# CHARLES BURNEY'S PHILOSOPHY OF MUSICAL CRITICISM

# CHARLES BURNEY'S PHILOSOPHY OF MUSICAL CRITICISM

By

KENNETH ALEXANDER McLEOD, A.MUS. B.MUS.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

MASTER OF ARTS (1991)
(Music Criticism)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Charles Burney's Philosophy of Music Criticism

AUTHOR: Kenneth Alexander McLeod, A.Mus. (Douglas College)
B.Mus. (University of British Columbia)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. William Renwick

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 181

ABSTRACT

Charles Burney represents one the most significant voices in the world of eighteenth-century music criticism. This thesis examines his critical philosophy, style and achievements as contained primarily in his *General History of Music* and *Tours* of France, Italy and Germany. Burney's criticism is explored in the context of its social and historical position and in relation to various musical genres.

The first two chapters present an introduction to Burney, summarizing the main events in his life which contributed to his development as a critic and describing the the considerable influence that such figures as Samuel Johnson and Jean Jacques Rousseau exerted on his critical outlook.

Chapter Three examines Burney's critical practice in terms of the criteria which he applied in judging various types of performance and composition. The fourth chapter contrasts differences in the critical styles of Burney and Sir John Hawkins, two men who represented diametrically opposed methods of musical criticism. The final chapter examines Burney's achievements as a critic both in relation to his era and up to, and including, our own.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. William Renwick, for his invaluable advice and encouragement. I am particularly grateful for his patience and guidance when dealing with stylistic aspects of my work. Many thanks are also due to Dr. Fred Hall for his acumen and diligence as second reader.

Additionally I wish to thank the faculty and staff of the McMaster Department of Music for providing an environment that encouraged and stimulated original musical thought; my family, for their continuing support; and fellow students and friends, Tim and Barbara Jones, Sharon and Ron Gelleny, and Marguerite Toews for their companionship and insights into the art of music.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# CHAPTER I

## BURNEY'S LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT AS A CRITIC

Dr. Charles Burney has long been regarded as one of England's first and foremost musical historians. His *General History of Music* represented the most complete and learned musical history for years after the final volume was published in 1789. What is often overlooked in Burney's contribution to musical knowledge, however, is his legacy of musical criticism. This legacy, as embodied in both his *General History* and musical *Tours* of the continent, represents an invaluable source of knowledge and insight into the tastes and critical practices of the day. Burney's critical philosophy and practice can be seen as a direct reflection of the prevailing English taste as it developed in the "enlightened" age of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Johnson.

In attempting to unravel the historical and social influences on Burney's critical philosophy, it may be helpful to review his life and works to the extent that they relate to his development as a critic. Born at Shrewsbury on April 7th 1726, Charles was the twentieth child of James Macburney, the fifth by James' second wife Ann Cooper. Dr. Burney's father was a man of versatile, if mediocre, artistic talents. Charles was later to recall some of his father's accomplishments: "he

danced remarkably well, performed well on the violin, and was a portrait painter of no mean talents. He likewise wrote a fine hand..."[1] Though sometimes fondly remembered by Charles, James Macburney's life was also described by him as "a succession of gaieties and troubles, & the number of places he appears to have liv'd at, proves the unsteadiness of his conduct...the versatility of his disposition was such, that tho he tried various professions he continued in none of them long..."[2] In spite of his transient career in the arts, Macburney did manage to rub shoulders with such eminent men as Charles Fleetwood, subsequent manager of the Drury Lane Theatre; Mathew Dubourg, an accomplished violinist; and John Weaver, an important dancing master.[3] If nothing else, James Macburney served as something of a role model, albeit a dubious one, in the development of Charles' own social and artistic aspirations. Further evidence of James Macburney's desire for social acceptance can be found in his decision to drop the 'Mac' prefix to his surname. This was due, in all

---

[1]Charles Burney, *Memoirs of Dr. Charles Burney 1726-1769*, edited by Slava Klima, Garry Bowers, and Kerry Grant (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), p. 11.

[2]As quoted in Roger Lonsdale, *Dr. Charles Burney* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.2. Also printed with alterations by Fanny d'Arblay, *Memoirs of Dr. Burney*, 3 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1832), new ed. (Ann Arbor: AMS Press, 1975), i, pp. X-XV. Note: Original variant spellings, abbreviations, and grammatical irregularities have been retained in this and subsequent quotations.

[3]Lonsdale, p. 2.

probability, to a desire to appear less provincial and gain a more socially acceptable 'English'-sounding name. To this relatively unflattering portrait of James Macburney can be added his partial abandonment of Charles, aged eight, and his elder brother Richard in about 1734 in the town of Condover, four miles from Shrewsbury. The boys were left in the complete care of a certain "Nurse Ball". The reasons for this apparent abandonment remain unclear. There can be little doubt, however, that in later years Charles' almost compulsive desire to gain the affection and respect of all whom he met can be traced, at least in part, to the insecurity of his childhood. Indeed, Burney's desire to befriend and ingratiate himself is one of the major flaws in his personality as a critic. As we shall see, this flaw manifests itself not so much in an inability to hold negative opinions--far from it--but rather in a marked desire to have his opinions conform to the fashionable tastes of the nobility and the eminent men of letters of whom Burney was continually in awe.

In 1739 Charles was finally allowed to rejoin his family who were now residing in Chester, James Macburney having received the patronage of George, third Earl of Cholmondeley in his appointment as "Surveyor of the Window-lights".[4] Once again, it is his father who seems to have

---

[4]Lonsdale, p. 4. At this time Charles' brother Richard was also sent to London to apprentice with his half-brother Thomas, a highly regarded dancing-master.

initiated the example of the potential of social patronage for his son, an example which Charles was to constantly follow in both his literary and his musical efforts.

In December of that year Burney began attendance at the Chester Free School on the nomination, no doubt induced by his father, of Prebendary Prescot, a distinguished local music-lover and a close friend of James Macburney. At Chester Burney received his first formal exposure to music and, to a large degree, education of any kind. Previous to this Burney merely had the instruction of his "uncultivated and utterly ignorant old nurse" and limited attendance at the financially strapped Shrewsbury Free School.[5]

At Chester young Charles became a choirboy and was introduced to the organ, on which he learned the rudiments of musical theory from Edmund Baker, organist of Chester Cathedral. The organ was an instrument which was to occupy and fascinate Burney throughout his life as evidenced by the many critical and technical descriptions of the organs encountered on his Tours of the continent.[6]

---

[5]*Memoirs*, d'Arblay, i, p. 4.

[6]In particular see Burney's detailed account of the 'Great Organ at Haarlem', built by Muller in 1738. *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Provinces* (London: Becket, J. Robson, and G. Robinson, 1775). Reprinted as *Dr. Burney's Musical Tours in Europe*, ed. Percy Scholes, 2 vols. (London: Oxford Press, 1959), pp. 231-233.

Chester's active musical life must have also influenced Charles' musical ambitions and tastes. Chester often played host to famous performers and composers who would pass through on their way from London to Ireland. Most notable, and most important to the impressionable Charles, was the visit of George Frideric Handel, in 1741, on his way to the first public performance of his *Messiah*. Judging from his later adulation of Handel, the impact of this visit on Burney must have been great. As late as 1785 Burney was able to recall the visit: "I watched him narrowly as long as he remained in Chester."[7] Though he was to subsequently temper his adulation in favour of later German and Italian masters, Burney nonetheless maintained that Handel was "superior in the strength and the boldness of his style, the richness of his harmony, and the complication of parts, to every Composer who has been most admired for such excellencies..."[8]

Despite its active musical scene, Charles apparently tired of Chester. In 1742, having "Run away to Shrewsbury" in order to become an assistant to his 37-year old half-brother

---

[7]Charles Burney, *An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster-Abbey and the Pantheon, May 26th, 27th, 29th: and June the 3rd, and 5th, 1784. In Commemoration of Handel* (London: T. Payne and Son and G. Robinson, 1785), p. 26. Also see Lonsdale, p. 5.

[8]Charles Burney as quoted in Kerry Grant, *Dr. Burney as Critic and Historian of Music* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), p. 288.

James, organist for St. Mary's Church,[9] Charles was hard at work on his musical and formal education.

> The quantity of music which I copied at this time, of all kinds, was prodigious; and my activity and industry surprised every body; for besides writing, teaching, tuning, and playing [organ] for my brother, at my *momens perdus,* I was educating myself in every way I was able. With copy books I improved my handwriting so much, that my father did not believe I wrote my letters to him myself. I tried hard to at least keep up the little Latin I had learned; and I diligently practised both the spinet and violin; which with reading, transcribing music for business, and poetry for pleasure; attempts at composition, and attention to my brother's affairs, filled up every minute of the longest day.[10]

This passage also alludes to the fact that Burney was, for the most part, self-educated. It was through his own remarkable diligence that he was able to gain enough general knowledge of the world so as later to be able to befriend and debate some of the most learned men in the world.

This penchant for industry was to become typical of all Burney's subsequent literary and musical efforts. If nothing else, Burney was extremely assiduous in his research into the music and composers on which he commented. His work ethic, coupled with a desire for attaining as complete an understanding of a subject as possible, would later reflect

---

[9] *Memoirs* (Index Fragment). The details of this event have been censored by Fanny Burney in her zealous editing of Burney's original manuscript of his Memoirs. See also *Memoirs*, Klima, Bowers, and Grant. p. 4.

[10] *Memoirs*, d'Arblay, i, p. 8.

favourably on the relative accuracy and subsequent value of his critical inquiries.

In 1743, at his father's behest, Charles returned to Chester and continued his musical studies with ever more zeal and "inflamed with a rage for composition."[11] Early upon his return, Charles was introduced by his father to the famous violinist and Master of the King's Band, Mathew Dubourg. This meeting is notable not only for Charles' pride in accompanying the Master in a duet but also for the observation that "Dubourg was a man of wit, who had been admitted into good company without, as well as with, his fiddle."[12] This observation can, in some sense, be regarded as the birth, if not an awakening, of Burney's own lifelong desire to escape the second-class social status of most eighteenth-century musicians.

In 1744 Charles was introduced by his old teacher Edmund Baker to Thomas Arne, the leading English composer of the day. Arne was impressed with the young man's abilities and industry and agreed, after negotiating with his father, to take Charles to London as an apprentice. Charles arrived in London later that year and for the next two years lived with Arne and his family. Charles was to help Arne, then the composer for the Drury Lane Theatre, in the monotonous tasks of transcribing his music, teaching it to various singers, and

---

[11]Charles Burney as quoted in Lonsdale, p. 7.

[12]*Memoirs*, fragment 20. Klima, Bowers, and Grant, p. 38.

playing in various orchestras as a "supernumerary Violin or Tenor".[13] This auspicious entrance to the London musical scene was further augmented through Charles' contact with many eminent musicians and his friendship with Arne's sister, Mrs. Susannah Maria Cibber, at whose home Burney personally encountered many of the eminent artists and literati of the city. There, Burney was able to develop the social and conversational skills which would later hold him in good stead throughout the courts and universities of Europe. This also represented, once again, Charles' ever widening exposure to fashionable London society and can not but have helped to influence the tastes of the ambitious young musician.

Gradually, however, Burney was to become weary of the drudgery of Arne's employment, and he became disillusioned with the composer himself: "It grieves me that gratitude does not oblige me to speak with more reverence of him as my Master; but the truth is, he was so selfish & unprincipled, that finding me qualified to transcribe music, teach & play in public...he never wished I shd advance further in the Art."[14] Also, the terms of Burney's apprenticeship were such that any and all of his earnings went directly to Arne.

In 1746 Burney met Fulke Greville, a leading socialite of the day. Greville, who often travelled with two French-horn

---

[13]Memoir fragment as quoted in Lonsdale, p. 10.

[14]Charles Burney as quoted in Lonsdale, p. 13.

players who entertained him whenever he stopped, had a relatively low opinion of professional musicians. His meeting with Burney was the result of a challenge issued to Jacob Kirkman, a noted maker of harpsichords, to produce a musician "who had a mind and cultivation" as well as musical skill. Greville believed there was almost nothing so impossible "as the extraordinary circumstance of finding any union of sense with sound."[15] Burney's playing and conversational skills impressed him however, and Greville wished to hire Burney as a domestic musician/companion on the spot. Arne was at first unwilling to let his apprentice go, but eventually agreed to sell Burney's indenture to Greville. Burney, a "mere" musician, was, to all intents and purposes, still being bought and sold.

Nevertheless, it was through Greville that Burney was first introduced to the elite society of England. Though music was hardly the main preoccupation of either Greville or his social circle--amongst other diversions gambling predominated--Burney was able to play for and acquaint himself with such a "blue blood" as Lord Holdernesse, to whom he dedicated his first published compositions, *Six Sonatas for two Violins, with a Bass for the Violoncello or Harpsichord*, in 1747.[16] It is also from this period that Burney began friendships with

---

[15]*Memoirs*, d'Arblay, i, p. 27.

[16]Lonsdale, p. 16.

such notables as William Mason the poet, England's leading actor David Garrick, and Samuel Crisp, an "scholar of the highest order" and a man of "infinite taste in all the fine arts".[17]

The influence of Greville and his friends on Burney's development can not be overestimated. It was the combined influence of Greville and Samuel Crisp, both greatly predisposed to Italian music, that convinced Burney to give up his "ancient worship" of "Handel, Geminiani, and Corelli", in favour of such composers as "Hasse, Scarlatti, and Pergolesi."[18] As a member of the Greville household he held a much higher position than the socially inferior positions to which the majority of eighteenth-century musicians were accustomed. From this lofty situation Burney was able to circulate with both the learned and the upper classes, and to develop fashionable and cultivated tastes for literature, sciences, and the arts. The rarified atmosphere of this society was however most important in that it raised Burney's aspirations once and for all to overcome the label of a "mere" musician.

In 1749, however, he developed other priorities. On June 25 of that year, he married Esther Sleepe, an actress who had already given birth to his daughter, also named Esther. With a family to support, Burney was released

---

[17]*Memoirs*, d'Arblay, p. 49.

[18]Ibid, p. 19.

from his contract with Greville and began what was to be an exhausting professional life as an organist, harpsichordist, composer, and, most importantly, as a music teacher. Throughout all his working life, despite even his later success at entering "great" society, it was primarily his labour as a working musician which was to support his family and his fashionable lifestyle. For the time being, Burney's brief interlude with London's social elite was over.

It is important to remember when reading Burney's music criticisms that, unlike much criticism of today, they were written by a working musician and composer. Burney was no "drawing-room" critic. He knew and understood the art of music from direct experience, though he often wrote for an audience which was utterly ignorant of the craft. It is precisely this gap between the experience and knowledge of the "critic" and that of his expected audience which often poses problems for modern musical reviewers. For Burney, the problem was magnified by his desire to be appreciated, and hence to be seen as fashionable, even by the non-musical of society. Burney often tempered his technical description and opinions to avoid alienating this intended audience. As Burney himself

would later state, "...I would rather be pronounced trivial than tiresome."[18]

Once again on his own, and resigned to the status of a "mere" musician, Burney acquired some initial success as a music master to several prominent London households. It was also in this initial stage of freelancing that he gained some fame as a theatrical composer for David Garrick's Drury Lane stagings. These works included the music for productions of *Robin Hood* (1750), a burletta with libretto by Moses Mendez; *Queen Mab* (1750), a pantomime; and *The Masque of Alfred* (1751), with libretto by David Mallet.[20]

Burney's ambitious career and social aspirations at that time were again to be diverted, in the spring of 1751, with the onset of a severe fever which confined him to his bed for three months and eventually forced him to abandon his growing fame in London for the healthier climes of Islington and King's Lynn. There, away from the smoke and

---

[18]Charles Burney, *General History of Music, from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, 4 vols. (London: Becket, Robson, and Robinson, 1776-1789), new ed. 2 vols. with critical and historical notes by Frank Mercer (New York: Dover, 1957), i, p. 5. Note: All subsequent citations of Burney's *History* will refer to the Mercer edition.

