ Moreover, Wallace focuses on the form of her novels without considering their content, a methodology that serves to promote the “myth of limitation” that is so pervasive in Austen scholarship.⁴⁶

Piggott’s contribution is a wonderfully exhaustive collection of musical moments from Austen’s novels and letters and contains some useful historical contextualization, but his interpretations of these moments are clouded by his own modern musical sensibilities. For example, he ignores the broader social implications of her characters’ musical behaviors and takes great pains to absolve Austen of her “philistine” taste.⁴⁷ I believe that a serious study of Austen’s musical life must begin with a desire to hear music as she heard it. Only then can we understand its complicated role in her world and the world of her novels.

While it is tempting to line up all of Austen’s musical characters and look for shared personality traits in order to ascertain the author’s opinion on the value of music and the social construct within which it was made, Austen is far too subtle for that approach to be productive. If we were to assume, for example, that the musical virtuosity of Jane Fairfax, Marianne Dashwood, and Georgiana Darcy all point to some

⁴⁵ Wallace, 249.

⁴⁶ Donald Greene, “The Myth of Limitation,” in *Jane Austen Today*, ed. Joel Weinsheimer (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975) 142-175.

⁴⁷ “Taste’ is not very evident in her choice of music, too many of the items in her collection being no more than superficially pretty [...] We may be disconcerted by, and critical of the absence of music by such composers as Mozart and Beethoven [...] but we must remember that she did own pieces by other great composers, among them Handel, Haydn and Gluck.” Patrick Piggott, *The Innocent Diversion* (Ludlow: Moonrise Press, 1979), 153.

universal opinion of Austen's on the importance of musical prowess we would be sorely mistaken. We cannot simply ask, "who is musical?" to understand her use of music for character development: rather, we should ask, "what is the *nature* of this character's musicality?"

For example, in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) the reader is presented with two proficient and equally dedicated pianists: Mary Bennet and Georgiana Darcy. Though each achieves a very high degree of technical skill on her instrument through constant study, the reader understands that Georgiana is an accomplished and admirable young lady while Mary is ridiculous and embarrassing to her family. The first time we "hear" Mary perform she is compared unfavorably to her less talented older sister, Elizabeth:

[Elizabeth's] performance was pleasing, though by no means capital [...] she was eagerly succeeded at the instrument by her sister Mary, who [...] was always impatient for display. Mary had neither genius nor taste; and though vanity had given her application, it had given her likewise a pedantic air and conceited manner, which would have injured a higher degree of excellence than she had reached. Elizabeth, easy and unaffected, had been listened to with much more pleasure, though not playing half so well.⁴⁸

Although technically the better player, Mary is deemed inferior to Elizabeth. A reader who approaches this scene with anachronistic assumptions about what constitutes musical value or skill will be confused by this assessment. However, with a knowledge of period conduct manuals we can easily see why Elizabeth is the better player in Austen's eyes; it is because, crucially, the two performances are not judged on the basis of technical skill. Rather, the sisters are evaluated on how well they exhibit the

⁴⁸ Jane Austen, ed. R. W. Chapman, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), 25.

traditional female virtues of modesty, cheerfulness, and an awareness of their effect on others as they play. While this sort of value system may seem backward – or even “philistine” – to us, it certainly coincides with Erasmus Darwin’s pronouncement (quoted in the previous chapter) that prescribed female activities have *no other purpose* than that of producing an “uninterrupted cheerfulness of mind.”⁴⁹

Mary is often described as pursuing accomplishments that would have been understood as “masculine” to nineteenth-century readers. Instead of reading novels, she “reads great books and makes extracts,” and “studies . . . [in] her hours of repose.”⁵⁰ After tea in the evenings she and her father both leave the ladies to chat in the drawing room while they retire to their respective places of study, he to the library, and Mary to her instrument. Her musical sensibilities also paint her in a masculine light: she plays “long concertos” instead of Scotch and Irish airs, and her sisters often find her, “deep in the study of thorough-bass and human nature.”⁵¹ The study of thorough-bass (to say nothing of human nature) would have been superfluous to the musical education of a young lady; during this period the music girls were expected to play would have been fully written out for them. Thorough-bass was considered a subject within the study of

⁴⁹ Erasmus Darwin, *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education, in Boarding Schools, Private Families, and Public Seminaries* (Philadelphia, PA, 1798), 125. Quoted in Richard Leppert, *Music and Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 29.

⁵⁰ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 7 and 292.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 25 and 60.

music theory – the “science of music” – as it no longer had a practical application.

Therefore, while a young lady would not have studied it, a young man might have.⁵²

The beatific Georgiana Darcy, on the other hand, seems incapable of doing wrong, even though at first glance she seems to be just as devoted to studying and perfecting her musical skill as Mary Bennet is. An account from her brother reveals that Georgiana, like Mary, practices very diligently:

“I am very glad to hear such a good account of her,” said Lady Catherine; “and pray tell her from me, that she cannot expect to excel if she does not practice a good deal.”

“I assure you, madam,” he replied, “that she does not need such advice. She practises very constantly.”⁵³

Another report of her “constant” practicing comes from the family’s housekeeper, later in the novel:

“And is Miss Darcy as handsome as her brother?” said Mrs. Gardiner.

“Oh! Yes – the handsomest young lady that ever was seen; and so accomplished! – She plays and sings all day long.”⁵⁴

Again, it is no mere accident or oversight, on Austen’s part, that Georgiana Darcy should be praised so much for her musical accomplishments while Mary Bennet is ridiculed for hers. This juxtaposition serves as one of Austen’s hidden commentaries on the state of female education: women who endeavored to enter into serious study with the aim of acquiring knowledge and improving their minds (masculine

⁵² For an excellent study of male and female domestic pursuits in the eighteenth century, see Richard Leppert, *Music and Image: Domesticity, Ideology and Socio-cultural Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁵³ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 173.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 248.

accomplishments) ran the risk of being perceived as “pedantic,” “conceited,” and ultimately ridiculous. Whereas women who applied themselves diligently to obtaining “a thorough knowledge of music, drawing, dancing, and modern languages,” but were careful to do so only in order to stay occupied and out of trouble until they were married, were considered “accomplished.”⁵⁵

Throughout the novel, Austen’s emphasis on Georgiana’s “constant” practicing provides an important clue as to the very different relationship she and Mary have to music. A nineteenth-century reader would have understood Georgiana’s constant practicing as a kind of penance for her past indiscretion (her disastrous near-elopement with Mr. Wickham). In contrast with Mary, Georgiana never displays a sense of personal satisfaction gained from playing or a desire to exhibit her talent by performing for others – in fact, quite the contrary. Rather than using her musical skill to show off, Georgiana seems to practice constantly in order to prevent “that vacuity of mind, which is too frequently the parent of libertinism,” and “the intrusion of idle and dangerous imaginations” that the conduct manuals warn against.⁵⁶

In fact, Austen makes the association between a dangerous vacuity of mind and a lack of musical practice even more explicit in another novel. In *Northanger Abbey* (1818) – a parody of the Gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe – Catherine Morland exemplifies the “unaccomplished” young lady. The first thing the reader learns about

⁵⁵ For further reading see John Burton’s advice to young women in his *Lectures on Female Education and Manners* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1793).