[20]These works were originally attributed to 'The Society of the Temple of Apollo' which was thought to be a 'club' of various artist's and musician's. Some twenty years would pass, however, before it was discovered that Burney was the main, if not sole, composer of the works. See Lonsdale, p. 36. For a further description of these works see Roger Fiske, *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 223-33.

grime, Burney's health readily improved. This self-imposed exile from London to such a seemingly provincial setting, lasting some nine years, proved to be less of a disaster to his social aspirations than might have been anticipated. It was at this time that Burney made the acquaintance of Horace Walpole and William Bewley, the latter a surgeon and scholar who was to become a close lifelong friend. Perhaps even more influential, however, was the correspondence that Burney entered into with Samuel Johnson, the famous London author and lexicographer. Burney had followed Johnson's career while still apprenticed to Arne in 1747[21] and his admiration, bordering on worship, of Johnson was to be a constant influence on Burney's critical style and ideas throughout his career. Evidence of Burney's idolatry of Johnson is typified by the following excerpt from the first of Burney's letters to Johnson, made ostensibly to enquire where he might obtain copies of Johnson's forthcoming *Dictionary of the English Language*:

> I ought to beg the pardon of the public as well as yourself, Sir, for detaining you thus long from your useful labours; but it is the fate of men of eminence to be persecuted by insignificant friends as well as enemies; and the simple cur who barks through fondness and affection, is no less troublesome than if stimulated by anger and aversion.
>
> I hope, however, that your philosophy will incline you to forgive the intemperence of my zeal

---

[21]Lonsdale, p. 45.

> and impatience at making these inquiries; as well as my ambition to subscribe myself, with very great regard,
>
> Sir, your sincere admirer, and most humble servant,
>
> Charles Burney.[22]

Though the correspondence continued, it was not until 1760 that Burney had the opportunity of personally meeting his revered Dr. Johnson, a meeting that was to result in a relationship filled with mutual professional and personal admiration.

Besides his continued attempts to extend his social circle, Burney, while at Kings Lynn, was continually educating himself. He and his wife studied a variety of subjects covering "history, voyages, poetry, and science, as far as Chamber's Dict$^{y}$, the French Encyclopedie, & the Philosophical Transactions..."[23] It was also at this time that Burney became significantly curious about musical history. Upon meeting the Italian literary-critic/historian Vincenzo Martinelli, Burney "picked his brains as much as I c$^{d}$ ab$^{t}$ Musical hist$^{y}$."[24] He began to collect books, to make extensive notes on musical history, and made several translations, among them of Jean le Ronde d'Alembert's *Élémens de musique suivant les pricipes de*

---

[22]CB (Charles Burney) to Samuel Johnson, 16 Feb. 1755, *Memoirs*, d'Arblay, i, p. 120.

[23]*Memoirs*, Klima, Bowers, and Grant, fragment 69, p. 115.

[24]CB to J.C Walker, 2 Feb. 1801 (Osborn Collection), as quoted in Lonsdale, p. 43.

*Rameau* (1752). Up to this point, however, all such scholarly activity had no directed or particular purpose, though Burney was later to date this period as the beginning of his serious musicological activities.[25]

In 1760 Burney and his family returned to London, ostensibly, "in order to provide for his children & rise in his profession above the rank of a country organist..."[26] The latter of these purpose is probably the more significant, since friends in London had been petitioning Burney to, in the words of Edmund Poole, "give up his provincial fame and resume his career in the capital."[27]

The next nine years in London were marked primarily by Burney's re-establishment of an active teaching career, and the relative failure of several more theatrical compositions for David Garrick. Also of note was the death, in 1762, of Burney's wife Esther. Though despondent over the loss, he would, in 1767, marry Mrs. Allen, a recent widow.

In 1769, in what appears to have been a calculated attempt to win increased professional notoriety, Burney proposed himself as composer of the "Installation Ode", music which was to commemorate the installation of the new

---

[25]Ibid., p. 44.

[26]*Memoirs*, Klima, Bowers, and Grant, fragment 84, p. 132.

[27]Edmund Poole, from his editorial introduction to Charles Burney, *Music, Men and Manners in France and Italy 1770* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1974), p. xiii.

Chancellor of the University of Cambridge. Burney's plan seems to have been to compose the "Ode" and then, on the following day, direct another of his own compositions in order to receive his Doctorate of Music.[28] Burney's designs came to an abrupt end, however, with his resignation from the project after being informed by the new Chancellor of the University that his proposed expenses for a large orchestra which he had engaged must be cut in half. Undaunted by his setback at Cambridge, Burney shifted the sights of his doctoral ambitions to Oxford. This attempt was to prove more successful, and after matriculating from University College on June 20th 1769, Burney received his Mus.B., to be followed just two days later by his Mus.D.

The Oxford Doctorate must be regarded as Burney's ultimate graduation from "mere musician" to scholar and man of letters. Possession of the degree instilled within Burney the courage of his own musical and literary convictions. For Burney, the Doctorate would have been viewed, at least in some sense, as sufficient justification and credentials for the subsequent public airing of his musical opinions and criticism.

---

[28]Traditionally an "Installation Ode" for a new Chancellor was composed by a leading composer of the day. Burney decided to imitate the precedent of William Boyce, who in 1749 had set the Ode and received his Doctorate the following day after the performance of a final exercise. See Lonsdale, p. 77.

Emboldened by the Doctorate, Burney, aged 43, began his literary career with the anonymous publication of *An Essay towards a History of the Principal Comets that have appeared since the Year 1742* in October of 1769.[28] The pamphlet was meant to accompany the impending return of Halley's Comet that Autumn. Astronomy, and science in general, were to be lifelong subjects of interest for Burney as shown by his pride in owning, after 1774, the former home of Sir Isaac Newton. Burney's interest in astronomy also manifested itself in the form of a lengthy poem entitled *Astronomy, a Historical and Didactic Poem*, which was intended to be a versification of the entire history of the science.[30] Burney also actively corresponded with his friends Dr. Shepherd, Professor of Astronomy at Cambridge, and Sir William Herschel. Burney's interest in science was another manifestation of his desire to transcend the profession of musician. A well-rounded interest in all aspects of both the arts and sciences was a must for any aspiring fashionable man of letters.

1769 also marked the genesis of Burney's *General History of Music*. Though he had been collecting historical

---

[28]Lonsdale, p. 80. Lonsdale also speculates that Burney wished to remain anonymous to mitigate any inhibitions he may have had in this initial literary venture.

[30]The poem was begun by Burney in 1789 and sporadically continued to occupy him, at his daughter Fanny's urging, until 1799. Another example of Burney's poetic aspirations, the poem was never published and was destroyed by Burney himself. See Lonsdale, pp. 385-87.

musical materials since his days at King's Lynn, it was not until this time that he began "seriously to concentrate his meditation, and arrange his schemes."[31]

On reviewing his materials, Burney was to discover, to his great dismay, that many of the authors on the various topics had merely reproduced the antiquated views of earlier writers; writers "who have found it more convenient to compile books at their own fire-side, from books which have been compiled before, than to cross seas, mountains, and deserts, in foreign countries, to seek for new and authentic materials."[32] Burney envisioned his history as having universal appeal that would not just be limited to antiquarians or musicians and it was with this in mind that he made the momentous decision to "fly to Italy...to allay my thirst of knowledge at the pure source, which I am unable to do by such spare Draughts as are to be attained from the polluted works through which it is conducted to us here."[33]

---

[31]Burney as quoted in Poole, p. xiv.

[32]Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany, The Netherlands, and United Provinces*, 2nd ed. (London: Becket, Robson, and Robinson, 1775), new ed. in 2 vols., edited by Percy Scholes as *Dr. Burney's Musical Tours in Europe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), ii, p. xi. Note: All subsequent references to Burney's *Tours* will refer to the Scholes edition unless otherwise stated.

[33]CB to William Mason, 27 May 1770, as reproduced in Percy Scholes, *The Great Doctor Burney* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), i, p. 150.

If nothing else, from these declarations we are able to glimpse Burney's admirable desire to spare no efforts to be as accurate as possible in both his documentation of facts and critical assessments. Though travelling to distant countries was a fairly common occurrence amongst eminent composers in search, and under the influence, of courtly patronage, a European tour solely in search of musical material by a musical scholar was almost unheard of, and had certainly never been attempted by an Englishman. Similar to his desire to enter "great" society and transcend the bonds of a "mere musician" Burney was, once again, taking a most unconventional tack with respect to his musical colleagues.

The "Grand Tour" was a European journey made by fashionable young Englishmen of the day in order to complete their education. The memoirs of these tours were often the basis for subsequent publications on the political, social, economic, and cultural situations of the various foreign countries, thus serving as the travel guides of their day. Some of the most celebrated and important of these tours, including those by Stephen Boswell in 1764 and Tobias Smollett in 1766, were not unknown to Burney and served as models for his own efforts at recording his experiences on the road.[34]

---

[34]See Stephen Boswell, *Travels in Europe* (London, 1764) and Tobias Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy* (London, 1766).

Burney toured through France and Italy in 1770, and subsequently published in 1771 *The Present State of Music in France and Italy: or The Journal of a Tour through those Countries, undertaken to collect Materials for a General History of Music*. Later, in 1772, he toured through Germany, Austria and the Netherlands with the resultant publication in 1773 of *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Provinces*.

The journal of the tour through France and Italy was remarkable in its single-minded advocacy of Italian music and corresponding revulsion of French music. Of this aspect of Burney's critical bias, more will be said in Chapter Two. The German tour, however, presents a slightly more complicated situation. There, Burney seemed caught between his admiration of the Germanic composers such as Handel and Hasse and his distaste for the country as a whole. Burney seemed preoccupied by the economic and political conditions of the region; complaints about poverty and the state of travelling conditions abound. Mannheim is a typical case:

> The expence and magnificence of the court of this little city are prodigious; the palaces and offices extend over almost half the town; and one half of the inhabitants, who are in office, prey on the other, who seem to be in the ut-most indigence.[35]

---

[35] *Tours*, ii, p. 30.

Of Darmstadt, Burney remarked:

> The women, amoung the common people in the country, are miserably ugly, not, perhaps, so much in feature, as from dress, and a total neglect of complexion...
>
> I could wish to speak of these people with candour and good temper, in despight of the bile which every stranger, travelling among them, must feel at work within him; but, as I neither mean to abuse or flatter them, I must say, that the numberless beggars, clamorously importunate, thought often young, fat, robust, and fit for any labour; the embarrassments of perpetual change and loss of money; the extortion, sulleness, and indolence of postmasters and postilions, are intollerably vexatious.[36]

Despite his distaste for the country, Burney's opinion of German composers was largely favourable. C.P.E Bach, Haydn, Handel and Hasse were among those composers whom he most admired. In the case of Handel and Hasse, however, Burney's admiration was influenced by the fact that they were masters of the Italianate style. In the case of the more Germanic styles of Haydn and C.P.E. Bach, this admiration seems more the result of the perceived originality of their compositions.

Upon its publication, the *French and Italian Tour* was greeted with immediate success. Burney's daughter Fanny would later write that "... it was no sooner read, than letters the most flattering, from the deepest theorists of science, and the best judges of the practice of the art of music, reached the favoured author..."[37] Responses such as this were ensured

---

[36]Ibid., pp. 28-29.

[37]*Memoirs*, d'Arblay, i, p. 226.

by a variety of favourable reviews, such as one coerced by Burney from his close friend William Bewley for the *Monthly Review*.[38] By 1773, the first edition of the *Italian Tour* was sold out. Despite some negative comments by German critics, Burney's *German Tour* was received with equal acclaim. The *Tours* succeeded in reaching a wide and not necessarily musical audience. The content of the *Tours* was not merely limited to dry musical description, but included various observations on collections of art, architecture, and social conditions as well as many entertaining anecdotes and reports of meetings with such personages as Voltaire, Rousseau, and Metastasio. Burney would later recall that the deviation from his strictly musical intentions "procured me many more readers than mere students and lovers of music. My publication was honoured with the approbation of the blue-stocking families at Mrs. Vezey's, and Mrs. Montagu's and Sir Joshua Reynolds's, where I was constantly invited and regarded as a member."[38]

With admission to this echelon of polite literary society, it was obvious that Burney had truly been accepted as a man of letters. It was, however, from his idol, Samuel Johnson, that Burney was most desirous of recognition. He had little to fear however, as Johnson claimed to have read

---

[38]Lonsdale, p. 106. For the review, see *Monthly Review*, xlv (1771), pp. 161-70, 337-44.

[38]*Tours*, i, p. xxx.

the *German Tour* from cover to cover and later told Burney that he had used Burney's *Tours* as the model, in "size and form" for his own *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, published in 1775.[40]

Previous to Burney's *Tours*, Johnson was representative of the barrier of polite literary society through which musicians and writers on music could not penetrate. Johnson, and other men of letters like him, were largely ignorant of the arts and of music in particular. Johnson was even unable to finish reading Burney's *Italian Tour* stating "...I could not read about fiddles and fiddle strings."[41] Books on music were considered to be dull, technical fare, 'unintelligble Giberish of affected Science'. Roger Lonsdale quotes Lord Chesterfield's definition of "bad company": "such as fiddlers, pipers, and *id genus omne*; most unedifying and unbecoming company for a man of fashion!"[42] This condescending attitude towards musicians, like music and and musical literature, permeated London literary and fashionable society and was precisely the social barrier Burney had overcome. Of her father, Fanny Burney rightly pointed out that he had acquired

---

[40] *Memoirs*, d'Arblay, ii, pp. 78-79. See also Lonsdale, p. 130.

[41] Samuel Johnson, as quoted in *Boswell for the Defence*, ed. W.K. Wimsatt and F.A. Pottle (London, Oxford Press, 1960), p. 51.

[42] Lonsdale, p. 132. From *Lord Chesterfield's Letters to his Son*, ed. C. S. Carey, 1912, ii, pp. 106-7.

"the higher rank... of a man of letters, from the general admiration accorded to his Tours; of which the climax of the honour was the award of Dr. Johnson, that Dr. Burney was one of the most agreeable writers of travels of the age."[43]

Not content to bask in his newly won fame, in 1773 Burney began writing the first volume of his *History*, which was published in 1776. The second volume was published in 1782, with the third and fourth appearing in 1789. Burney's *History*, the first complete and comprehensive musical history in the English language, met even more success than his *Tours* and was to ensure his fame throughout his lifetime and secure him a lasting place in musical history. The sixteen-year span needed to complete the project was a direct result both of the sheer scope of the work and of the various other ventures which were to divert Burney's energies.

It should be noted that Sir John Hawkins had issued the entirety of his five-volume *General History of the Science and Practice of Music* in 1776, a mere four months after the first volume of Burney's appeared.[44] The competition and rivalry that ensued between these two histories, and men, are notorious. Burney launched a series of vicious attacks against "the knight" culminating in a biting satire in verse of Mr.

---

[43]*Memoirs*, d'Arblay, i, p. 255.

[44]Sir John Hawkins, *General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, 5 vols (London, 1776).

"Money-Bags Hawkins" entitled *The Trial of Midas.*[45] Burney's attacks, and the public attacks of others ruthlessly arranged by Burney, were disastrous to the sales of Hawkins' *History,* and indeed proved most damaging to the latter's reputation. Fortunately for Hawkins, he did not live long enough to hear the popular catch: "Sir John Hawkins, *Burn 'is History!* How d'ye like him? *Burn 'is History!* Burney's History pleases me."[46] Suffice it to say that, though Charles Burney could be a man with seemingly infinite social charms and graces, he was also possessed of a ruthlessness whenever he felt his position threatened by possible competition. The specific details of the conflicting musical criticisms and philosophies of the two men will be more fully dealt with in Chapter Four. To sum up, however, it is Burney's lack of sympathy with ancient music, his greater literary and organisational skills, and his greater practical knowledge of music which constitute the fundamental differences between his own and Hawkins' work.

One of the other projects which was to occupy Burney was his unsuccessful attempt to establish a public music school at London's Foundling Hospital modelled on the conservatories he had encountered in Italy. The proposal, which incorporated a generous salary for himself, was denied

---

[45]This poem, written in 1777, was never to be published though Burney circulated it to many of his more influential friends including Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale. See Lonsdale, p. 208.

[46]Scholes, *The Great Doctor Burney,* i, p. 304.

on the basis that it was not warranted by the Act of Parliament which had originally created the Hospital. The lack of such a music school in England, and the rejection of his plan, was a constant annoyance to Burney. When finding fault with young English performers Burney would often lament the denial of his plan which would have, in Burney's opinion, negated the problem. The rejection of his plan represented one of the few significant failures of Burney's life.

Burney was to be side-tracked from his *History* again in 1784 by his contribution of an account of a series of performances which were to be held commemorating the centenary of Handel's birth and the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death. The result, *An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster-Abbey and the Pantheon,* was delayed in its publication until 1785. The primary reason for the delay was the King's desire, upon hearing of the project, to see every page of the *Account* in manuscript form before approving it for publication.

King George III, to whom Burney had dedicated his work, was a well-known Handel devotee and often felt obliged to censure Burney's qualifications of Handel's genius. Nevertheless, Burney, an admirer of Handel himself, was not prepared to inflate Handel's genius at the expense of his belief in the superiority of later Italian and German composers. Though Burney was obviously frustrated at this royal interference, he was nonetheless all too aware of the

opportunity he now possessed to ingratiate himself with the King. Burney was also aware that, with the King's interest in the project, he might also expect a musical appointment at the Court. The call of Royal approbation must have proven too strong an enticement for Burney since, in the end, as Roger Lonsdale comments, "Burney absorbed the King's observations into his own narrative with hardly any alteration."[47]

Though Burney was never to receive the hoped-for Court appointment, he had earlier received the relatively trivial position of "Musician Ordinary to the King". This incident points out the pressures applied to our critic and his susceptibility to letting his opinions on music conform to the tastes of those whose social position Burney still felt he must pander. Though Burney was outspoken in his opinions, notably against modern French music in favour of Italian, there is, nonetheless, some doubt as to how much of his publicly aired criticisms were shaped by his constant desire to appeal to the society of the great. Burney was well aware of his unprecedented position of respect as a musician and man of letters. His standing in elite society was the product of immense labour and he was loath to jeopardize it through radical or socially unpopular criticisms.

Perhaps no influence on Burney's opinion and taste was as strong as that of the 'Thrale circle'. Meeting at

---

[47]Lonsdale, p. 305.

Streatham, home of the affluent 'Blue-Stocking' family of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Thrale, its members included Samuel Johnson, David Garrick, Joshua Reynolds, Arthur Murphy, and James Boswell among others. Burney, then one of the most fashionable music-masters in London, secured his admittance to the 'circle' in 1776, initially through his position as music teacher to the Thrale's eldest daughter. His regular inclusion in the gatherings at Streatham was ensured, however, by his wit, charm, and ability to converse on a wide variety of subjects.

Burney was now able to debate, discuss, and converse with the absolute elite of literary society and, not surprisingly, was enthralled with the company of his new circle of friends. It was particularly the long talks with Johnson that Burney enjoyed and which were most influential in shaping his opinions. Some indication of Johnson's influence on Burney can be gleaned from the following excerpt from his 1776 autobiography, written in rough verse:

> This year I acquaintance began with the Thrales,
> Where I met with great talents 'mongst females and
> males:
> But the best thing that happen'd from that time
> to this,
> Was the freedom it gave me to sound the abyss,
> At my ease and my leisure, of Johnson's great mind,
> Where new treasures unumber'd I constantly find.
>
> Huge Briareus's heads, if old bards have not
> blunder'd,

> Amounted in all to the sum of one hundred;
> And Johnson--so wide his intelligence spreads,
>
> Has the brains of--at least--the same number of heads.[48]

There is ample evidence that the feelings of respect were mutual, and Johnson, who would later write several dedications for Burney's books, is recorded as saying: "I love Burney; my heart goes out to meet him; I much question whether there is in the world such another man, for mind, intelligence, and manners, as Dr. Burney."[48]

In the mid-1780s, Burney was still being hampered in his efforts to finish his *History*, this time by crippling bouts of rheumatism in his hands. He was also depressed at the deaths, in 1784, of several close friends, among them William Bewley and Samuel Johnson, who had been of great assistance in the writing and successful launching of the first two volumes of his *History*. The Thrale circle had also come to an end with the death of Henry Thrale, and Burney and other surviving members joined the Essex Head Club which had been formed by Johnson in 1783.

With his appointment as organist at Chelsea College in 1783, Burney was, not for the first or last time in his life, to benefit from the patronage of a friend. The position

---

[48]*Memoirs*, d'Arblay, ii, pp. 100-101.

[48]As quoted in Percy Scholes, "Notes on a Collection of Burneyana", *Music Review*, iii (1942) p. 130.

was secured through nomination by Edmund Burke. Burney, who had previously been organist at Oxford Chapel, was eventually to move to Chelsea College were he remained until his death.

The year 1789 saw the publication of the final two volumes of his *History*. The same year saw the almost immediate beginning of another project, *The Memoirs of Metastasio.* This project, long contemplated by Burney, was to occupy him until its publication in 1796.[50]

The early 1790's were also notable for the two visits to England, between 1791 and 1795, of Joseph Haydn. Burney had long been an admirer of Haydn and upon his arrival published a poem of welcome, *Verses on the Arrival in England of the Great Musician Haydn*.[51] Haydn and Burney were to spend a significant amount of time together on his visits. The hero worship previously accorded Samuel Johnson was now bestowed on Haydn. An indication of Burney's idolisation can be seen in his treatment of Haydn in his *History*: "the admirable and matchless HAYDN! from whose productions I have received more pleasure late in my life, when tired of most other music, than I ever received in the most ignorant and rapturous part of my youth, when every thing was new, and the disposition to be

---

[50]Charles Burney, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Abate Metastasio*. (London: Printed for G.G. and J. Robinson, 1796).

[51]Charles Burney, *Verses on the Arrival in England of the Great Musician Haydn*. (London: T. Payne, 1791).

pleased undiminished by criticism or satiety."[52] Of his compositions Burney states that they "are in general so new to the player and hearer, that they are equally unable, at first, to keep pace with his inspiration."[53]

In 1801 Burney, then 75, undertook an enormous new task of writing and editing articles for *The Cyclopedia* which was being compiled and edited by Abraham Rees.[54] The articles, both new and excerpted from his *History*, would occupy him until 1805 though the complete *Cyclopedia* was not to be published until May 1814, one month after Burney's death. The articles, written in this late stage of Burney's life, are most notable for "his gloomy conviction of the ephemeral nature of music...[which] was often justified, for many of the musicians whom he commemorated in his articles have, in the phrase he often used, sailed down the 'stream of oblivion'."[55]

In 1805, the aging but ever industrious Burney began serious work on compiling his *Memoirs* which had sporadically occupied him since 1782. Upon Burney's death, the *Memoirs* were entrusted to his daughter, the novelist Fanny d'Arblay, whose fantastical editing and tampering with

---

[52]*History*, ii, p. 958.

[53]Ibid., p. 959.

[54]*The Cyclopedia; or, Universal Dictionary of the Arts, Sciences, and Literature*, ed. Abraham Rees (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1802-19), 39 vols.

[55]Lonsdale, p. 431.

Burney's own manuscript in an attempt to idealize her father's life, has been well documented.[56] The *Memoirs*, eventually published in Fanny's bastardized form in 1832, were to occupy Burney until his death at Chelsea College in 1814.

If nothing else, Burney's life was typified by his constant and unrelenting industry. In the high season Burney would spend half the night on his writing as well as visiting upwards of fifty or more pupils a week in a twelve-hour working day. Even having achieved his goal of ascending to "great" society, Burney was loath to relax lest he might loose his position. Though he had climbed the ladder of social standing to unprecedented heights for a musician, he never achieved the complete financial security that would allow him to give up his work. His careers as organist and private music master were to finance almost all his activities, and occupy him all his life.

As both a musician and music critic, Burney blazed new and important trails. Though given a glimpse of the social possibilities of a musician by his father, Burney nonetheless had a relatively conventional approach to a musical career. He was a choir boy, studied the organ, gradually learned the fundamentals of music composition, and obtained a Doctorate of Music at Oxford. Burney broke from the typical musician

---

[56]In particular see Kerry Grant's lively account in *Dr. Burney as Critic and Historian of Music*, pp. 2-6.

of the day both through his success at entering high society as a man of letters and in his desire to travel, unlike men such as John Hawkins, in order to gain first hand experience of his subject.

It was perhaps Burney's intense desire to be accepted by those whom he simply labelled "the Great" that most affected and constrained his musical convictions. Paradoxically, Burney had to restrain himself from ruffling the feathers of the often conservative and always fashionable "great" society, while maintaining his own convictions as a progressive modern musician. Nowhere is this conflict more evident than in the *Tours*. While Burney's desire to travel and to gather and study musical materials first hand was an admirable effort to break from the generally narrow outlook of the typical musician of the day, unfortunately the effect of this first-hand experience seems to have been merely to reinforce his preconceptions, shared by most of polite London opinion, of the quality of the music and musicians with which he came into contact. Before he ever left for his first musical tour of France and Italy, Burney was already well convinced of the superiority of Italian to French music. In the first paragraph of the original introduction to *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*, Burney immediately tips his hand, no doubt to reassure his cultivated audience of the correctness of his taste and ensure they would continue reading:

> Among the numerous accounts of Italy,...it is somewhat extraordinary, that none have hitherto confined their views and researches to the rise and progress, or the present state of music in that part of the world, where it has been cultivated with such success; and from whence the rest of Europe has been furnished, not only with the most eminent composers and performers, but even with all its ideas of whatever is elegant and refined in that art.[57]

Though it is prominent in the title, within the entire introduction there is no mention of the music, or the state of music, in France.

Though they have long ceased to be authoritative documentations of musicological fact, Burney's *History of Music*, and his *Tours* provide unique glimpses into the critical style, philosophy, and practice of eighteenth-century England. These works exemplify prevailing eighteenth-century musical tastes in England and remain important sources of information on music of this era.

In Burney's England, and London in particular, fashionable upper-class society was very much aware of the world of intellectual and artistic achievements, and encouraged it through patronage. Due to their patronage and influence, wherever the nobility led the general public was sure to follow. This situation, combined with an ever-increasing literacy rate, ensured a large market for both booksellers and authors alike. It was in this publishing fray

---

[57] *Tours*, i, p. xxv.

that the art of criticism, so influential for Burney's own critical style, began to develop.

As has been illustrated, Burney's critical influences were primarily those defined by social ambition. His fashionable taste, however, can be traced to some of the greatest social philosophers of the day, Diderot, Rousseau, Johnson, and Avison, among others. The influence of these men on Burney's critical philosophy, as well as the general state of literary criticism, as practiced by Burney's contemporaries Boswell and Johnson, will be discussed in the following chapter.

# Chapter II

## BURNEY IN AN AGE OF CRITICISM

In the mid-eighteenth century, industrial and social developments in Europe resulted in an ever-widening variety and wealth of musical life. The era saw the beginnings and growth of concert organizations such as the *Concerts Spirituel* in Paris, the *TonkÜnstler-Societät* of Vienna, the *Collegium Musicum* in Leipzig, and the rise of subscription concerts, led by Johann Peter Salomon (1745-1815), in London. Concerts took place in many diverse venues, from the great halls of universities, churches and palaces to inns, parks, and taverns. Burney's London, in particular, had an extremely varied musical life and there were many benefit concerts, informal performances in private homes and in the pleasure gardens of Vauxhall, Marylebone, and Ranelagh, and operas, both in English and Italian.

As typified by Burney himself, this age of the cosmopolitan musician was characterized by an increasing mobility of composers, musicians, and music throughout Europe. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, England, and London in particular, was visited by a extremely large number of foreign musicians and composers. Concert goers, including

Burney, were constantly exposed to the musical works of J.C. Bach, Leopold and Wolfgang Mozart, Muzio Clementi, A.M. Sacchini, Haydn, and many others.[1]

This active concert life was also fuelled by an expanding international base of middle-class music consumers who increasingly demanded published music for their own amateur uses. The rise of the amateur musician, especially in England, was also linked to the birth of many musical associations, such as *The Academy of Ancient Music* and the *Madrigal Society*, which would gather for weekly musical encounters. English musical life continued to experience a revitalization in reaction to the Puritan musical strictures and the subsequent flowering of musical activity after the Restoration.[2]

This flowering of musical activity paralleled the increasing rate of literacy amongst the general public which brought on an even greater demand for printed materials of all kinds. It was the function of the bookseller to supply this large new market with novels, poems, essays, pamphlets and a growing number of newspapers. The eighteenth-century bookseller had a much more pivotal role in literary society

---

[1]For a more complete list of composers visiting London in the last half of the eighteenth century see, Fred Petty, *Italian Opera in London, 1760-1800*. (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1972), p. 4.

[2]For more information on this subject, see Henry Raynor, *Music in England* (London: Clarke, Doble & Brendon Ltd., 1980).

than those of today. He was no mere retailer of books; it was his responsibility to make the contracts with authors, arrange for printing and distribution, and to organize much of the publicity.[3]

One popular way of ensuring a work's publication was by private subscription. This method was often employed by 'would-be' authors, including Burney. It consisted of advertising for subscribers to a proposed work and collecting from them half the price of the finished product. On completion, the published copy would then be handed over to the subscriber in return for the second half of the payment.

Despite the increased popularity of the written word, authors in general remained amateurs in the sense that they could not expect to live off the profits of their work. Burney's *History* took thirteen years to complete and was one of the most popular books of its kind, with 857 subscribers taking among them 1,047 copies; yet, as Mrs. Thrale would lament of Burney and his undertaking: "Poor dear Man! He is sadly pressed for Pelf too I fear, the Times go by so hard with him; his book will never pay its own expence I am confident..."[4] As Roger Lonsdale remarked, "his literary

---

[3]Dorothy Marshall, *Dr. Johnson's London.* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1968), p. 193.

[4]Hester Lynch Thrale, *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale* (London, 1776-1809), new edition, ed. Katherine Balderson 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), i, p. 395.

activities brought him little or no profit."[5] This was hardly surprising when one takes into account the considerable costs of travelling, and the necessity of buying the many rare books which were essential sources for his *History*.

It was in the midst of this abundance of musical and literary activity that formal music and literary criticism began to flourish as a natural outgrowth of the increasing availability of these arts to the public. It was, however, during the late seventeenth century, when accomplished writers such as John Dryden began to contribute to *Athenian Mercury* (1690-1697), that the periodical essay and the modern art of criticism were born.[6] Such pamphlets and periodicals, which would become extremely popular throughout Europe, were written to entertain and inform and were not merely limited to artistic criticism. Social and political criticism were also common, as witnessed by the politically charged "paper wars" waged by Richard Steele and Joseph Addison.

A giant step in the history of criticism was taken by Richard Steele with the publication of the first issue of *The Tatler* in 1709. This magazine, which also included many articles by Addison and others, became the first to achieve widespread middle-class popularity. In 1711 *The Spectator*

---

[5]Lonsdale, p. 292.

[6]D.R. Boomgaarden, *Musical Thought in Britain and Germany During the Early Eighteenth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), p. 13.

succeeded *The Tatler* and entered into even wider circulation, running six days a week rather than three.[7] These periodicals would be imitated across England and Europe and remained, throughout the eighteenth-century, major outlets for English criticism. Indeed Burney's musical criticism, though not of the periodical variety as it was primarily incorporated into his historical and travel journal observations, was nonetheless a result of the precedents set by such papers.[8]

By far the bulk of artistic criticism at this time consisted of literary criticism written by men of letters such as Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Alexander Pope, and Samuel Johnson in England, and by the Encyclopédistes François Voltaire, Denis Diderot, and Jean Jacques Rousseau in France. The writings of the German Johann Mattheson (1681-1764), in his periodical *Critica Musica* (1722-1725) and other essays, represented one of the few instances of a trained musician who was able to comment publicly on his own art.

Despite the abundance of critical writing, music in the early 1700s was still considered an inferior art form, at best a poor cousin to poetry. The prominence of literary criticism was an inherent fact at this time, given the public's increased demand for literature and the fact that the forum for most public criticism was also the written word.

---

[7]Boomgaarden, p. 14.

[8]For a discussion of Burney's contributions to periodical criticism see Chapter Five, page 171n of this thesis.

Thus it was not surprising that the most articulate men of letters dominated the field at this time. Until Burney, a skilled musician who was also a skilled writer was a rarity, Mattheson and Rousseau being two notable exceptions.

With literature and literary men thus dominating the art of criticism, it was from the practice of literary criticism that the first tenets of musical criticism were to be drawn.

## Neoclassicism and Literary Criticism

Throughout Europe the dominant ideology in literary criticism in the early- to mid-eighteenth century was neoclassicism.[8] The central concept of the neoclassical theory of literature was imitation of nature or mimesis. These terms were not interpreted to mean a literal copying of nature, as it is often interpreted today, but rather a representation of nature. The term "nature" is also often misinterpreted as referring only to outdoor landscape, plants, animals and the like. "Nature", in fact, refered to reality in general, including human nature.

---

[8]Neoclassicism as used here is distinct from the usual musical reference to twentieth century music that exhibits a revival of the structures and harmonies commonly employed the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See René Weelek, *A History of Modern Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), ii, p. 1.