⁵⁶ Allatson Burgh, *Anecdotes of Music, Historical and Biographical: In a Series of Letters from a Gentleman to His Daughter* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1814), vi-vii.

Catherine is how utterly unremarkable she is:

[...] she was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid. Her mother wished her to learn music; and Catherine was sure she should like it, for she was very fond of tinkling the keys of the old forlorn spinnet; so, at eight years old she began. She learnt a year, and could not bear it; and Mrs. Morland, who did not insist on her daughters being accomplished [...] allowed her to leave off. The day which dismissed the music-master was one of the happiest of Catherine's life.⁵⁷

The only thing that Catherine excels at is reading novels, so long as “nothing like useful knowledge could be gained from them.” As a result she constantly succumbs to the morbid fantasies and “dangerous imaginations,” which Allatson Burgh warns against in his conduct manual, and that Georgiana Darcy’s “constant” musical practice wards off. Nineteenth-century readers would have understood that rather than occupying her impressionable young mind with innocent piano sonatas, Catherine had allowed it to be “poison[ed] by innumerable licentious Novels.”⁵⁸

In light of the widespread popularity of such conduct manuals, it seems reasonable to assume that a nineteenth-century reader, would have viewed Catherine’s lack of musical training as a moral failing that opens her up to disaster. Similarly, they might have approvingly read Georgiana’s dedicated practicing as an emblem of atonement for her past transgression and of renewed obedience to her brother.

Whereas Austen’s characterizations of Mary Bennet, Georgiana, and Catherine seem to uphold the standards set by conduct manuals, elsewhere she makes fun of the

⁵⁷ Jane Austen, ed. R. W. Chapman, *Northanger Abbey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 14.

⁵⁸ Allatson Burgh, *Anecdotes of Music, Historical and Biographical: In a Series of Letters from a Gentleman to His Daughter* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1814), vi-vii.

expectation that women must be “accomplished.” The wittiest example comes from *Pride and Prejudice*: Mr. Bingley jokingly notes that he has “never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished,” which sets off a heated debate amongst the characters.⁵⁹ Mr. Darcy pedantically corrects him by declaring that the term is applied too liberally. Caroline Bingley, eager to ingratiate herself to Mr. Darcy and to distinguish herself from Elizabeth Bennet by showing off her more aristocratic education, makes her famous proclamation on female accomplishment, in which she refers to none other than Erasmus Darwin:

“[...] no one can be really esteemed accomplished who does not greatly surpass what is usually met with. A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half-deserved.”⁶⁰

Elizabeth rounds out the debate by confessing that she “never saw such a woman,” and doubts that “such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance,” could be united in one person. Thus, while the execrable Miss Bingley defends a conduct book ideal, Elizabeth speaks to the actual social reality experienced by the nineteenth-century women who tried to uphold these impossible expectations, something that Austen’s readers would have readily identified with.

Austen also satirized the widespread cultural expectation of female musical accomplishment in *Mansfield Park* (1814). When the jealous Mary Crawford

⁵⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 39.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

interrogates Fanny Price about “the Miss Owens,” her first question is whether or not they are musical.

“That is the first question, you know,” said Miss Crawford, trying to appear gay and unconcerned, “which every woman who plays herself is sure to ask about another. But it is very foolish to ask questions about any young ladies [...] for one knows, without being told, exactly what they are: all very accomplished and pleasing [...] Two play on the pianoforte, and one on the harp; and all sing, or would sing if they were taught, or sing all the better for not being taught; or something like it.”⁶¹

But Austen’s many witty observations concerning the ubiquity of accomplished young ladies are tinged with melancholy; despite the supposed pervasiveness of female musical accomplishment, Austen sometimes observed that even women who achieved a high level of socially-appropriate proficiency on their instrument had no qualms about giving music up altogether once they were married:

In the evening, as Marianne was discovered to be musical, she was invited to play . . . [she] went through the chief of the songs which Lady Middleton had brought into the family on her marriage, and which perhaps had lain ever since in the same position on the pianoforte, for her ladyship had celebrated that event by giving up music, although by her mother’s account, she had played extremely well, and by her own was very fond of it.⁶²

Moments like these reveal that the primary purpose of female musical accomplishment, for Austen, was not the enjoyment of music for its own sake, but rather the display of qualities that were sought after on the marriage market.

Elsewhere, Austen offers insight into this way of valuing music in late-Georgian society by demonstrating the potentially devastating social consequences of allowing a

⁶¹ Jane Austen, ed. R. W. Chapman, *Mansfield Park* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 288.

⁶² Jane Austen, ed. R. W. Chapman, *Sense and Sensibility* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 35.

young woman to grow up without musical accomplishment. The shy and awkward Fanny Price, for example, is taken from her humble home in Portsmouth to be raised by her wealthy relations at Mansfield Park, presumably so that she might have a better chance of marrying well someday. However, Fanny is the only one of Austen's heroines who never receives any musical training at all. While her beautiful, accomplished cousins play duets on the fortepiano and sing glees, Fanny runs errands and serves as a companion to her aunt, the indolent Lady Bertram. As the years go by her cousins are introduced into society and go to countless balls and dinners while Fanny is always left at home, and, over time, any intention of seeing that she "find a good establishment," is clearly forgotten. Eventually she comes to inhabit such a socially ambiguous position within the family circle at Mansfield Park that Mary Crawford must ask, "Pray, is she out, or is she not?"⁶³ Due to her total lack of musical training, Fanny is excluded from the music-making at Mansfield and therefore is not able to "exhibit" herself in the way that women traditionally would have, in pursuing potential marriage partners. Instead, during a particularly poignant scene, she attempts to draw Edmund away from the glee singing by engaging him in a conversation about constellations and suggesting that they go outside to look at the stars together. But as soon as the singing begins Edmund is captivated:

"We will stay till this is finished, Fanny," said he, turning his back on the window [...] she had the mortification of seeing him advance too, moving

⁶³ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 48. In the late Georgian-era England, being "out" meant that a lady had been officially presented to society and was now available for men to court. See Amanda Vickery's, *A Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

forward by gentle degrees towards the instrument, and when it ceased, he was close by the singers, among the most urgent in requesting to hear the glee again.⁶⁴

To a nineteenth-century reader the introverted, unmusical Fanny Price must have also seemed distinctly unfeminine. While she and Mary Bennet are both seen as unmarriageable, their respective “incorrect” approaches to music reveal the powerful gendering work that music performed in Austen’s England. Unlike Mary, who is highly musical but in a masculine rather than a feminine way, the wholly unmusical Fanny goes through most of the novel altogether unsexed by those around her. Where Mary is a laughingstock, Fanny is invisible.