Much like today, however, imitation of nature in neoclassical theory meant different things to different people. In painting it was often interpreted as realism. In other arts it was often employed in the sense of "general nature", art that would retain the general principles and order of nature. Some interpretations which followed this latter, general, view stretched the meaning to include the typical, things which characterize a species, usually man, as it occurs everywhere at all times. This demand for the "typical" or universal formed the basis for the doctrine of decorum and propriety, which frowned on the depiction of the ugly, the horrible or the vulgar.[10]

The demand for universality or typicality could also, naturally enough, pass into a demand for idealization of nature. This idealization could mean either nature as it realistically occurred, or as fantasized in an inner vision or abstraction of the artist or author. Indeed, "imitation of nature" was a term which allowed for a wide variety of artistic approaches stretching from literal naturalism to abstract idealization.

Neoclassical theory was also concerned with the effects of literature on its audience. The majority of literary critics felt that moral utility was the primary aim of literature, to which end pleasure and delight were

---

[10]Wellek, p. 15.

considered necessary means.[11] Literary critics envisioned men of their own kind--men of taste, civilized, schooled in the classics, and taught from childhood to distinguish good from bad--as the ideal audience of literature. Many critics felt that the writers of antiquity were inferior and barbaric, due to their comparative lack of gentlemanly taste. The critic Françoise Fénlon summed up this chronocentric position: "The heroes of Homer do not resemble gentlemen, and the gods of that poet are even much below his heroes, who are unworthy of the idea we have of a gentleman."[12] Thus the "moral utility" of literature was aimed not at a universal audience but at a select few, the upper-class cultivated gentlemen.

Samuel Johnson

The dominating presence in English literary criticism at this time was Samuel Johnson. Burney's friendship with, and admiration of, Johnson has already been touched upon here. The effect of Johnson's philosophy on Burney was tremendous, though, as we shall see, where music was concerned it was Burney who wielded the influence over Johnson. While Johnson would be, naturally enough, of little consequence in affecting Burney's musical opinions and tastes, he was nonetheless a

---

[11]Wellek, p. 21.

[12]Françoise Fénelon, *Lettre sur les occupations de l'Académie française*, ed. M.E. Despois (Paris, 1714), p. 103. As translated in Wellek, p. 23.

great influence on Burney's understanding and approach to the art of criticism.

As was typical of a literary critic of his day, Johnson heavily subscribed to many of the neoclassical doctrines, including those of "imitation" and "moral utility".

> It is justly considered as the greatest excellency of art to imitate nature... Greater care is still required in representing life, which is so often discoloured by passion or deformed by wickedness. If the world be promiscuously described, I cannot see of what use it can be to read the account or why it may not be as safe to turn the eye immediately upon mankind, as often upon a mirror which shows all that presents itself without discrimination.[13]

The function of literature, "to instruct by pleasing",[14] was for Johnson, as was his view of art in general, inherently tied to neoclassical belief in the moral utility of art.

Johnson also developed a clear idea of the role and responsibility of the critic. One of Johnson's first public definitions of a critic, in his *Dictionary*, underlines the total dominance of literary criticism at this time. Johnson defines a *critick* as "a man skilled in the art of judging literature; a man able to distinguish the faults and beauties

---

[13]Samuel Johnson, "The Moral Duty of Novelists", *The Rambler* No. 4 (March 31, 1750.) See also Scott Elledge, *Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1961), ii, p. 573.

[14]Samuel Johnson as quoted in Walter Bate, *The Achievement of Samuel Johnson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 206.

of writing."[15] However accurate this definition may or may not appear, it completely ignores the possibility of critics and criticism of forums other than literature. Nonetheless, Johnson had a solid idea of what criticism ought to be.

> It is the task of criticism to establish principles, to improve opinion into knowledge, and to distinguish those means of pleasing which depend upon known causes and rational deduction from the nameless and inexplicable elegancies which appeal wholly to the fancy... Criticism reduces those regions of literature under the dominion of science which have hitherto known only the anarchy of ignorance, the caprices of fancy, and the tyranny of prescription.[16]

Such a definition gives to criticism, in theory at least, the authority of an independent and recognized discipline, an authority usually reserved for science. It is precisely the struggle for such authority that has characterized artistic criticism to this day. The quest to establish "scientific" principles on which to base criticism was an ideal for most serious critics throughout the eighteenth-century.

Like Johnson, Burney advocated the "science" of the practice and dismissed unprincipled criticism. Burney specifically recognized the lack of a serious scientific approach to music criticism. He felt that it was "not

---

[15]Samuel Johnson as quoted in Jean Hagstrom, *Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 24.

[16]Samuel Johnson, "Sound and Sense", *Rambler* No. 92 (February 2, 1751).

unusual for disputants [critics], in all the arts, to reason without principles," but also that this "happens more frequently in musical debates than in any other."[17] The "principles" which he felt should be the hallmarks of serious criticism meant that a critic should possess "a clear and precise idea of the constituent parts of a good composition, and of the principal excellencies of perfect execution."[18] Burney underlines the science of his particular art with the following scientific analogy: "a composition, by a kind of chemical process, may be decompounded as well as any other production of art or nature."[18] These comments, written nearly thirty years after Johnson's, clearly show similarities--especially in the need to develop a principled scientific approach to criticism, be it literary or musical.

Judging from his reverence for Johnson and his familiarity with his *Dictionary*,[20] it is fair to assume that Burney adopted many of Johnson's terms and definitions. Indeed Burney's entire language, and that of many eminent men of letters at this time, was influenced by Johnson's mastery and codification of the English language. This debt is acknowledged by Burney near the end of his *History* where he

---

[17]*History*, ii, p. 955.

[18]Ibid., p. 8.

[18]Ibid.

[20]Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1756).

allows that "every English writer uses Johnson's language with impunity."[21]

The use of the descriptive term "barbaric" is a case in point. When Burney uses the term, and it appears quite frequently in his writings, he seems to be referring not to our common notion of "savageness" but rather to a mere breaching of the rules of music. This somewhat less dramatic definition has its origins in Johnson's definition of "barbarism" as "a form of speech contrary to the purity of the English language."[22] Thus when Burney in apparent confusion exclaims of ancient Greek music, "what a noisy and barbarous music!"[23] he is merely referring to a breaching of the rules of musical grammar as judged against the criteria of his own day, and simply ignoring the apparent contradiction which describes the Greeks as "Barbarous".

Other examples of the similarity of Burney's critical vocabulary to Johnson's are not difficult to find. Johnson's definition of "graceful", "Beautiful with dignity" and "Gracefully", "Elegantly; with pleasing dignity," seems to fit Burney's conception.[24] He defines grace, using a quotation

---

[21]*History*, ii, p. 955.

[22]Johnson, "Barbarism," *Dictionary*.

[23]*History*, i, p. 74.

[24]Samuel Johnson, "graceful", "Gracefully", *Dictionary*.

of Marmontel, as a "polish, a laquer, a varnish, a guilding to every human action; without which we may be surprised and entertained, but never perfectly pleased."[25] Similarly, "grace" is often linked in Burney's criticisms to the words "ease" and "simplicity" about which Burney and Johnson also share considerable agreement in their respective definitions.

Burney attempts to delineate a balance between the relative terms "easy" and "difficult" in a critique of Antonio Jommelli's music.

> Palates accustomed to plain food find ragouts and morceaux friands too highly seasoned; while to those who have long been pampered with dainties, simplicity is insipid. How then is a composer, or performer to please a mixed audience, but by avoiding too much complacence to the exclusive taste of either the learned, or the ignorant, the supercilious, or the simple.[26]

In the context of this delineation, one of Johnson's definitions of "easy" seems to have served as a model for Burney's implied use of the term: "Unconstraint; freedom from harshness, forced behaviour or conceits."[27]

---

[25]Charles Burney, "Marmontel", *The Cyclopaedia; or Universal Dictionary of Arts Sciences, and Literature*, ed. Abraham Rees, 45 Vols. (London, 1802-1820).

[26]Charles Burney, "Jommelli", *Cyclopaedia*. This explanation is also a microcosm of Burney's own efforts to balance the style and content of his *History* so as to appeal to as many readers as possible. To strike an appropriate balance between simplicity and difficulty was a lifelong criterion in Burney's evaluation of both music and literature.

[27]Johnson, "Ease", *Dictionary*.

More specific instances of Johnsonian thought are also to be found in Burney's philosophy, particularly with regard to various aspects of taste. For Johnson, the most serious error that he, and other authors, could make was to be tedious and unoriginal in their writings: "Tediousness is the most fatal of all faults."[28] This comment immediately reminds one of the similar comment made by Burney in reference to his own *History*: "I would rather be pronounced trivial than tiresome."[29] This abhorrence of tediousness would also reflect itself in a demand common to the two men for novelty and originality, or more generally for "genius", in their respective arts.

The demands for novelty, variety and originality have for Johnson, and more indirectly Burney, their roots in the neoclassical ethic of the moral utility of art: art, of any kind, can not morally instruct without maintaining the interest of the observer. In a critique of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Johnson makes the point that "the want of human interest is always felt: The reader finds no transaction in which he can by any effort of imagination place himself; he has, therefore, little natural curiosity or sympathy."[30] To solve

---

[28]Samuel Johnson, "Dryden", *Lives of the Poets* (London: E. Newberg, 1779), vol. i, p. 454. New edition, ed. George Birbeck Hill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1905).

[29]*History*, i, p. 5.

[30]Samuel Johnson, "Milton," *Lives of the Poets*, i, p. 181.

the problem of "the want of human interest", Johnson turns to novelty and originality. In praising various authors, Johnson never fails to point out their originality. Of the eminent poet James Thompson, Johnson writes "he is entitled to one praise of the highest kind: his mode of thinking and expressing his thoughts is original."[31] Likewise, of William Congreve Johnson writes that he "has merit of the highest kind; he is an original writer."[32]

Burney is similarly distressed by musical works which are unable to hold an audience's attention. Instead of relying on originality and novelty, however, Burney looks to genius as the solution. "All the science possible, without the inspiration of genius, is unable to command attention and interest in an audience, at all times, and in all places."[33] Unfortunately, Burney never specifically defines what he means by 'genius' in any of his writings, though he uses the term frequently. However, he does appears to use the term in two senses, that of "a man endowed with superior faculties" as defined by Johnson,[34] and in the more specific sense of "a natural talent, or disposition to one thing more than

---

[31]Johnson, "Thompson", *Lives*, iii, p. 298.

[32]Johnson, "Congreve", *Lives*, ii, p. 228.

[33]Charles Burney, "Composer of Music", *Cyclopaedia*.

[34]Samuel Johnson, "Genius", *Dictionary*.

another."[35] Burney was more leery of excessive novelty than Johnson, equating it, particularly within the realm of contrapuntal invention, with a "constant struggle and labour to be unnatural."[36] Sufficient originality, apparently bound by taste, was nevertheless as important to Burney as to Johnson. In a letter to William Crotch, Burney staunchly defends the genius and originality of Handel.

> Original writers of all kinds are first regarded as innovators. The first concerts of Anc't Music established in this country in 1711 or 12 was set up against Handel whose style had been so much more force & variety than what our nation had been accustomed to... [37]

While an endorsement of originality, this statement also exposes an aspect of Burney's break from neoclassical literary ideals in his predilection for new and contemporary works over those of the "ancients". At least in some sense, Burney's desire for originality implied the presence of a contemporary new work as opposed to an inherently inferior older work.

Consideration of 'ancient' works was important in the criticism of both Johnson and Burney and was, again, the direct result of neoclassical influence. The precise definition of 'ancient', however, is open to speculation. The term has referred to various epochs in different contexts.

---

[35]Charles Burney, "Genius", *Cyclopaedia*.

[36]Charles Burney, "Invention", *Cyclopaedia*.

[37]CB to William Crotch, Oct. 10th (or 18th) 1798. As reprinted in Charles Burney, *A General History of Music*, ed. Mercer, ii, p. 1034.

According to Herbert Schueller, the word "ancient" had at least two meanings in the eighteenth-century: "It meant either (1) ancient Greece or Rome..., or (2) ancient Greece and what are now called (though they were not then so called) the Middle Ages and the Renaissance."[38] Burney refers to Boethius as "the last ancient, and the first modern who established a dominion in the Scientific parts of the musical empire."[39] As Boethius is generally considered as being part of the Middle Ages, Burney implies the first of Schueller's usages of ancient; he is the summation of ancient thought and the basis of modern. However, upon arriving at the mid-sixteenth century, he seems to imply the second of Schueller's definitions, as if there had been a gradual shrugging off of ancient shackles:

> We are now arrived at an Era when the principal materials for musical composition are prepared; when a regular and extensive scale for Melody, a code of general laws for Harmony, with a commodious Notation and Time-table, seem to furnish the Musician with the whole mechanism of his art; and if the productions of this period do not fulfil our present ideas of excellence, we must attribute their deficiencies neither to want of knowledge nor genius in their authors, but to the Gothic trammels in which Music was still bound.[40]

---

[38]Herbert M. Schueller, "The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns", *Music and Letters*, IXI, 1960, p. 318.

[39]*History*, i, p. 707.

[40]Ibid., p. 703.

Burney thus seems to have used the term in both senses. Further, he saw all past eras as inherently inferior to his own, referring all previous errors, though especially those of contrived counterpoint, to a common "barbarity". Burney was generally in agreement with Rousseau, who even proclaimed baroque music a "rough music" whose "harmony is confused, filled with modulations and dissonances, its notes hard and unnatural, the intonation difficult, and the movement constrained."[41] Burney himself described baroque music as being "in the old style" and "full of fugues upon hackneyed subjects."[42]

Burney found precedent for much of what pleased him in contemporary music, including the simple and natural operatic accompaniments of the Neapolitan school, in the accomplishments of the ancients. The influence of classical Greek scholarship was a powerful force both in enlightened and neoclassical critical thought. Burney was, to some extent, able to deny the neoclassical ideals of art imitating nature while also advocating the natural simplicity of ancient music.

---

[41]Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Dictionary of Music*, translated from the French by William Waring (London: For J. Murray, 1770), art. "Baroque". See also Herbert Schueller, 'The Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns', p. 326.

[42]*The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (London, 1771), pp. 112-3.

> The nearer the people of any country are to a state of nature, the fonder they are of noisy music: like children, who prefer a rattle and a drum to a soft refined melody, or the artful combinations of learned harmony.
>
> It is not, therefore, difficult to conceive, that the music of the ancients, with all its simplicity, by its strict union with poetry, which rendered it more articulate and intelligible, could operate more powerfully in theatric, and other public exhibitions, than the artificial melody, and complicated harmony of modern times; for though poetry was assisted by ancient music, it is certainly injured by the modern.[43]

The neoclassical ideals of Johnson and others were not easily shrugged off, even under the progressive tenets of the Enlightenment. Indeed, even Greek civilization was often considered, "as earthy as the Enlightenment itself."[44] Though he firmly believed in the superiority of contemporary music, Burney did recognize nonetheless that "the best Music of the time, in all ages, has greatly delighted its hearers."[45]

Johnson's influence on Burney was strong and lasting. The similar definitions of criticism, the common distaste and fear of tediousness, and a common desire for originality are perhaps the most obvious examples of Johnson's influence on Burney. In Johnson's language and masterful writing style, Burney found the perfect role model of an academic critic who was still able to ingratiate himself to a wide audience, from

---

[43]*History*, i, p. 160.

[44]Herbert Schueller, "The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns", p. 319.

[45]*History*, i, p. 387.

the literate general public to royalty. Indeed, wherever mastery of the English language was concerned, Johnson's impact was universally felt in English criticism of the mid-to late-eighteenth century.

However, the reversal of roles which took place when musical matters were concerned, stands in notable contrast to Johnson's literary and philosophical influence on Burney. There it was Burney who provided the learned opinion and exerted an influence to rectify his hero's, largely self professed, ignorance of music.

Johnson's insensitivity to music, and to the arts in general, has often been documented. Burney's rival John Hawkins recounts of Johnson:

> To the delights of music he was equally [with painting] insensible: neither voice nor instrument, nor the harmony of concordant sounds, had power over his affections, or even to engage his attention. Of music in general, he has been heard to say, 'it excites in my mind no ideas, and hinders me from contemplating my own'.[46]

In response to Burney's contention that "the love of lengthened tones and modulated sounds, seems a passion planted in human nature throughout the globe," Johnson is reported to have glibly boasted that "all animated nature loves music - except myself!"[47]

---

[46]John Hawkins, *Life of Samuel Johnson* (London: By Chambers for Chamberlain, Colles, Burnet, Wogan, Exshaw, White, Bryne, Whitestone, Moore and Jones, 1787), p. 319.

[47]*Memoirs*, d'Arblay, i, p. 78.