So far I have examined the ways in which domestic music-making offered young women the opportunity to healthfully occupy their time while also demonstrating their accomplishments to potential suitors. Equally important, however, was the opportunity it afforded men and women to make music together.⁶⁵ Though less frequent and often mentioned only in passing, Austen’s novels contain a variety of such scenes.

In *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), for example, the reader hears many reports of John Willoughby’s musical talents and understands that music-making plays a prominent role in his courtship of Marianne:

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁶⁵ For further reading on the history of music and courtship in eighteenth-century Europe and its visual representation in the artwork of the time, see Richard Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[...] above all, when she heard him declare, that of music and dancing he was passionately fond, she gave him such a look of approbation [...] They speedily discovered that their enjoyment of dancing and music was mutual, and that it arose from a general conformity of judgment in all that related to either.⁶⁶

His society became gradually her most exquisite enjoyment. They read, they talked, they sang together; his musical talents were considerable.⁶⁷

She played over every favourite song that she had been used to play to Willoughby, every air in which their voices had been oftenest joined, and sat at the instrument gazing on every line of music that he had written out for her.⁶⁸

That fact that Willoughby copied out several pieces of music for Marianne confirms that his talents were “considerable,” and suggests that the two might have also played four-hand piano duets together.⁶⁹ Interestingly, Austen never once allows the reader to “see” them playing or singing together; instead, these musical encounters come from Marianne’s recollections, or are told second-hand by the narrator. The absence of any description of their music-making in “real-time” serves to emphasize the insular nature of their relationship.

The secrecy and confidentiality that characterizes Willoughby’s courtship of Marianne was not considered entirely proper by her family, particularly her sensible elder sister:

“[Elinor’s wonder] was engrossed by the extraordinary silence of her sister and Willoughby on the subject [of engagement], which they must know to be

⁶⁶ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 46.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶⁹ Music copying was a skill more indicative of training on an instrument than in voice, and since no other instrument is mentioned, I would assume it was the piano.

peculiarly interesting to them all. As this silence continued, every day made it appear more strange and more incompatible with the disposition of both. Why they should not openly acknowledge to her mother and herself, what their constant behaviour to each other declared to have taken place, Elinor could not imagine [...] a doubt sometimes entered her mind of their being really engaged, and this doubt was enough to prevent her making any inquiry of Marianne.⁷⁰

Willoughby is able to misrepresent his intentions towards Marianne because so much of their courtship is kept private, and as a result, Marianne and her family are left shocked and devastated when they find that he is engaged to another woman. A nineteenth-century reader would have noted the absence of any public music-making during their courtship and might have seen it as foreshadowing his eventual deceit.

In light of the expected public nature of courtship in Austen's England, music-making also gave men and women the opportunity to communicate with one another in a language that could not be easily deciphered by those around them. In *Emma* (1815), for example, Jane Fairfax conveys an extremely private and tender message to Frank Churchill by playing a waltz that they had once danced together, which recalls the memory of their secret engagement at Weymouth earlier in the novel.⁷¹

But the conduct manuals do not solely govern female behavior. Men were expected to behave in socially appropriate ways as well, and many of these expectations similarly surrounded musical activity. The most fascinating of Austen's scenes

⁷⁰ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 54.

⁷¹ Kathryn Libin's insightful and thorough analysis of the music in *Emma* notes the physical closeness of the waltz, a relatively new dance in England at the time of this novel that was still considered rather lascivious, though it had been popular in Europe since the 1780's. By recalling the memory of this waltz Jane Fairfax is not only reminding Frank Churchill of their secret engagement but also of a particularly intimate and sensual moment that they shared. See: Kathryn Libin, "Music, Character, and Social Standing in Jane Austen's *Emma*," *Persuasions* 22 (2002): 14-30.

depicting men and women singing together is also from *Emma*, and highlights the pervasive anxiety surrounding men making music in nineteenth-century England:

One accompaniment to her song took her agreeably by surprise—a second, slightly but correctly taken by Frank Churchill. Her pardon was duly begged at the close of the song, and every thing usual followed. He was accused of having a delightful voice, and a perfect knowledge of music; which was properly denied; and that he knew nothing of the matter, and had no voice at all, roundly asserted.⁷²

Frank Churchill would have to be very talented and experienced to spontaneously make up a counter-melody to Emma's song, and, since "every thing usual followed," it seems that his talent was openly praised. However, it would also seem that *publically denying* his musical talents was part of some unwritten social custom by which he had to abide. Even after asserting that he "had no voice at all," Frank Churchill still sings one more song with Emma, at least two or three with Miss Fairfax, and we are led to believe that he would have sung even more had Mr. Knightly (via Miss Bates) not intervened to save Miss Fairfax's voice. At this point the most curious and illuminating moment in the scene occurs:

Here ceased the concert part of the evening, for Miss Woodhouse and Miss Fairfax were the only young-lady-performers; but soon (within five minutes) the proposal of dancing . . . was so effectually promoted by Mr. and Mrs. Cole, that every thing was rapidly clearing away, to give proper space.⁷³

Here, Austen seems to take for granted the fact that, once "the only young-lady-performers" are no longer able to perform, the music-making must automatically cease. The only logical reason Frank Churchill could not go on singing is because there

⁷² Jane Austen, ed. R. W. Chapman, *Emma* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 227.

⁷³ Jane Austen, *Emma*, 229.

was something improper, or at least very unorthodox, about a gentleman singing solo in a domestic setting.

Though unaccompanied ballad singing by men as entertainment for mixed company is alluded to earlier in the novel, crucially, it is described as a past time enjoyed by such men as the humble (but respectable) farmer Mr. Martin and his shepherd boy, not the likes of the sophisticated Frank Churchill.⁷⁴ In fact, the anxiety that amateur male music-making might blur the lines of class distinction was a primary concern of Lord Chesterfield (quoted in the previous chapter) when he implored his son to *hire* musicians to play for him rather than labor over an instrument himself.⁷⁵

The problem with Frank performing a song in this context could also have been a visual one. In a time when music could only exist in live performance, all musical activities were also visual by default. This scene perhaps implies a deep-seated discomfort, in Austen's England, with the idea of a man being a visual focal point – being objectified – during domestic music-making, a space that was normally used as a market in which women displayed their wares to men. As I have demonstrated, one of the main social functions of domestic music making was the opportunity for a *man* to watch and admire a *woman* in a way and for a length of time that would not have

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁵ “If you love music, hear it; go to operas, concerts, and pay fiddlers to play for you; but I insist upon your neither piping nor fiddling.” Philip Dormer Stanhope, *Letters to his Son by the Earl of Chesterfield on the Fine Art of Becoming a Man of the World and a Gentleman* (London: W. Scott Publishing Co., 1900), 170.

otherwise been socially acceptable.⁷⁶ Take for example, the following scene from *Pride and Prejudice*:

When coffee was over, Colonel Fitzwilliam reminded Elizabeth of having promised to play to him; and she sat down directly to the instrument. He drew a chair near her. [... Mr. Darcy] walked away from [Lady Catherine], and making with his usual deliberation towards the pianoforte stationed himself so as to command a full view of the fair performer's countenance.⁷⁷

Due to this essential visual aspect of music-making, women in Austen's day were limited in their instrument choices to those instruments that could be played in such a way that their posture was not dramatically altered and remained aesthetically pleasing to the male gaze. Wind instruments were absolutely out of the question, as they were considered highly inappropriate for women due to their phallic implications, and bowed strings such as the violin were deemed unsuitable for women to play because of the irregular posture they require.⁷⁸ This narrowed women's options to keyboard instruments such as the fortepiano or to less popular (but not altogether uncommon), plucked strings such as the harp.

Several of Austen's characters play the harp in addition to playing the fortepiano but only one is exclusively a harpist: the infamous Mary Crawford.⁷⁹

"The harp arrived, and rather added to her beauty, wit, and good-humour . . . A young woman, pretty, lively, with a harp as elegant as herself, and both placed

⁷⁶ For an insightful discussion of the visual nature of music-making and the asymmetry between female and male musical display, see Lucy Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 1-116.

⁷⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 173-174.

⁷⁸ For further reading, see: Paula Gillett, *Musical Women in England 1870-1914: "Encroaching on All Man's Privileges,"* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 21.

⁷⁹ Other notable harpists in Austen's oeuvre include one or both of the Miss Musgroves (*Persuasion*, 50), and Georgiana Darcy (*Pride and Prejudice*, 48).

near a window . . . was enough to catch any man's heart.”⁸⁰

Visually, the harp was much more striking than the fortepiano; not only did it showcase the graceful movements of a woman's arms but the instrument itself would have been held, perhaps erotically, between her legs. I would suggest that Austen's own encounters with women who played the harp are what primarily influenced her portrayal of harpists in her novels.⁸¹ The most notable real-life harpist she knew was her worldly and flirtatious cousin Eliza Hancock (later the Comtesse de Feuillide) who, at different times, seduced two of Jane's most beloved brothers (eventually marrying one of them). Another flirtatious harpist in Jane's life was her niece, Fanny Knight. A striking account from Jane's letters to her sister Cassandra describes a scene in which Jane looks on as her niece flirts with a new acquaintance:

“then came the dinner & Mr. Haden, who brought good Manners & clever conversation;—from 7 to 8 the Harp;—at 8 Mrs. L. and Miss E. arrived—& for the rest of the Evening the Drawing-room was thus arranged, on the Sofa-side the two Ladies Henry & myself making the best of it, on the opposite side Fanny & Mr. Haden in two chairs (I *believe* at least they had *two* chairs), talking together uninterruptedly.—Fancy the scene!”⁸²

Even though Jane would have been in her late thirties and a confirmed spinster when she met Mr. Haden, judging from the frequency and tone with which she alluded to “Mr. H.” in her letters to Cassandra it seems possible that she genuinely had feelings for him and might have even entertained the faint hope of marriage. The twinge of jealousy she must have felt watching him engaged in animated conversation with her

⁸⁰ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 64-65.

⁸¹ Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 1997).

⁸² Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 26 November 1815. *Jane Austen's Letters*, Ed. Deirdre LeFaye, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 243.

niece is almost palpable in her brusque parenthetical: “I *believe*, at least, they had *two* chairs.”

In addition to her personal experiences with harpists, Austen might have considered the harp a characteristically flirtatious and worldly instrument due to its relatively easy portability. A woman’s musical talents were valued primarily because they kept her cheerfully occupied, entertained her family and acquaintances, and generally contributed to the philosophy of female *domesticity*. Keyboard instruments, being stationary, even furniture-like, represented this ideal female relationship to music. A harp, which, like a flute or violin (masculine instruments at the time), could be transported to wherever a woman wished to go, perhaps represented a potentially dangerous liberality or independence.⁸³

Musical encounters between Austen’s characters serve a range of purposes from offering us a glimpse into the liminal space in which a relationship is forming, to setting off significant turning points in a narrative. For the modern reader and historian they also present valuable cultural information and help to fill in large holes in our understanding of the social history of domestic music-making in England.

However, no study of musical life in Austen’s England would be complete without

⁸³ Jeffrey Nigro’s otherwise excellent article on Mary Crawford’s harp argues that, on the contrary, harps were much harder to move than fortepianos. He bases this assertion primarily on Mary Crawford’s distress at the difficulty of procuring a cart to transport her instrument to the parsonage. However, I would suggest instead that Mary’s frustration actually serves to highlight the fact that the harp was indeed very portable and that in London she must have been accustomed to moving more freely with her instrument. See: Jeffrey Nigro, “‘Favourable to Tenderness and Sentiment’: The Many Meanings of Mary Crawford’s Harp,” *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal On-Line*, Vol. 35 No. 1 (2014).

considering the music that Austen herself played. In the following chapter I will examine several pieces from her collection of printed music revealing Austen's own domestic soundscape.

Chapter 4: Music from Austen's Collection

“... yes, yes, we will have a pianoforte, as good as can be got for thirty guineas, and I will practice country dances, that we may have some amusement for our nephews and nieces, when we have the pleasure of their company.”⁸⁴

It should come as no surprise that Jane Austen, an educated, female member of the English gentry, was also an accomplished pianist. In the quotation above, taken from a letter to her sister Cassandra just before their move to Chawton in 1809, Jane writes of her intentions of buying a fortepiano for their new home. Considering that Austen's annual allowance never exceeded 20 guineas, this statement alone might be enough to indicate the importance of music in her life.⁸⁵ This quote also gives some indication of what Austen thought the primary purpose of music was: “amusement.”

As I discussed in the first chapter of this study, Austen music scholars such as Patrick Piggott and Robert Wallace have had difficulty reconciling her literary genius with what they perceive as her unsophisticated musical taste. As evidence, they cite the contents of her music collection and the letters to her sister in which she describes her own inattentiveness at public concerts.⁸⁶ Additionally, their assumptions about

⁸⁴ Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 27 December 1808. *Jane Austen's Letters*, Ed. Deirdre LeFaye, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 116.

⁸⁵ Information on the economics of the Austen household and Jane's sources of personal income found in Claire Tomalin's excellent biography of the author, *Jane Austen: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 1997) 83-84.