Johnson, in these comments on music, seems to be reinforcing the idea cherished by the eighteenth-century literary establishment that music was a sensational and irrational art, hardly worthy of serious contemplation. Indeed there are numerous anecdotes throughout the eighteenth century regarding the insensibility of men of genius to the art of music. Isaac Newton was said to have declared that music was "ingenious nonsense", and Jonathan Swift seemed to be proud of knowing no more about music "than an ass".[48] It was against precisely this ignorance and intolerance of music within learned society that Burney both censured and attempted to remedy in his *History*.

Johnson's insensitivity to music, however, seems to have arisen more as the recognition of a personal foible rather than as a considered intellectual belief. In the constant company of Burney, Johnson appears to have undergone a remarkable conversion to the recognition of music's validity as an intellectual art. As early as 1774, the conversion was such that Burney could even ask Johnson to write a dedication to the Queen as a preface to his *History*.[49]

---

[48]As quoted in Morris Brownell, "Ears of an Untoward Make: Pope and Handel", *Musical Quarterly*. LXII, (October, 1976), pp. 554-570.

[49]Lonsdale, p. 169. The Queen in question was Charlotte, wife of King George III.

In an apparent challenge to previous literary beliefs concerning the relatively inconsequential nature of the musical art, Johnson writes:

> The science of musical sounds, though it may have been depricated, as appealing only to the ear, and affording nothing more than a momentary and fugitive delight, may be with justice considered as the art which unites corporal with intellectual pleasure, by a species of enjoyment which gratifies sense, without weakening reason; and which therefore, the Great may cultivate without debasement, and the Good enjoy without depravation.[50]

It would seem that Johnson, in the constant companionship and influence of Burney, had eventually come to appreciate the musical art.[51] In the preface to Burney's *History*, Johnson recognized the "science" of music and legitimized it in the manner of his own beloved literary art.

Though James Boswell would state that Johnson in his dedications was "by no means speaking his own sentiments,"[52] more recent scholars, including Katherine Balderston and Morris Brownell, have interpreted this dedication as Johnson's

---

[50]Samuel Johnson, "Dedication" to Burney's *History*, i, p. 9.

[51]For more information concerning Johnson's recognition and appreciation of music, see Morris Brownell, *Samuel Johnson's Attitude to the Arts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).

[52]James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* 1793 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1934-50), ii, p. 2.

own thoughts.[53] Adding to the credibility of this latter position is the fact that Johnson would later write still another dedication, then to the King, for Burney's *Account* of Handel's commemoration in Westminister Abbey. This dedication, which proved to be Johnson's last prose work, was another ringing endorsement of music and contained a complete reversal of his earlier flippant remarks regarding Burney's contention of the universality of music. Johnson stated that "the delight which music affords seems to be one of the first attainments of rational nature; wherever there is humanity, there is modulated sound."[54] In being a prime force in converting Johnson to the appreciation of music, Burney was firing some of the first shots in the liberation of music criticism from the neoclassical doctrines of the literary world.

Prior to Burney, however, the general state of music criticism was still dominated by men of letters who, much like Johnson, were often completely lacking in practical musical knowledge.

---

[53]See Katherine Balderston, "Dr. Johnson and Burney's History of Music", *Publications of the Modern Language Association* No. 49 (1934), p. 967. See also Brownell, p. 15.

[54]Johnson as quoted in Allen T. Hazen, *Samuel Johnson's Prefaces & Dedications* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), p. 29.

Neoclassical Music Criticism

Most of the early eighteenth-century music criticism had been carried out by literary figures who were merely speculating on an art about which they often had little, if any, practical knowledge. Under the influence of neoclassical literary theory, these men wrote many speculative books concentrating on the affective and mimetic powers of music. In particular, the works which Burney himself had read and debated included James Harris' *Three Treatises* (1744), Daniel Webb's *Observations on the Correspondence between Poetry and Music* (1769), and even John Brown's *Dissertation on the Rise, Union, and Power, The Progressions, Separations and Corruptions of Poetry and Music* (1763).[55] All of these works are characterized by a desire to compare music to other arts in an attempt to find what they had in common with each other or to discover the neoclassical traits of what was 'typical' or 'universal' in art in general.

Harris, for example, goes to great lengths to compare the arts of painting, poetry, and music, solely based on the neoclassical criteria of imitation. "They *agree*" Harris states "by being *all* Mimetic, or Imitative."[56] Harris concludes "that Musical Imitation is greatly below that of Painting, and at

---

[55]For Burney's familiarity with these works, see Grant, p. 17.

[56]James Harris, *Three Treatises Concerning Art: A Discourse on Music, Painting, and Poetry* (London, 1744). New ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1970), p. 58.

*best* it is but an imperfect thing."[57] Though Harris later goes on to relate music's "efficacy", in combination with poetry, to "*a noble Heightening of Affections*", his reliance on, and ties to, neoclassical literary theory remain obvious.[58]

Brown's highly speculative *Dissertation* was also steeped in neoclassical theory in his attempt to historically link the arts of poetry and music, and in his proponence of moral utility as music's ultimate function.

> Music in the extended sense of the word (that is including melody, dance, and song) would make an essential and principle part in the education of their children [early civilization]...no other method could be devised which would so strongly impress the youthful mind with the approved principles of life and action. Music therefore (in this extended sense) must gain a great and universal power over the minds and actions of such a people.[59]

It would be left to true musicians such as Charles Avison and Burney to liberate music from such speculative literary-based observations, and it was into this environment, that Burney, as a musician-critic, entered with his *Tours* and *History*. In developing his critical style and philosophy and in keeping with new ideals of the enlightenment, Burney was to reject all

---

[57]Ibid., p. 69.

[58]Ibid., p. 101.

[59]John Brown, *A Dissertation on the Rise, Union and Power...of Poetry and Music* (London: for L. Davies and C. Reymers, 1765), Section iv, pp. 12, 13. See also Peter le Huray and James Day, *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 84.

such speculative musical criticism in favour of a more scientific approach.

The influence of Samuel Johnson's literary legacy on Burney's criticism has already been outlined. There remains, however, an exploration of the musical personages who would much more directly shape Burney's philosophy of music criticism. Specifically, it is to Jean Jacques Rousseau and Charles Avison that we can turn to find the roots of Burney's own musical philosophy and critical practice.

## Rousseau and the French Encyclopédistes

Rousseau, along with Denis Diderot, Jean le Ronde d'Alembert, and others were collectively known as the 'Encyclopédistes' due to their contributions to Diderot's and d'Alembert's massive *Encyclopédie*.[60] This work was to prove immensely influential to social and philosophical thinking throughout Europe. Unlike previous dictionaries and encyclopedias that merely provided objective summation of facts, the *Encyclopédie* was notable in its attempt to guide and influence opinion. In the Encyclopédiste's all encompassing quest to dispell the myths of human existence in favour of reason and rationalized thought, the *Encyclopédie*

---

[60] *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers* ed. J. le R. d'Alembert and D. Diderot (Paris: by Diderot, 1751-72). 17 vols.

would become one of, if not the most, important document of the Enlightenment. The articles on music, primarily as contributed by Diderot, d'Alembert, and Rousseau, likewise were to serve as models of modern progressive thinking, especially in their advocacy of the expressive nature of music and in their approbation of Italianate vocal style as an ideal model suitable for all music.

Among the Encyclopédistes, and indeed among all major music, literary or social critics of the day, none, in terms of a direct influence on Burney's musical philosophy and opinions was more important than Rousseau (1712-1778). In particular, Rousseau's *Lettre sur la Musique Française* and his *Dictionnaire de Musique* were extremely influential in guiding Burney's proponence of Italian music, and shaped many of his views on such concepts as musical expression, taste, and genius. Burney on several occasions, acknowledged his debt to Rousseau:

> Rousseau will be, so to speak, the hero of this History and moreover, I will strongly say to the public that among the many thousands of books which have been written on this subject, his *Lettre sur la Musique Francaise* and his *Dictionnaire de Musique* are almost the only ones that one can read without disgust. One can acknowledge that he has done more good for music than all other writers together, in what concerns good taste and the refinement of his art.[61]

Burney had earlier referred to Rousseau as one of "the three principal heroes of my *Journal*," the other two being Diderot

---

[61]CB to Pierre Gui [1 May 1774]. As quoted in Grant, p. 68.

and Padre Martini.[62] Indeed, Burney was to pay tribute to his "hero" by preparing an English translation of Rousseau's operetta *Le Devin du village* (1752). The result, *The Cunning Man*, debuted at Drury Lane theatre on 21 November 1766, while Rousseau himself was in England.[63]

Where Rousseau most obviously influenced Burney was in his outspoken condemnation of French music which first appeared in his *Lettre sur la Musique Française*.[64] Burney described the *Lettre* as the "best piece of criticism on the art, perhaps, that has ever been written."[65] In the *Lettre* Rousseau completely condemned French music stating:

> ...I have shown that there is neither measure nor melody in French music, because the language is not capable of them; that French singing is a continual squalling, insupportable to an

---

[62]CB to Samuel Crisp [31 May 1771] (Osborn collection). As quoted in Grant, p. 69.

[63]Lonsdale, p. 71.

[64]Rousseau's *Lettre* appeared in 1753 amidst, and strongly contributing to, the famous *guerre des bouffons*. This 'war' was the continuation of a debate concerning the relative merits of French versus Italian music. The debate had its roots in a dispute which arose between François Raguenet's approbation of Italian music outlined in his pamphlet *Le parallele des Italiens et des Française en ce qui regarde la musique et les operas* (Paris, 1702) and Jean-Laurent Lecerf de la Vieville's proponence of their native French music in his *Comparison de la musique italienne et de le musique française* (1704). By the time of Burney's arrival in 1770, Paris was replete with persons of fashionable taste and learning, including the Encyclopédistes Diderot and d'Alembert, who agreed with Rousseau in his dislike of French music.

[65]Burney as quoted in Poole, p. xxiii.

> unprejudiced ear; that its harmony is crude and devoid of expression and suggests only the padding of a pupil; that French 'airs' are not airs; that French recitative is not recitative. From this I conclude that the French have no music and cannot have any; or that if they ever have, it will be so much the worse for them.[66]

Rousseau's extremely harsh criticism of his adopted homeland's native music is rendered all the more strange when one considers that in 1750, only three years prior to the *Lettre's* publication, Rousseau was advocating the superiority of French music over Italian.

> Italian music pleases me without touching me. French music pleases me because it touches me. The *fredons*, the *passages*, the *traits*, the *roulements* of the first make the vocal organ sound brilliant and charm the ears, but the seductive sounds of the second go straight to the heart. If music is only made to please, let us give the palm to Italy, but if it should also move, let us keep it for our own [French] music...[67]

Regardless of Rousseau's apparent hypocrisy, the influence of his *Lettre* on Burney's opinions was enormous. Throughout both the *Tours* and *History* there are innumerable references to the superiority of Italian over French music. Early in his journey through France, Burney notes:

---

[66]Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre sur la Musique Française* (Paris, 1753) as translated in Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1965), iv, p. 80.

[67]Rousseau to Friedrich Grimm (1750). As quoted in Georgia Cowart, *The Origins of Modern Musical Criticism: French and Italian Music* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), p. 106.

> ...The French begin to be ashamed of their own music every where but at the serious opera; and this revolution in their sentiments seems to have been brought about by M. Rousseau's excellent *Lettre sur la Musique Françoise*.[68]

Later, having arrived in Lyons on his return journey from Italy, Burney's criticism of the French vocal style seems to have degenerated into mere blind prejudice.

> In visiting the theatre, I was more disgusted than ever, at hearing French music, after the exquisite performances to which I had been accustomed in Italy. *Eugenie*, a pretty comedie, preceded *Silvain*, an opera by M. Gretry: there were many pretty passages in the music, but so ill sung, with so false an expression, such screaming, forcing, and trilling as quite made me sick.[69]

A day later, upon arriving in Paris, Burney was even "far more shocked by the Music and singing than ever."[70] Having attended a Concert Spirituel, Burney comments:

> M. Richer... who has a most charming tenor voice--but having only French music to sing, it was thrown away... M. Dauvergne is a very dull and heavy composer even in the oldest and worse French style--Besozzi played a Concerto charmingly--all the rest was the screaming of tortured infernals.

---

[68] *Tours*, i, p. 30.

[69] Ibid, p. 309. M. Grétry refers here to André Ernest Modest Grétry (1741-1813), an opera composer who attained some fame with these and other works such as *Le Huron, Le Tableau Parlent*, and *Lucile*. That Burney's criticism is limited only to the vocal performances is no doubt due to his earlier praise of Grétry as "the best and, at present, the most fashionable composer of comic operas." This praise is mitigated by the fact that Grétry had "lived eight years in Italy" and had studied there under one of Burney's "heroes" Padre Martini. See *Tours*, i, p. 31.

[70] Ibid, i, p. 310.

> The Sopranos are squalled by Cats in the shape of women... The Motets are detestable. The Prompter danced, not beat the time to them--There was a great deal of male company who seemed much pleased with these intolerable Masterpieces, as M. Rousseau calls them, to all ears but their own.[71]

The influence of Rousseau's *Lettre* on Burney's *Tours*, and indeed on fashionable taste in general, can be seen in a critique by Samuel Crisp of the *Tours* which appeared in the *Critical Review*.[72] Crisp, whom Burney felt was a "critic of the clearest acumen"[73] and with whom he enjoyed "a sympathy of taste,"[74] recognized that Burney's attitude to French music reflected the fashionable point of view in the "...severity with which he treats French national music...especially since Rousseau's letter on that subject."[75]

While one cannot ignore Rousseau's influence on Burney's less than enthusiastic response to French music, it is also important to remember that the English aristocracy were already under the influence of Italianate tastes, notably in the Baroque styles of architecture, interior decor, and painting which were popular at the time. The advent of the Grand Tour had already allowed the wealthy access to, and

---

[71]Ibid.

[72]*Critical Review*. (1771)XXXI, pp. 421-32; (1771) XXXII, pp. 1-15.

[73]*Memoirs*, d'Arblay, i, p. 51.

[74]Ibid., p. 53.

[75]Samuel Crisp, *Critical Review*. (1771), XXXI, pp. 421-32.

indulgence in, Italian taste. Italian painters, such as Tiepolo, were popular and it was fashionable to privately collect as many Italian art works as one could.[76] Reasons for this English affinity for Italian over French taste are numerous. Most obvious was the widespread anti-French sentiment that characterized British foreign policy for much of the century. Religious differences as well as trade and colonial disputes made the acceptance of anything 'French', much less their standards of taste, impossible to accept in England. As early as 1707, writers such as Joseph Addison reveal a considerable negative prejudice against the French.

> The french are certainly the most implacable, and most dangerous enemies of the British nation. Their form of government, their religion, their jealousy of British power, as well as their prosecutions of commerce, and pursuits of universal Monarchy, will fix them forever in their animosities and aversions towards us, and make them catch at all the opportunities of subverting our constitution, destroying our religion, ruining our trade, and sinking the figure which we make among the nations of Europe.[77]

---

[76]One of the largest and most eminent collections belonged to Sir Robert Walpole at his home in Houghton. See Marshall, *Doctor Johnson's London* op. cited. p. 210.

[77]Joseph Addison, *The Present State of the War and the Necessity of an Augmentation Considered. 1707.* As quoted in Boomgaarden, p. 28. Also quoted in *The Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison*. ed. A.C. Gutkelch. (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1941), ii, p. 241.

Burney's criticisms of French music in favour of Italian, like Rousseau's *Lettre*, seem to have been mere authoritative confirmations of what was already a fashionable trend with much of the European aristocracy. For Burney, repeating Rousseau's criticisms of French music served the dual purpose of exhibiting to his readers the academic credence and currency of his own opinions while also reconfirming the opinions that were already tacitly held by many of his aristocratic readership. With such reinforcement, one wonders how any of his readers could have dared to disagree.

Rousseau also served as a model for many of Burney's musical definitions and philosophies, much as Johnson did with literary terminology. Indeed many of Burney's musical definitions which he contributed to Rees' *Cyclopaedia* are directly quoted from Rousseau's *Dictionnaire*. In the following, Rousseau expounds on the the nature of opera with allusions to the expressive ability of music:

> A dramatic and lyric spectacle, where we use our endeavours to reunite all the charms of the fine arts, in the representation of a passionate action, to excite, by the assistance of agreeable sensations, the interest and illusion.
>
> The constitutive parts of an opera, are the poem, the music, and the decorations... and the whole ought to be reunited to move the heart.[78]

---

[78]Rousseau, "Opera", *Dictionnaire de Musique*. As translated in William Waring, *A Complete Dictionary of Music* (London: for J. Murray, 1779), New ed. (New York: AMS Press Inc., 1975). pp. 289-90.