⁸⁶ According to Wallace, although the music in Austen's collection is not “‘first rate,’ to late twentieth-century ears nurtured on the best of Mozart and Beethoven, it is not ‘third rate’ either,” because it allowed Austen to master “the basic proportions and dynamics of the three-movement sonata form.” 260; Piggott is appalled that Austen

Austen's daily musical habits are based almost entirely on what her nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, chose to publish in *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (1869), a source that I find unreliable for two reasons. First, the *Memoir* was written in the style of Victorian era biographies, which carefully covered up anything considered improper. Austen's growing fame as an authoress was initially what prompted James to compile the memoir, as he was eager to publish the definitive biography. In keeping with Victorian ideas about women, he played down her genius as a writer and emphasized her more traditionally feminine qualities. Second, the primary contributors to the memoir – her nephew James, and niece Caroline Austen – were young when she died (18 and 12 respectively) and their memories of her are those of children. Therefore, we should take with a grain of salt what Caroline Austen says of her Aunt Jane's musical abilities:

She was not highly accomplished according to the present standard. [...] Jane herself was fond of music, and had a sweet voice, both in singing and in conversation; in her youth she had received some instruction on the pianoforte; and at Chawton she practised daily, chiefly before breakfast. I believe she did so partly that she might not disturb the rest of the party who were less fond of music. In the evening she would sometimes sing, to her own accompaniment, some simple old songs, the words and airs of which, now never heard, still linger in my memory.⁸⁷

Based solely on this evidence and without understanding the historical and social context of Austen's musical life it would be easy to conclude, as Piggott does, that her music-making was nothing more than “a relaxation,” and an “innocent

attended a concert where Mozart was on the program and had nothing more to say of the event than, “I wore my crepe sleeves,” 19.

⁸⁷ James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1906) 88.

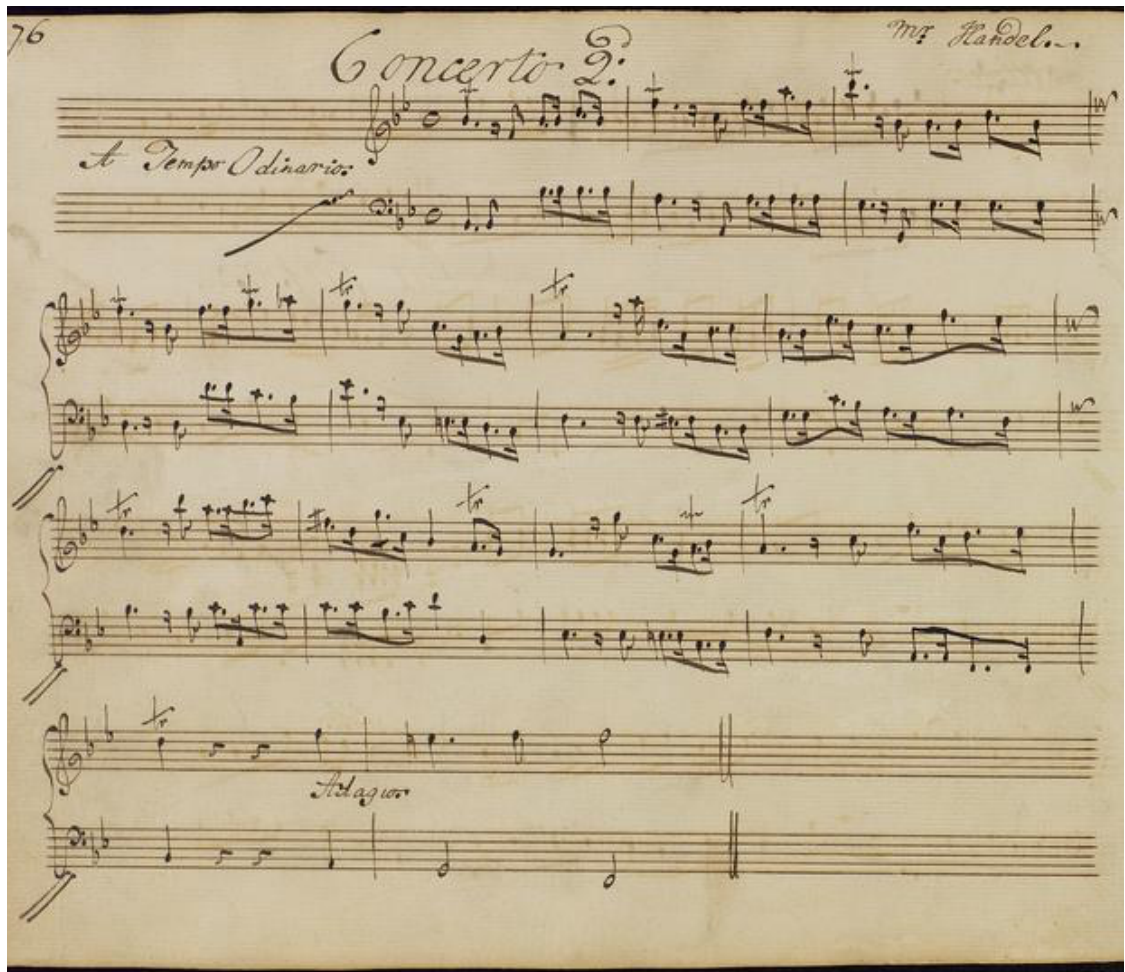
diversion,” that she used to fill her leisure time.⁸⁸ However, a careful analysis of her music books gives us a very different impression of young Austen’s musical life, as I will discuss below.

A work of many generations, the Austen family music collection contains both printed and copied music dated from the mid-eighteenth century through the nineteenth century. Originally comprised of seventeen volumes, the collection was broken up in the mid twentieth century; eight volumes were donated to the Jane Austen Memorial Trust and the remaining books were divided between descendants of the family. The recent acquisition of these remaining volumes by Chawton House Library, and even more recent digitization of the entire collection have made it possible for researchers to thoroughly investigate the collection as a whole.

For this study I will be focusing on the first five volumes in the collection, four of which contain the vast majority of music that was either copied or acquired by Austen during her youth. The first volume, *CHWJA/19/1*, contains solo keyboard music and popular songs copied by Jane’s and Cassandra’s governess, Ann Cawley, who began working for the Austens in 1783. The repertoire in this volume appears in printed publications from the 1750’s but also contains some juvenile keyboard exercises and early attempts at music notation, likely by Cassandra or Jane. At the very end of this volume – the last entry before the young Austens keyboard exercises begin – is a particularly long concerto by George Frideric Handel (See Fig. 1). Labeled simply by the transcriber as “Concerto No. 2,” this piece actually comes from Handel’s Op. 4

⁸⁸ Piggott, *The Innocent Diversion*, 163-164.

collection of organ concertos, which was the first printed set of keyboard concertos to be published in England.⁸⁹ It would be easy to imagine a young Jane Austen encountering this concerto, full of Baroque mannerisms, which would have sounded laughably pretentious to her late-classical ears, and tucking it away in her memory as something absurd for Mary Bennet to play in *Pride and Prejudice*.

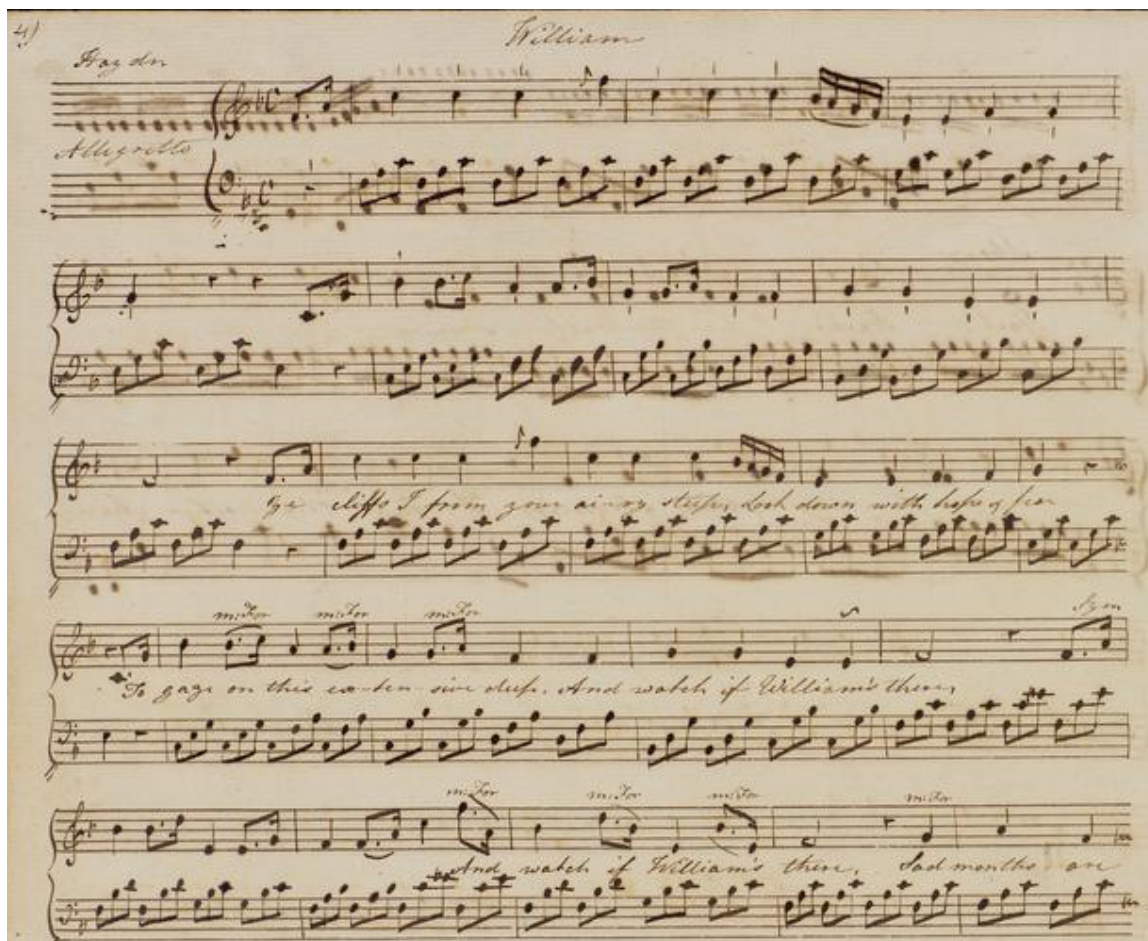


[Fig. 1 CHWJA/19/1 Handel Concerto in B flat major, HWV 290]

⁸⁹ For a thorough investigation of Handel's role in shaping the composition of keyboard concertos in England see Peter Holman's aptly titled article, "Did Handel Invent the English Keyboard Concerto?" *The Musical Times*, Vol. 144, No. 1883 (Summer, 2003) 13-22.

Volumes *CHWJA/19/2* and *CHWJA/19/3* are the only two volumes entirely composed of music copied in Jane Austen's own hand, and as such they have offered the most insight into the way that she used music notation. Her transcriptions are meticulous, as easy to read as printed music, and because of that I was unable to ignore what seemed at first to be an inconsistency in the way that she transcribed song texts onto the piano music. In examining this inconsistency, I have come to the conclusion that Austen did not lead the solitary musical life described in the *Memoir*, but rather that she engaged in social music-making not only with other women but also with at least one man.

I perceived three distinct methods of notation in *CHWJA/19/2* and *CHWJA/19/3* that I believe indicate the intended vocal/instrumental texture for each piece. The first method is the most common in her transcriptions and should be familiar to modern musicians: a grand staff with the vocal text written under the right hand of the piano part (See Fig. 2).



[Fig. 2 “William” CHWJA/19/3]

The second method involves adding an independent, un-texted treble line above the grand staff. It is important to note that in these instances Austen consistently beams groups of eighth and sixteenth notes together in the un-texted treble part, differentiating it visually from vocal music, which she consistently beams in relation to the text. Also, the un-texted treble line in these examples is always a counter-melody or musically superfluous to the music notated within the grand staff (See Fig. 3).



[Fig. 3 “Oh Nanny” CHWJA/19/3]

Notice in Fig. 3 that the additional treble line is a counter-melody that could be taken away without much consequence to the harmonic or melodic contour of the song. Additionally, while the treble line of the grand staff (with the text below it) sits perfectly within the range of a soprano, the added upper line leaps all the way down to a G below the staff.⁹⁰ Two other songs from this volume notated in this fashion “The

⁹⁰ Austen seemed to enjoy singing in E flat major “Oh Nanny” was originally published in C major, and this is just one example of Austen copying a song from its original key into E flat major. Interestingly, the original 1790 publication of “Oh Nanny” also contained a separate part for “German flute” written in G major. It is the flute part that Austen copied into the un-texted top line in her songbook.

Joys of the Country” and “The Soldier’s Adieu” also leap below the staff (to A and G respectively). Austen transcribed four more songs in this way and all of them feature an added, un-texted treble line that is both unsingable and superfluous to the music below it in the piano part.

In the third method Austen used for notating songs with piano accompaniment, the treble line added above the grand staff contains the song text and is beamed like vocal music. It is worth mentioning that whenever a song is notated this way in her collection the vocal melody is doubled in the right hand of the piano (See Fig. 4)



[Fig. 4 “Heaving of the Land” CHWJA/19/3]

Sometimes this texture was amplified by a second vocal line that functioning as a counter-melody to the principal vocal line. In these scenarios, the vocal melody is always doubled somewhere in the right hand of the piano. Additionally, Austen consistently wrote out the text in *both* of the vocal parts for songs notated in this fashion (See Fig. 5).