This can be compared with Burney's nearly identical definition of opera in the *Cyclopaedia*.

> A dramatic and lyric representation, in which all the fine arts conspire to form a spectacle full of passion, and to excite, by the assistance of agreeable sensations, interest and illusion.
>
> The constituent parts of an opera are the poem, the music, and the decorations... and the whole ought to harmonize to move the heart...[78]

In this borrowing we can clearly see that Burney was, at least publicly, more than willing to follow and adopt Rousseau's concepts of both opera and of the emotionally expressive function of the art. In fact, Burney was to quote Rousseau's definitions from his *Dictionnaire* in over forty articles which appeared in Rees' *Cyclopaedia*.

Though such borrowings abound in the *Cyclopaedia*, in both the *Tours* and *History* Burney is much less concerned with such overt definitions. However, Rousseau's influence is nonetheless in evidence in these works, albeit more tacitly. Take, for example, an extract from Rousseau's definition of taste: "each man has his peculiar taste, by which he gives to things, which he calls beautiful and excellent, an order which belongs to himself alone."[80] This presages a similar statement made by Burney at the beginning of his "Essay on Music Criticism": "...every hearer has a right to give way to

---

[78]Charles Burney, "Opera", *Cyclopaedia*. As quoted in Grant, p. 32.

[80]Rousseau, "Taste", *Dictionnaire*. pp. 428-29.

his feelings, and be pleased or dissatisfied without knowledge [or] experience..."[81]

Though indeed Rousseau's *Dictionnaire* was an influential document in shaping musical thought in the second half of the eighteenth century it was of nearly singular importance to Burney's conception of the art.

Denis Diderot

Of the other French Encyclopédistes Denis Diderot assumes a place of importance, though somewhat less than Rousseau, in relation to Burney's approbation of Italian music. Diderot was, as has been mentioned, one of the "heroes" of Burney's *Tours*. He sided with Rousseau in his preference for Italian music. Indeed, of the hundreds of pamphlets written during the *guerre des bouffons*, Diderot's article *Au petit prophéte de Boehmischbroda et au grand prophéte* (Paris, 1753)has been called by Georgia Cowart, "one of the few to rise above wit and venom and display an objective critical attitude."[82] But it is primarily his role as the leading architect of the *Encylopédie* that seems to have made an impression on Burney. So great was this impression that upon his first meeting with Diderot, a man with whom he "so much wished to be in company", Burney felt as if they had been close friends for years.

---

[81]*History*, ii, p. 7.

[82]Cowart, p. 108.

> We mutually embraced each other as cordially as if we had been acquaintances of long standing--Indeed his writings made him *mine* a long time ago--from the time I received the 1st Vol. Encyclopedie in 1751--We soon grew very intimate... and we had a most frank and open conference.[83]

The meeting with Diderot was to be remembered by Burney throughout his life. Though there is little further reference to Diderot in either the *Tours* or *History* there can be little doubt of Burney's reverence for his work and contributions to the *Encyclopédie*.

D'Alembert

The same can be said for another musically influential Encyclopédiste, Jean le Ronde d'Alembert. In most of his writings Burney generally only mentions d'Alembert in the context of another 'name' in the list, following Rousseau and Diderot, of influential authors who have backed up his low opinion of French music. Where d'Alembert did receive individual recognition from Burney was for his theoretical work *Élémens de Musique* (1752), which was based on the priciples of Rameau. Burney praised this work as "a well digested and excellent epitome of Rameau's doctrines."[84] One of Burney's first literary projects was an attempt to

---

[83] *Tours*, i, p. 312.

[84] *History*, ii, p. 979.

translate d'Alembert's work for English publication, a project which seems never to have been brought to completion.[85]

Despite his having contributed a large number of musical articles to the *Encyclopédie* there is comparatively little reference within Burney's writings to d'Alembert, especially in relation to the other Encyclopédistes, Rousseau and Diderot. The reasons for this apparent anomaly are open to speculation. However, the fact that Burney never established a personal contact with him is a likely contributing factor.

Padre Giambattista Martini

The third of Burney's "heroes", Padre Martini, was one of the most famous figures in eighteenth-century music. Martini has been described by Percy Scholes as "the oracle of all Europe in all that concerned the theory and history of music."[86] Burney was especially desirous of meeting Martini on his tour as he too was engaged in writing a huge, five-volume musical history.[87] Burney, ever on the watch both for possible competition and chances to obtain more information for his own

---

[85]Roger Lonsdale discusses Burney's efforts to complete the project over the course of many years. See Lonsdale, pp. 44, 57, 76.

[86]*Tours*, i, p. 145n.

[87]Martini's *Storia della musica* was meant to encompass five volumes, but in fact only three were published before the author's death in 1784. The volumes were published in the years 1757, 1770, and 1781 respectively. Burney was, however, unable to obtain the first volume until arriving in Italy in 1770.

planned *History*, met with Martini in 1770. An immediate friendship ensued: "Upon so short an acquaintance I never liked any man more...it was impossible to be any more cordial."[88] The outcome of this acquaintance was to prove most valuable to Burney in that Martini generously gave him access to all the printed and manuscript sources of his library, which Burney spent many hours reading, transcribing and making notes.

While there is no evidence of specific instances of Martini's influence or work in Burney's *History*, it is evident, and not unexpected, that the contents of the two works overlap. After meeting with Martini and studying the first completed volume of his work, Burney wrote "I shall avail myself of P. Martini's learning and materials, as I would of his spectacles, I shall apply them to my subject, as it appears to me, without changing my situation..."[88]

This statement perhaps best reflects the nature of Martini's influence. Martini was influential to Burney in providing him with historical facts and information, rather than with any particular critical approach or musical philosophy, as was the case with Johnson and Rousseau. Nonetheless Martini's scholarship is, without doubt, incorporated throughout the *History*. Burney scholar Kerry

---

[88]*Tours*, i, p. 146.

[88]Ibid.

Grant has speculated that though no other previous work "seems to be a prototype of Burney's [*History*]", he nonetheless allows for the possibility that Burney's idea for a dissertation on music of the ancients, in the first volume, was taken from the first volume of Martini's *History*.[80]

While Burney lists Diderot and Padre Martini alongside Rousseau as "heroes" of his *History*, their overall influence on Burney's critical philosophy seems to have been less tangible than that of Rousseau, or even of Johnson. It appears that Burney was more intent on creating some sort of legitimacy for his *History* by linking it to the names of these eminent "heroes" than by directly incorporating or endorsing their thoughts to any significant degree. In any event, there can be little doubt that Martini and Diderot were greatly admired by Burney and that they were very influential in providing, respectively, both information and philosophical inspiration in aid of his writings.

The German Critics

Though it was from the French Encyclopédistes that Burney drew the bulk of his critical ideas, German music critics such as Johann Matheson (1681-1764), Friedrich Marpurg (1718-95), Johann Adam Hiller (1728-1804), and Johann Adolphus Scheibe (1708-76), provided him with examples of popular music

---

[80]Grant, p. 60.

criticism such as he was to practice in his own *Tours* and *History*. Of Matheson and Scheibe, Burney wrote:

> Matheson's best musical writings are his *Critica Musica*, 1722... Matheson, with all his pedantry and want of taste, was the first popular writer on the subject of Music in Germany; the rest were scientifically dry and didactic; but as taste improved both in Music and literature, better writers sprung up. Among the first of these was JOHN ADOLPHUS SCHEIBEN... who, in 1737, began a periodical work called *Der Critische Musikus*, or *The Critical Musician*, which he continued to the year 1741. This work... contains much musical criticism, as well as many characters and anedotes of the great musicians who had then distinguished themselves throughout Europe.[91]

Burney was also aware of the critical writings of Marpurg and Hiller writing:

> In 1754, M. Marpurg began the publication of his *Historical and Critical Essays towards the Advancement of Music*... These essays, with his Critical Letters on the Art of Music, from 1760 to 1762, called the attention of Germany to musical criticism; which Hiller's weekly essays on the same subject continued from 1764 to 1770.[92]

Burney's descriptions of the work and achievements of these German critics reads much like an assessment of his own. Indeed, it was Burney who "called the attention" of <u>England</u> to music criticism and, as with his discription of Scheibe's, his writings were replete with "many characters and anedotes of the great musicians who had then distinguished themselves

---

[91]*History*, ii, p. 948.

[92]Ibid, p. 949.

throughout Europe." It is likely that these German critics provided some inspiration to Burney, but the extent of their influence is open to question. Although Burney nowhere declares his debt to the Germans as he does to Rousseau and his other "heroes", it is apparent that they did provide a precedent and example for him..

Charles Avison

In terms of a role model for musical criticism, there remains a final figure whose beliefs and ideas Burney would adopt. The man in question was the noted concerto composer and author, Charles Avison. Avison represents the only English musician-critic to precede Burney in seriously tackling the subject of musical taste. Avison's most important literary achievement, his *Essay on Musical Expression*, published in 1753, was a milestone in English criticism.

Previous to Avison's *Essay*, music's chief purpose was traditionally held to be mimetic, as inspired by neoclassical literary theory. Avison, however, intended his *Essay* to be a critical examination of music "not drawn from the formal Schools of systematical professors, but from the School of Nature and Good Sense."[93] One of Avison's prime aims was to

---

[93]Charles Avison, *A Reply to the Author of Remarks on the Essay on Musical Expression* (London: for C. Davis, 1753), p. 4. Also see Lawrence Lipking, *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth Century England* (Princton: Princton University Press, 1970), p. 211.

assert "that it is the peculiar Quality of Music to raise the *Sociable and happy Passions*, and to *Subdue* the *contrary ones*."[84]

After concluding that expression was the prime function of music, Avison attempted to give a basis for judgment of this expression. Naturally enough Avison found that taste, rather than reasoning, was the only arbiter of expression.

> After all that has been said, or can be said, the Energy and Grace of *Musical Expression* is too delicate a Nature to be fixed by Words: it is a Matter of Taste, rather than of Reasoning, and is, therefore, much better understood by Example than precept.[85]

Avison declines adequately to define his conception of expression, except with this very general and subjective definition of taste. These comments are also notable for their resemblance to those later made by Burney who, like Avison, felt that music and musical expression "would be better taught by specimens of good composition and performance than by reasoning and speculation."[86] Burney also seems to take his cue from Avison in giving the listener authority over his own taste in his belief that "every hearer has a right to give way

---

[84]Charles Avison, *Essay on Musical Expression* 2nd ed. (London, 1753), reprint, (New York: Broude Brothers, 1967), p. 4.

[85]Ibid., p. 81.

[86]*History*, ii, p. 7.

to his feelings, and be pleased or dissatisfied without knowledge, or experience..."[97]

Though Burney was to disagree with many of Avison's opinions as outlined in the *Essay*, he nonetheless can be seen as following up the work of Avison in his proponence of the expressive power of music. Burney's first words in his "Essay on Musical Criticism" define music as "the art of pleasing by the succession and combination of agreeable sounds."[98] In fact, a three-stage progression leading farther and farther away from neoclassical mimetic ideas on music and to the proponence of the expressive power of music can be traced from James Harris' *Three Treatises*, following through Avison's *Essay* to Burney's *History*. Avison praises Harris for his limitation of the mimetic effects of music as a "judicious writer" whose "precision and Accuracy ...distinguishes his Writing."[99] Burney, in turn, recognizes Avison's work stating:

> Musical criticism has been so little cultivated in our country, that its first elements are hardly known. In justice to the late Mr. Avison, it must be owned, that he was the first, and almost the only writer, who attempted it.[100]

---

[97]Ibid.

[98]Ibid.

[99]Avison, *Essay*, p. 60. See also Lipking, p. 220.

[100]*History*, ii, p. 7.

Burney, however, goes on to state that Avison's judgement as a critic "was warped by many prejudices" primarily because "he exalted Rameau at the expense of Handel, and was a declared foe to modern German symphonies."[101] Later in his *History*, Burney calls Avison an "ingenious man, and an elegant writer upon his art" but again criticizes Avison for over-rating Benedetto Marcello's Psalms "either to depreciate Handel, or forward the subscription he opened for their publication."[102] Burney points out that Avison succeeded "in neither of these designs" and "depriciates" Avison's own compositions as lacking "force, correctness, and originality sufficient to be ranked very high among the masters of the first class."[103]

In typical fashion Burney seems unable, or unwilling, to give much praise to a rival writer, even a dead one, the majority of whose views coincided too closely with his own. As with his attacks on Hawkin's *History*, Burney was loath to acknowledge the accomplishments of another critic whose ideas would diminish the importance and impact of his own.

Though Burney disagreed with many of Avison's particular opinions, it is evident that the two men shared many similar critical views, both in their approbation of musical expression and in the methodology of their approach. The

---

[101]Ibid.

[102]Ibid, ii, p. 1013.

[103]Ibid.

formation of a musical judgement for both men has been aptly described as a process in which "one listens, tests his response to the music, and only later seeks to confirm by reason the judgement already formed by taste."[104]

As an English musician-critic who propounded an expressive function of music, Avison can be viewed as the nearest thing to a direct prototype to Burney himself, in the tradition of English music criticism.

With his *Tours* and *History,* Burney had firmly established himself as the foremost musical commentator in England. The roots of his critical philosophy, as has been outlined, lie both in the neoclassical literary influences of previous non-musician critics, notably Samuel Johnson, and in the more musically progressive ideas of Rousseau and Avison. The apparently irreconcilable differences between these two disparate influences would typify Burney's desire not to alienate, or dismiss, any popular school of thought so long as it could procure or ensure a greater readership and, thus, greater fame and recognition for himself.

While some of Burney's beliefs have been touched upon in relation to his influences, his proponence of Italian music and his belief in expression as the primary function of music for example, little has been said of his own practical approach to criticism. The following chapter will specifically concentrate on Burney's own musical criticism, his approach to

---

[104]Grant, p. 18.

the various genres of music (sacred, dramatic, and chamber) and his reliance on "taste" as the determining factor of a "prudent" critic.

# CHAPTER III

## BURNEY'S CRITICAL PRACTICES

Although Burney's *Essay on Musical Criticism* appeared innocuously as a preface to the third volume of his *General History*, it was in many ways the heart of the work, and represents the most direct insight into Burney's critical thinking.

In relying so heavily on 'taste' as the ultimate determining factor in musical criticism, Burney nonetheless recognized that some people's taste was superior or more developed than that of others. With this in mind, Burney felt it was his duty as a critic and a man of, evidently, superior taste, "to instruct ignorant lovers of Music how to listen, or to judge for themselves."[1]

Since Burney relied so heavily on such an apparently subjective evaluative criteria as 'taste', the *Essay* was intended to establish confidence within his lay readers in the impartiality of his judgement. Thus the *Essay* was included "to explain and apologize for the critical remarks which have been made in the course of this History... and prevent their

---

[1]*History*, ii, pp. 7-8.

being construed into pedantry and arrogance."[2] Once again Burney attempted to please all his readers by, in a sense, *apologizing* to them for his own taste. However, at one and the same time, Burney had no qualms about dictating the precepts by which his taste should be considered superior. In this manner Burney distinguishes between an unskilled listener and a "prudent" critic who requires "not only extensive knowledge, and long experience, but a liberal, enlarged and candid mind..."[3] The unskilled listener, however, had the "right to give way to his feelings" and to judge or be "pleased or dissatisfied" merely on the basis of their own instincts and feelings.[4] In short this meant judging only on the criteria of their own taste. The professional critic, on the other hand, in addition to relying on taste, was also expected to have long practical musical experience and knowledge. In short, the professional critic also judges from taste, but a taste refined and developed through reason, knowledge and experience. In this way Burney ultimately gives himself authority over his readers, as it was unlikely that any of them could match his impressive practical experience and knowledge of music. In his *Essay*, Burney has cleverly established the authority of his own criticism, based on his

---

[2]*History*, ii, p. 7.

[3]Ibid., p. 8.

[4]Ibid., p. 7.

superior qualifications, and at the same time consciously avoided alienating his audience by giving them the authority over their own opinions. As Burney scholar Kerry Grant has remarked, Burney "establishes a rational foundation for the confidence that the readers of similar taste had in his judgement."[5] So too, however, had Burney ensured, or tried to ensure, the favour of all, whether men of letters, lay people or nobility. As ever, Burney's motivation for this intricate justification seems merely to have been to ensure the success of his *History* and, consequently, the success of his own social aspirations amongst "the Great" of society.