32)

Andante

From night till morn I take my Glass

From night till morn I take my Glass in hopes to forget my Chloe From night till morn I

From night till morn I take my Glass in hopes to forget my Chloe From night till morn I

take my Glass in hopes to forget my Chloe But as I take the pleasing draught who nice the life be

take my Glass in hopes to forget my Chloe But as I take the pleasing draught who nice the life be

The image shows a handwritten musical score on aged paper. It features a title at the top, a tempo marking 'Andante', and two vocal parts with lyrics written in both parts. The piano accompaniment is written in two staves at the bottom. The handwriting is in cursive and the paper shows signs of age.

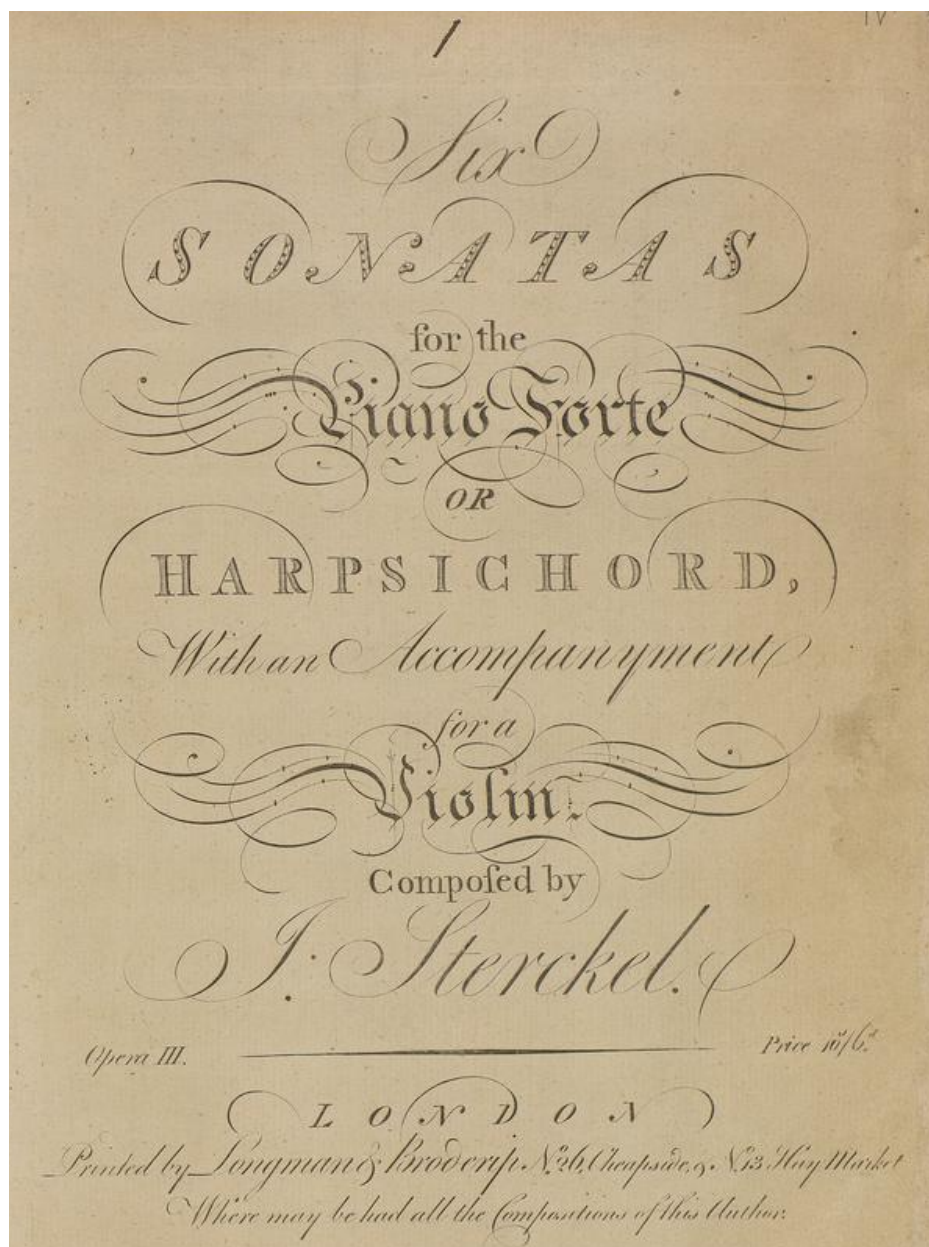
[Fig. 5 “From Night ‘til Morn I take my Glass” CHWJA/19/3]

The three distinct notation methods I have identified suggest very specific musical intentions. The first method, a grand staff with the song text written under the right hand of the piano part, was clearly intended for one performer playing and singing simultaneously at the piano. The second method, with the untexted treble line added above the grand staff, implies a scenario in which one performer plays and sings simultaneously at the piano while *another instrument* (likely a violin, given the range) plays the counter-melody written above the grand staff. The third method, two vocal lines written above a grand staff, suggests two singers reading the top lines of the score while the pianist accompanies, reading the music written in the grand staff below the vocal lines. In this last method, crucially, the vocal melody is always doubled in the piano part so that the pianist can also play the song alone without having to read three or four lines of music at once.

Why would Austen have taken such pains to copy out music in this way if she only played alone, accompanying herself at the piano, as Caroline Austen described? Her notation methods indicate that at the very least, she had the expectation of playing with another person. Who would this person have been? Any number of her female relatives or acquaintances in the neighborhood might have joined her in singing at the piano or playing four-hand piano duets (of which there are several in CHWJA/19/2). However, the range of the instrumental accompaniment indicated in CHWJA/19/3 implies a violin, and as I demonstrated in my previous chapter, violins were considered inappropriate for women to play at this time.

Volumes CHWJA/19/4 and CHWJA/19/5 provide ample evidence to support my hypothesis. These two volumes of printed music consist of repertoire that was published in England between 1770-1795. Both of these books have Jane Austen's name printed on the flyleaf in her own hand and were, presumably, bound by her. On the online catalogue CHWJA/19/4 and CHWJA/19/5 are labeled as containing "solo keyboard music," which is a misleading description considering that more than half of the compositions in these books are accompanied sonatas, intended for keyboard with (often *ad libitum* but sometimes written out) violin accompaniment (See Fig. 6).⁹¹ I cannot imagine why Austen would have owned so much music for keyboard and violin if she did not regularly, or at least occasionally, play with a violinist – who, based on the very fact that they played the violin, must have been a man. However, there is not even the slightest hint anywhere in her letters or in her family's recollections of any musical men in the family or in their circle of friends, and certainly no one described specifically as a violinist.

⁹¹ Jane Austen's House Museum: images digitized by the University of Southampton Library Digitisation Unit, 2015 <https://archive.org/details/austen1676189-2001>.