Besides distinguishing between the "prudent" or professional critic and the "ignorant lover of music", Burney also determines several types of musical and artistic enjoyment. First there is "Music that leaves us on the ground, and does not transport us into regions of imagination beyond the reach of cold criticism..."[6] This was music which Burney allowed "may be correct" but which failed because it was devoid of all genius and passion. Of course, the opposite of this definition was also apparent to Burney; that is to say that good music, inspired by genius and passion, should or could "transport" the listener to a state of rapture in which "cold criticism" was impossible. In short, if this ecstatic state of transport has been achieved, a listener has no need

---

[5]Grant, p. 18.

[6]*History*, ii, p. 7.

to question its value: it would be considered successful *de facto*. Burney also, however, distinguishes a further type of enjoyment, "tranquil pleasure", which falls just short of this rapturous state. Burney holds that in this state of pleasure "intellect and sensation are equally concerned."[7] Falling short of rapture, music of this nature enters the domain of "cold criticism," whereby it can be judged according to reason and taste. It was the analysis of this "tranquil", less rapturous pleasure which was to be the "subject" of Burney's *Essay*.

As previously suggested, Burney relies on "taste" as the ultimate determining factor in musical judgment. The subjectivity of this position was, however, tempered by certain principles which Burney felt should be applied when judging music. One such principle is that "no one musical production can comprise the beauties of every species of composition."[8] This is an important precept in Burney's criticism and results in the case that, as Kerry Grant has remarked, "one must seek in his [Burney's] discussions the merits particular to each style of music--church, chamber, or theatre--under discussion."[9] Burney felt that a critic

---

[7]*History*, ii, p. 7.

[8]Ibid., p. 8. While this "principle" is perhaps an obvious observation to most trained musicians, it must be regarded within the context that Burney had intended, to instruct the "ignorent" lovers of music.

[9]Grant, p. 19.

"should have none of the contractions and narrow partialities of such as can see but a small angle of the art."[10] This was by way of saying that the prudent critic must be open to, and experienced enough, to recognize the relative merits of all branches, or "species", of musical composition. In other words, a critic should not, for example, be inherently predisposed or biased to vocal over instrumental music or to sacred over dramatic music.

While such impartiality is an admirable trait for a critic to strive towards, it must also be recognized as an ideal that no critic, least of all Burney himself--witness his prejudicial views on French music--can ever truly attain. It would seem that a critic's subjective predisposition, or "narrow partiality," is an inevitable and inherent intrusion on any judgement of music, whether professional or not. In more recent times this point was illustrated by the noted critic Michael D. Calvocoressi who divided influences on musical judgement into three categories; the individual in-escapable predisposition of the critic, the available indirect data on the piece to be judged (its history, the composer's history, programmatic information, and other indirect sources of information), and direct data which consists of information gleaned from the actual music. Calvocoressi held that a critic should "write out" his biases in order to become as

---

[10]*History*, ii, p. 8.

much aware of them as possible so that their effect on his judgement might be limited. He too recognized that a complete elimination of such personal bias is humanly impossible.[11]

Burney attempts to give his taste-dominated and, apparently, subjective, approach to criticism the guise of a rational and principled system. He proposes "principles" on which to base a judgement. These principles consisted merely of "having a clear and precise idea of the constituent parts of a good composition, and of the principal excellencies of perfect execution."[12] This seems to be an attempt by Burney to do at least two things. First, it can be seen as an attempt to provide his criticism with an objective foundation in order to convince his audience that his own judgements are based on reason, and not on "narrow partialities". Secondly, Burney's establishment of principles, however vague or weak, can be seen as an attempt to raise the heretofore slightly regarded art of music, and music criticism, into the more distinguished realm of a science, much in the same manner as was previously achieved for literary criticism by Samuel Johnson. In any case, whatever the motivation, it is one of the greatest paradoxes of Burney's criticism that taste, in the face of such principles, still remains the ultimate arbiter over what constitutes "good composition" or "perfect execution". While

---

[11]See Michael.D. Calvocoressi, *The Principles and Methods of Music Criticism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931).

[12]*History*, ii, p. 8.

perhaps not intended as such, Burney's manipulation of the minds of his readers in this manner merely serves once again to illustrate his obsession with pleasing, or at least not alienating, as many people as possible. The attempt to reconcile extremes, subjective taste and objective science in this case, is a hallmark of Burney's criticism.

In the *Essay,* Burney gives his definition of a "complete musical composition".[13] It should be noted that in this context Burney uses the term "complete" to refer to a work lacking in none of the "constituent parts of a good composition" nor in the "principal excellencies of perfect execution". Burney, in using the word "some", does not completely commit himself to this list of criteria but the following statement does, nonetheless, serve as a concise glimpse into both his taste, and the general taste of his day.

> If a complete musical composition of different movements were analysied [sic], it would perhaps be found to consist of some of the following ingredients: melody, harmony, modulation, invention, grandeur, fire, pathos, taste, grace, and expression; while the executive part would require neatness, accent, energy, spirit and feeling...[14]

Burney goes on to instruct his readers that it is rare to find all these qualities united in one composer or performer but that the "piece or performer that comprises the greatest

---

[13]*History,* ii, p. 8.

[14]Ibid.

number of these excellencies... is entitled to pre-eminence" and furthermore that a performer or piece which exhibits any of these qualities "cannot be pronounced totally devoid of merit."[15] Once again Burney tries to combine the subjective discernment of such elements as "pathos", "taste", "grace" or "feeling" with the apparently objective ability to judge the "pre-eminence" of a work merely through an objective counting-up of the number of these "excellencies".

Burney was also aware of, and lamented, prejudices which have continually plagued music criticism to this day. He pointed out the fallibility of the opinion of professors of even "the greatest integrity" in their inability to be equally conversant with all "species of musical merit". He laments those who would blindly share the opinions of men who, though experts in only one area of art, pronounce judgements with equal confidence in areas less familiar to them. Burney points out that "to judge minutely of singing... requires study and experience in that particular art."[16] He is suspicious, for example, of instrumentalists whom he felt were not "sufficiently feeling or respecting" of good singing, accusing them of merely being impressed by rapid passages rather than the "finest *messa di voce*, or tender expression of slow notes, which the greatest art, and most exquisite sensibility can

---

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid.

produce."[17] Burney likewise decries the existence of those petty critics and academics, who "approve of nothing which they themselves have not produced or performed."[18] Burney's consciousness of the biases inherent in much musical criticism of his day, which is still a potent judgmental motivator in our day, is admirable, yet in it we can see a slightly more practical motivation. By castigating the common musical prejudices of others, Burney deliberately attempts to convince his readership of his own unprejudicial nature. As we have seen, Burney held several notable prejudgements which constantly entered into his criticism, the relative worthlessness of ancient music and French music to name but two. Whether Burney was conscious of his own bias or not is open to speculation, but he was obviously acutely aware of the desirableness of ensuring that the public perceived himself as transcending all such petty and tasteless discrimination.

Taste

The single most important determining factor in Burney's criticism was the concept of "taste". For most of his life Burney attempted to codify, explain, and justify taste. Previously this pursuit was primarily limited to literary

---

[17]Ibid., p. 9.

[18]Ibid.

criticism. Johnson described taste as obtaining "pleasure from intellectual relish or discernment" and used the following passage from Addison in support: "As he had no *Taste* of true glory, we see him equipped like an Hercules, with a club and a lion skin."[19]

Other definitions included that of Père Bouhours who, much like Burney, tried to reconcile taste in literature with rationalism. "Taste is the first notion, or to put it another way a kind of instinct of the right reason, which works with more rapidity and more certainty than any trains of reasoning."[20] Taste was thus associated with instinct and acted as an accelerated form of reasoning--a short cut to aesthetic conclusions.

The term "sensibility" also occurs in Burney's criticism and as such takes on a similar definition to that of taste, though perhaps carrying more moral and general connotations than taste. Johnson gives two such applicable definitions of sensibility: "Having moral perception; having the quality of being affected by moral good or ill", and "having quick intellectual feeling, being easily or strongly affected."[21]

---

[19]Johnson, "Taste", *Dictionary*. ii, p. 814.

[20]Père Bouhours, *La Manière de bien penser* (Paris: Charles-Nicolas Poiriou, 1743), i, p. 24. As translated in Wellek, p. 24.

[21]Johnson, "Sensibility", *Dictionary*.

For his part Burney, in his *Tours*, explained taste in the following manner: "*Taste*, the adding, diminishing, or changing a melody, or passage, with judgement and propriety, and in such a manner as to *improve* it..."[22] This definition, of course, refers only to performers and the common practice of embellishment of a melody in order to "improve it" by presenting it in a fresh manner. The passage serves to point out that which we commonly associate with performance interpretation Burney sees merely as a question of taste.

Later, in his articles for Rees' *Cyclopaedia* (1791-1805), Burney would modify this definition to include the concepts of feeling and expression. There is also much less emphasis placed on embellishing, or changing, the given music in his later work:

> TASTE, in *Music*, is often confounded with *graces*, or changes of passages; but a movement composed in good taste, is often injured by what are called graces. We rather suppose taste to depend on feeling and expression...[23]

Even though Burney extends his definition to include feeling and expression he has, in either definition, neglected to explain how one is to distinguish good taste from bad. It

---

[22] *Tours*, i, p. xxxiv.

[23] "TASTE in Music," *Cyclopaedia*. It might also be noted that Burney's changing attitude towards embellishment may have reflected the gradual shift to the fidelity to the complete idea of the individual composer. This trend towards accurately reproducing the intentions of composers flowered in the purgative notions of romantic composition and continues to this day.

is when quoting Rousseau's definition of taste that Burney comes closest to addressing the heart of the matter.

> Of all the natural gifts, taste is that which is most felt and least explained: It would not be what it is, if it could be defined; for it judges of objects, in which the judgement is not concerned, and serves, as it were, as spectacles to reason.
> ...Each man has his peculiar taste, by the which [sic] he gives to things, which he calls beautiful and excellent, and order which belongs to himself alone.[24]

The inexplicable nature of taste captured in this definition was, and is, like Achilles heel, in the end blocking every attempt to provide an objective explanation for critical judgement.

As pointed out by Lawrence Lipking, Burney uses "taste" to support his judgements in two ways: as "the *je ne sais quoi*" criterion, where he relies on his intuition without seeking to provide reasons, and as a relationship that exists between the mind and the works which it judges.[25] This latter use of taste was defined in Rees' *Cyclopaedia* by Dugald Stewart: "In the constitution of man, there is an inexplicable adaptation of the mind to the objects with which his faculties are conversant, in consequence of which, these objects are

---

[24]Rousseau, "Taste", *Dictionaire*, as translated by Waring. pp. 428-429. Also see Burney, "Taste", *Cyclopaedia*.

[25]Lipking, p. 292-293.

fitted to provide agreeable or disagreeable emotions."[26] Though still related to the *je ne sais quoi* principle in its "inexplicable adaptation" to the human mind this definition attempts to provide a more objectifiable situation that may exist when judging an object, relating to a type of stimulus-response exchange whereby taste is based on the knowledge and awareness of real objects. This position does have modern aesthetic and philosophic backing, such as that found in Roman Ingarden's famous aesthetic "concretization" of a work of art where all aesthetic merit is, whether actual or indeterminantly potential, inherent in a real object.[27]

Despite the underlying subjective nature of taste, Burney nonetheless felt that taste could be improved and learned. Indeed, the *History* and *Tours* in and of themselves could be considered as instructional manuals to good taste. Taste could be developed through both continued experience and exposure to instances of good taste as recommended by those, such as Burney, who had already refined their taste. For Burney, merely residing in Italy would apparently improve one's taste. This was, of course, the prime reason for the Grand Tour in the first place. In any event, Burney attempted

---

[26]Dugald Stewart, *Elements of Philosophy of the Human Mind*, ii, p.v. As quoted in Rees *Cyclopaedia*, in the main article "Taste". Also see Lipking, p. 293.

[27]Roman Ingarden, "Artistic and Aesthetic Values", in *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, Joseph Margolis, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), p. 117-133.

to offer a standard of judgement that referred to something other than himself alone while, at the same time, establishing taste as a type of grand unification theory for music. "It is taste which enables a vocal composer to seize and express the ideas of a poet; it is taste which guides the performer to the true expression of the composer's ideas; it is taste which furnishes both with whatever can embellish and enrich the subject; and it is taste which enables the hearer to feel all these perfections." [28]

General Criteria for the Evaluation of Music

In the latter part of his *Essay*, Burney gives his readers a more precise set of criteria for what constituted excellence in the performance of music, whether vocal or instrumental. Burney also attempts to educate his readers as to what they should look for in good Dramatic, Chamber, and Church music.

Burney held singing to be a superior form of performance to instrumental. Indeed this fact, due in large part to the general English fascination with singing and

---

[28] "Taste in Music," *Cyclopaedia*. See also Lipking, p. 294. Note also Burney's apparent belief in interpretation based on following a composer's intentions as a "true expression". The value and determination of intentionality, usually debated today only in the context of historical performance practice, is here aligned with good taste.

Italianate vocal taste already discussed,[29] can account for his copious comments on the art found throughout his writings. Burney's supposedly learned reasons for the superiority of vocal performance are, however, extremely general: "It is but by the tone of the voice and articulation of words that a vocal performer is superior to an instrumental."[30] Once again it appears that Burney is simply attempting to lend some academic credence and a rational for the wide appreciation which vocal performances already enjoyed. Despite his lack of specificity on this issue Burney, nonetheless did have a precise and considered idea of what constituted good and bad singing.

> Good singing requires a clear, sweet, even, and flexible voice, equally free from nasal and guttural effects... If in swelling a note the voice trembles or varies its pitch, or the intonations are false, ignorance and science are equally offended; and if a perfect shake, good taste in embellishment, and a touching expression be wanting, the singer's reputation will make no great progress among true judges.[31]

A typical vocal criticism by Burney is recorded in his comments on a female singer named Bichelli: "She has a very sweet voice with infinite taste; has good shake, great flexibility, and is more free from affection than any female

---

[29]It is also apparent that, as singing is an inherently natural human ability, Burney was merely confirming its superiority in accordance with the naturalist ideals of the Enlightenment.

[30]*History*, ii, p. 9.

[31]Ibid.

Italian singer I ever saw...".[32] A more acrid vocal criticism is typified in the following remarks concerning the performance in a Franciscan Conservatorio in Naples.

> ...Worse singing I never heard before, in all Italy; all was unfinished and scholar-like; the closes stiff, studied and ill executed; nothing like a shake could be mustered out of the whole band of singers. The soprano forced the high notes in a false direction, till they penetrated the brain of every hearer; and the base singer was as rough as a mastiff, whose barking he seemed to imitate."[33]

If nothing else, Burney apparently applied his criteria for vocal excellence evenly to all performers, without regard to their professional, amateur, or student standing.

In his vocal criticisms, Burney paid particular attention to a vocalist's "shake", or trill. As evidenced by the preceding critiques, a good "shake" was held by Burney to be a mandatory part of any good vocal performance. An even and natural shake was a quality to be striven for, much as an even, natural vibrato is considered an ideal for singers today. In his conversations with Giambattista Mancini (1716-1800), one of the most famous singing teachers of the day, Burney illuminates the practice and the importance of naturalness in vocal ornamenting:

---

[32] *Tours*, i, p. 224.

[33] Ibid., p. 248.

> Signor Mancini thinks it practicable, with time and patience, not only to give a shake where nature has denied it, but even to give voice; that is to make a bad one tolerable, and an indifferent one good, as well as to extend the compass: always observing the natural tendency of the organ.[34]

These comments allude to the idea that a trill, if not readily forthcoming, was nonetheless obtainable if enough natural ability was present.

From his initial experience as a choirboy Burney had gained a practical knowlege of the art of singing. He was also familiar, though to what extent is unclear, with the treatises on singing by Giambattista Mancini and Pierto Tosi. In his *History*, Burney only refers to the works of these authors once, stating: "On the Art of Singing, del Canto figurato, Tosi published a tract at Bologna 1723; and Mancini another at Vienna 1774, which are excellent."[35]

With regard to performance on an instrument, Burney reiterated his credo of "practical experience as the prime arbiter of value", and so asks "who can judge accurately but those who know its [an instrument's] genius and powers, defects and difficulties?"[36] Later Burney states "whether the music is good or bad, the passages hard or easy, too much or too little embellished by the player, science and experience

---

[34]*Tours*, ii, p. 115.

[35]*History*, ii, p. 938.