[Fig. 6 Title page of Sterckel Sonatas, CHWJA/19/5]

Given what this study has already uncovered about England's anxieties regarding musical men in the late eighteenth century, perhaps it should not come as a surprise that, if Austen did have an acquaintance who played the violin or if she was being courted by a young man who was musical, their music-making would not have

been chronicled. Even if Austen had recorded these encounters, it is unlikely they would have survived Cassandra Austen's censorship of her sister's letters.⁹²

The only love interest from her youth that has been preserved in the extant letters to Cassandra (these letters must have only survived by mistake) is the brief but passionate episode with Thomas Langlois Lefroy, the nephew of a family friend. Tom Lefroy, a penniless law student from Ireland, came to stay with his relations in Hampshire for one month between December 1795 and January 1796 for a brief vacation before continuing his studies in London. In that short span of time, he and the equally penniless Jane became so attached that the Lefroys hastened his departure for London in the hopes of terminating what would have been an imprudent match.⁹³

At the peak of their short romance, Austen wrote to Cassandra:

You scold me so much in the nice long letter which I have this moment received from you that I am almost afraid to tell you how my Irish friend and I behaved. Imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together. I *can* expose myself, however, only *once more* because he leaves the country soon [...]

It was Austen's endearment for Tom, "my Irish friend," that caused me to pay particular attention to one song in volume CHWJA/19/3 entitled "The Irishman" (See Fig. 7).

⁹² "The occasional correspondence between the Sisters when apart from each other would as a matter of course be destroyed by the Survivor – I fancy what the indignation of Aunt Cass. would have been at the mere idea of its being read and commented upon by any of us, nephews and nieces, little or great." Caroline Austen to James Edward Austen-Leigh in 1869 while they were collaborating on the memoir. Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, 184.

⁹³ "... Mrs. Lefroy sent the gentleman off at the end of a *very* few weeks, that no more mischief might be done." *Ibid.*, 186.



[Fig. 7 “The Irishman” JA/19/3]

There are several unique characteristics to consider about this transcription.

First, the text of the song is rather bawdy when compared to the other songs that she had in her collection, such as “the Joys of the Country,” or “the Soldier’s adieu.” The songs she copied were plaintive ballads and arias from popular operas, or songs extolling the virtues of simple, rural life in England. “The Irishman,” on the other hand sounds like a (rather cosmopolitan) drinking song! Each stanza compares the relative

virtues of Turkish, French, and English lovers, concluding in the refrain that: “none can love like an Irishman.” The final stanza is especially suggestive:

The London folks themselves beguile,
And think they please in a capital stile;
Yet let them ask, as they cross the street,
Of any young virgin they happen to meet;
And I'm sure they'll say, from behind their fan –
'O! There's none can love like an Irishman!'

Another aspect of this piece that struck me as unusual was the sparseness of the bass line compared to other accompaniments for vocal music in CHWJA/19/3. In my search for an original publication to check her transcription against I found no printed music for this tune at all during Austen's lifetime. However, the text was printed widely in chapbooks and distributed as a broadside ballad in Ireland and later in England during the 1790's.⁹⁴ Taken all together, I believe there is enough evidence to suggest that Tom Lefroy taught her this song and might have even helped her to dictate it at the piano. The scene that this hypothesis conjures up is reminiscent of a brief but poignant scene between Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth in Austen's last novel, *Persuasion* (1817):

Once, too, he spoke to her. She had left the instrument on the dancing being over, and he had sat down to try to make out an air which he wished to give the Miss Musgroves an idea of. Unintentionally she returned to that part of the room; he saw her, and, instantly rising, said, with studied politeness – “I beg your pardon, madam, this is your seat.”⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Paul Rice, *British Music and the French Revolution* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 151.

⁹⁵ Jane Austen, ed. R. W. Chapman, *Persuasion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), 63.

There are key similarities between Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth's relationship and Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy's brief romance. Like Austen, the young Anne falls quickly and passionately in love with a poor man that her family disapproves of and she is persuaded against marrying him. Eight years later he returns rich, successful, and single while Anne is steadily approaching the age of spinsterhood. Reading of their joyful reunion and marriage at the end of the novel, I imagine Jane fantasizing about a happy ending to the brief, passionate romance of her youth.

By viewing Austen's musical life through this new window we begin to see her in a new light: not as the "dear Aunt Jane" that her family described in the *Memoir*, but rather a lively, social and flirtatious young woman. Reexamining the ways that Austen used music in her daily life and finding that her musical activities were likely much more varied and socially assertive than was previously thought has strong implications for the musical scenes in her novels. Understanding the role that domestic music-making played in her own life makes it impossible to overlook the music-making in her novels as mere "minutiae." The fact that Austen herself engaged in the same highly charged musical activities that she wrote for her characters tells us that nothing in those scenes was guesswork, she was writing from experience.

Conclusion

By examining seemingly disparate artifacts of Georgian culture – instruments, conduct manuals, novels, printed music and manuscripts – it becomes possible to synthesize outwardly incongruous information and to produce as a result a new story of Georgian musical life that is far more vibrant and diverse than the one told in the standard music history textbooks. Taken together, the evidence examined in this study demonstrates that Austen’s England was not at all unmusical, on the contrary, it was buzzing with musical activity. Paradoxically, it was their devotion to domestic music-making that contributed most to their absence from the metanarrative of music history. Their music culture was incompatible with the new aesthetic values of nineteenth-century Romanticism, which placed greater importance on the autonomous musical product than the malleable musical process.

While this study has examined a wide array of evidence to paint a picture of musical life in England during this period, there are still many stones left unturned. For example, Jane Austen’s various methods of transcribing songs and the presence of such a large quantity of music in her collection calling for violin accompaniment is truly puzzling. This study has suggested one possible scenario of the musical forces she might have played with but much more investigation is necessary to find definitive evidence to support the claim that Austen often (or even sometimes) played with any other instrumentalists. The hypothesis put forward in this study, that there must have been at least one violinist that she played with somewhat regularly, is based almost entirely on her particular method of transcribing songs. It is completely possible that

this method was just a quirk of Austen's and her notation should not be interpreted as prescriptive. Perhaps she was copying someone else's transcription and this just happened to be the way that they transcribed those particular songs from the original print. The only way to know with any certainty would be to investigate (if they exist) her music teacher's (George Chard, the assistant organist at Winchester Cathedral while the Austens lived in Steventon) music collection, and the music collections of his other pupils to see if her transcription method was consistent with other transcriptions intended for domestic use.

Another methodology utilized in this study that could be applied more broadly to eighteenth and nineteenth-century music studies is that of using musical scenes in novels as empirical evidence of musical culture. It would be fascinating to study the change that occurred in domestic music-making from the beginning to the end of the nineteenth century by examining the musical scenes depicted in novels by Victorian authors such as Brontë, Dickens, and Gaskell. Additionally, by investigating the musical lives of Victorian authors such as these, it would be possible to compare their domestic soundscapes to one another, and to their predecessors (like Jane Austen) to see how accurately their own musical experiences are reflected in their novels.

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