[36]Ibid., p. 9.

only can determine."[37] There Burney again tries to trump the uneducated taste of the average listener with educated taste, such as his own, that is influenced by objective "science".

Burney is acutely aware that "what is natural and easy on one instrument, is not only difficult but impracticable on an other."[38] Within the sphere of instrumental music Burney contended that instruments "of which tone and intonation depend on the player" such as the "violin, flute, hautbois, &c" were more difficult to play than "harps and keyed-instruments, where the player is neither answerable for the goodness of the tone nor truth of intonation."[38] He does, however, temper this opinion by allowing that harpsichords have their own peculiar difficulties, such as the need for independence of hands. It is interesting to note that Burney also felt string quartets to be the superior form of composition, the "touchstone of an able composer."[40]

In the preceding comments we can see in Burney a concentration on technical mastery in instrumentalists. Artistry plays a less dominating role in the judgement of instrumental excellence, perhaps because it is a more

---

[37]Ibid., p. 10.

[38]Ibid., p. 9.

[39]Ibid., p. 10.

[40]Here Burney is quoting and endorsing the opinion of Quantz, although no citation is given. *History*, ii, p. 10.

ephemerally subjective factor and thus, for Burney, equally open to uneducated judgement. Though not as numerous as his vocal criticisms, instrumental criticism nonetheless abounds in his writings. A typical example, emphasizing the technical aspect of the performance, can be seen in the following comments on a concert given by the Bologna Philharmonic Society in the church of S. Giovanni in Monte.

> The morning service was finished by a symphony, with solo parts, by Signor Gioanni Piantanida, principle violin of Bologna, who really astonished me. This performer is upwards of sixty years of age, and yet has all the fire of youth, with a good tone, and modern taste; and, upon the whole, seemed to me, though his bow-hand has a clumsy and aukward look, more powerful upon his instrument than any one I had, as yet, heard in Italy.[41]

Later in Florence, however, Burney seems to encounter an even greater violinistic talent in the person of Signor Nardini.

> Signor Nardini played both a solo and a concerto, of his own composition, in such a manner as to leave nothing to wish: his tone was even and sweet; not very loud but clear and certain; he has a great deal of expression in his slow movements... As to execution, he will satisfy and please more than surprize; in short, he seems the completest player on the violin in all Italy; and, according to my feelings and judgment, his stile is delicate, judicious, and highly finished.[42]

---

[41] *Tours*, i, p. 163.

[42] Ibid., p. 185.

Burney's concept of musical style is most obviously presented in a chapter from his *History* called "The Progress of the Violin in Italy from the Sixteenth Century to the Present Time." In this discourse Burney uses the technical demands of compositions as evidence of the virtuosity of the composer-performers, such as Torelli, Corelli or Legrenzi. Of Giovanni Legrenzi's sonatas of 1677 Burney merely remarks that "there is considerable merit in the texture and contrivance of parts, yet, for want of knowledge of the bow, or the particular energies and expressions of the violin, these compositions have been long since justly superseded and effaced, by superior productions of the same kind."[43]

The inclusion of this last statement behoves a discussion of Burney's lifelong belief in the ultimate superiority of modern music. Throughout his *History* Burney fights a running battle against lovers of the "noisy and barbarous" music of the ancients. Burney regarded the history of music as inherently progressive, constantly improving with the advance of time.

> ...Notwithstanding the defects of modern music in some particulars, I may venture to affirm that it has arrived at a very great degree of perfection; and I appeal for the truth of this assertation to the daily experience of persons of good taste and refined ears.[44]

---

[43]*History*, ii, p. 436. Also see Grant, p. 206.

[44]*History*, i, p. 39.

Burney, once again, uses taste as the sole arbiter of modern music's superiority. He appeals to persons "of good taste and refined ears" in such a manner that few of his readers would allow themselves to disagree. If modern music sounded better to his audience, that was all the evidence necessary to prove its superiority, regardless of whether his contemporary audience had any real acquaintance with older music.

Despite his obvious modernist leanings, however, Burney attempted, at various times, to proclaim some sort of neutrality on the issue. In what can best be described as an effort by Burney to reconcile his position with that of his readers who revelled in antiquarian music, Burney begins by allowing that "we can arrive at no greater certainty about the expression of a dead music, than the pronunciation of a dead language."[45] To this somewhat underhanded conciliation Burney later adds "if we do not give the ancients credit for arts of expression and modulation...their music will be reduced to such a low degree of perfection, as nothing but blind enthusiasm for every thing ancient can disguise, or deny."[46] It would seem, however, that Burney himself gave no such "credit" to the music of the ancients and was at the forefront of the movement to reduce their art to "such a low degree of perfection." In fact this whole statement, in light of

---

[45]*History,* i, p. 37.

[46]Ibid., p. 63.

Burney's predominantly modernist views, can be interpreted as both a ringing condemnation of "blind" antiquarians and as a temperance of his own approbation of modern music.

Burney's belief in the superiority of modern music carried itself through to the music of his own day. Music progressively improved, and thus Burney's interest generally increased commensurately, from the Greeks to the medievalists, through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries until reaching its most superior state during Burney's own lifetime. It would appear no happier coincidence could be afforded a man of such impeccable and superior taste. As one scholar has remarked of Burney, "securely ensconced in his own high time in history, Burney can consign whole ages to the depths of oblivion."[47]

This chronocentric view of the progress of musical history manifested itself even in Burney's criticisms of contemporary composers and artists. Those who were living were generally, though not always judging from Burney's lifelong admiration of Handel, considered superior to those who were recently deceased.

One reason for this was that Burney felt it was inappropriate to criticize living English musicians or foreigners who where working in England. For his articles in the *Cyclopaedia* he states his practice.

---

[47]Lipking, p. 303.

> ...We have adhered as closely as possible to the rule of confining our remarks to the dead, of whom an opinion may be given without fear or offence, if unfavorable, or of exciting envy by eulogies...[48]

While we may admire this most mannerly and reverent approach, it seems, as with many of Burney's critical precepts, to have been motivated more by practical, personal considerations. Burney was only too aware that harsh criticism of living composers would likely bring about the "fury of a nest of hornets that would never cease to sting or allarm me the rest of my life."[49] Burney could resort to harsher criticism when dealing with older composers as many of them were so long forgotten to the average reader of day that they would not possess the knowledge to be able to disagree. Burney would have felt freer to stricture in direct proportion the historical obscurity of the figure in question. In short, Burney often reserved negative criticism of living composers lest he be criticized himself and, almost as a direct result, he could be more vitriolic with those whose music had then been lost to obscurity.

Burney's harsher treatment of "dead" composers, and his distaste for music which was not current is typified in some remarks made about Giuseppe Torelli.

---

[48]"Piozzi", *Cyclopaedia*. See also Grant, p. 12.

[49]CB to Barthelemon (1789), Osborn collection. As quoted in Grant, p. 13.

> Though Giuseppe Torelli [d. *c.* 1708], of Verona, was an eminent performer on the violin, and a voluminous composer for that instrument... his productions for that instrument are now so superannuated, as almost to cease to be music; for having little original melody, and no uncommon stock of harmony or modulation, there is nothing left to make amends for the want of novelty and elegance.[50]

A relationship is also naturally evident here between Burney's approbation of modern music and his desire for novelty and originality.

Burney's tempered approbation of modern music and reluctance to criticize living musicians is further evidence of Burney's desire to please all audiences. This philosophy presents itself most obviously in advice on musical criticism which Burney offered to William Crotch. By praising Handel in comparison to Haydn, Crotch had offended many modernists. Burney, whose sympathies were, at least on the surface, with the modernists felt impelled to advise that "Whoever writes or speaks to the public must not indulge in favouritism."[51] Later in the same letter, Burney explains to Crotch the reasons behind his advice.

> I tell you all this, my dear Crotch, that you may conciliate parties, and not make enemies among real Connoisseurs by praising one Master at the expense of another. Praise when you can; play the best productions of gifted men; and let alone the spots in the sun which are invisible to common

---

[50]*History*, ii, p. 436.

[51]CB to William Crotch (Feb 17, 1805). As reproduced in Frank Mercer's edition of Burney's *General History*, ii, p. 1033.

> eyes and you will not find it impossible to please a whole audience.[52]

Indeed the advice that Burney was really offering to Crotch was that whoever speaks to the public should not be seen to indulge in favouritism, for to be caught out, as it it were, could jeopardize one's own social credibility and popularity.

Church, Dramatic and Chamber Music

Throughout his *Essay on Musical Criticism*, Burney delineates music into three primary categories: church, dramatic, and chamber music. Similar classifications of musical style had existed for years prior to Burney. Indeed, it is apparent that he was merely following the delinations set out by earlier authors such as Marco Scacchi who, in 1649, stated that though older music contained "only one practice and and one style of using consonance and dissonance, the modern consists of two practices and three styles, that is, the styles for church, chamber, and theatre."[53] These particular divisions are today, of course, common ones but

---

[52]Ibid. Note Burney's astronomical reference to "spots in the sun". Burney's interest in astronomy has already been discussed (see Chapter One), yet it is interesting to note that such a reference would have been obscure, at best, in communicating with anyone other than another man of learning. It is also further evidence of Burney's intermingling of science and musical criticism.

[53]Marco Scachi, *Breve discorso sopra la musica moderna* (Warsaw: Pietro Elert, 1649), fols. 10-11. As reprinted in Claude Palisca, *Baroque Music* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 57.

they nonetheless serve as a good jumping off point for a general discussion of his criticism in these areas.

CHURCH MUSIC: Of Church music, Burney in his *Essay* believes that the average listener could determine the expression of the music through the words alone. The "degree" of adequacy of the composition, however, was a matter which "few but professors can judge in detail." It was through the words, and their expression of "jubilation, humility, sorrow, or contrition..." that sacred music was distinguishable from secular.

The ability of sacred music to often remain more popular, or at least not forgotten, through the passage of time in comparison to secular music, was a feature of music history that applied in Burney's day, much as it does in our own. This is perhaps one reason that Burney delved more deeply into the past here than when dealing with other genres of music.

It was in the music of Josquin des Prez that Burney felt the true origins of sacred choral composition began. Burney lavishly calls Josquin "the father of modern harmony, and the inventor of almost every ingenious contexture of its constituent parts, near a hundred years before the time of Palestrino, Orlando di Lasso, Tallis or Bird..."[54] Burney's critique of Josquin's *Miserere a 5*, is strongly evocative

---

[54]*History*, i, p. 735.

of the precepts for church music which were presented in the *Essay on Criticism*: "The subjects of the fugue and imitation are simple, and free from secular levity; the style is grave and reverential; the harmony pure; the imitations are ingenious."[55]

By raising Josquin to the level of "original genius" for typifying "all Musical excellence at the time in which he lived," Burney felt that "less need be said of his cotemporaries [sic], who, in general appear to have been but his imitators." [56] Indeed, within the *History*, the subsequent discussions of sixteenth and seventeenth-century church music lack much of the cordiality offered that of Josquin's era. Of sixteenth-century church music Burney writes:

> Taste, rhythm, accent, and grace, must not be sought for in this kind of Music... Indeed what is generally understood by taste in Music, must ever be an abomination in the church; for as it consists in new refinements or arrangements of notes, it would be construed into innovation, however meritorious, till consecrated by age.[57]

---

[55]Ibid., p. 750.

[56]*History*, i, p. 752.

[57]Ibid., ii, p. 124.

Regarding the seventeenth century Burney is even less tolerant, especially when English composers were concerned.[58] In a letter to Thomas Twining, Burney pronounces, with the exception of a few sacred compositions by Pelham Humphrey, Wise, and Blow, all music "from Orlando Gibbons to Purcell unmeaning, dull, and despicable."[59] In his *History* Burney is more general in his condemnation.

> Indeed, amidst many dull and worthless secular productions, the *Church* was furnished with some good compositions; but these, it is to be feared, will only prove, that such Music may be produced at all times with less genius that that which requires imagination, as well as science, to support it; as it depends more on mechanical rules and labour than invention.[60]

Burney's interest in seventeenth-century English church music seems to have had one primary motivation and it was therefore with "particular pleasure" that Burney "arrived at that period of my labours which allows me to speak of HENRY PURCELL."[61] Burney, in a moment of nationalism, calls Purcell

---

[58]In regard to Burney's intolerance of seventeenth-century English composition, it should be remembered that, at that time during the Restoration, Charles the II "was insistent that English composers should accommodate themselves to the standards to which he had been accustomed in France." It is perhaps, therefore, possible that Burney's views are again being shaped due to the French influence on English music at this time. See Percy M. Young, *A History of British Music* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1967), p. 228.

[59]CB to Thomas Twining (Nov. 10-12, 1783). As quoted in Grant, p. 140.

[60]*History*, ii, p. 263. See also Grant, p. 141.

[61]*History*, ii, p. 380.

"as much the pride of an Englishman in Music, as Shakspeare in productions for the stage, Milton in epic poetry, Locke in metaphysics, or Sir Isaac Newton in philosophy and mathematics."[62] The inclusion of Purcell in this eminent list, while probably warranted, is nonetheless another manifestation of Burney's attempts to elevate the art of music to a position equivalent to that held by literature and science.

Regarding Purcell's church music, in particular the three-part anthem "Be merciful unto me, O God," Burney writes: "To my conceptions, there seems no better Music existing, of the kind, than the opening of this anthem, in which the verse, "I will praise God," and the last movement, in C natural, are in melody, harmony, and modulation, truly *divine Music*."[63] The use of the term "divine" here is representative of the shift in adjectives that Burney employs when writing of sacred music. Gone are terms such as "barbarous" or "genius". The focus here is solely on the the suitability of the music in the ecclesiastical use for which it was designed.

Despite such enthusiasum Burney is, at times, critical of Purcell. Concerning an anthem from the same collection, "O Lord God of hosts," he wrote "both in that [the second] and the last movement, he seems to be trying experiments in harmony; and, in hazarding new combinations, he seems now and

---

[62]Ibid., p. 380.

[63]Ibid., p. 384.

then to give the ear more pain than pleasure."[64] In this instance Burney's desire for originality and novelty seems have taken a back seat to harmonies which he felt were both tasteless and unbecoming of a sacred composition.

In the final chapter of the third volume entitled "Progress of Church Music in England after the death of Purcell," Burney finally arrives at composers who were more his contemporaries. Typically, in keeping with his philosophy of praising what is good and ignoring the rest, he promises "only [to] point out such movements as, upon recent examination, have appeared to me the most excellent."[65] As previously discussed, by this method Burney hoped to avoid any unfavourable reaction to his judgements.

Burney, however, did not always follow this credo to the letter. Criticisms of his contemporaries abound, but they are nonetheless generally limited to composers who died, either literally, or figuratively through public disinterest, during his lifetime.

One such composer was Maurice Greene (1695-1775), whose church music Burney felt to be most lacking in propriety. For Burney, theatricality and levity had no place in music that was meant for the dignified practice of devotional worship.

---

[64]Ibid.

[65]Ibid., p. 482. See also Grant, p. 145.

He commented on the last of Green's collection of *Forty Select Anthems*:

> The last anthem of this volume is made up of common play-house passages; the first movement is heavy and monotonous; the andantes tiresome, by the repetitions of an old harpsichord-lesson in the base; the chorus justifies Mr. Mason's censure of this author, by too long and frequent divisions; these are too vulgar and riotous for the church... The vivace...has more of the dancing-minuet, or Vauxhall song, in it than belong to that species of gravity and dignity which befits devotion. I think I could neither play nor hear this movement in a church, without feeling ashamed of its impropriety.[66]

Of Green's music in general, Burney later points out that "it was sarcastically said, during the life of this composer, that his secular Music smelt of the church, and his anthems of the theatre."[67]

Burney did find some modern composers, notably Neapolitans, whose church music was worthy of admiration. "[Johann, Adolph] Hasse, [Niccolo] Jommelli, and [David] Perez; these wrote music most worthy of admission, for their gravity and dignity, into the sacred service."[68] Jommelli in particular seemed to exemplify Burney's ideal when he concluded that his music will "be regarded with reverence by real judges of composition, as there is no mixture of trivial

---

[66]*History,* ii, p. 491.

[67]Ibid. In notable contrast to Burney, Donald Jay Grout felt that it was only the works of Maurice Greene which, at this period, provided relief from "the generally low level of church music". See D.J. Grout, *A History of Western Music* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1960), p. 481.

[68]"Santarelli", *Cyclopaedia*. As quoted in Grant, p. 164.

or fantastical movements or passages in his truly classical, and often sublime works."[68] For Burney the ideal style of modern sacred composition was one which combined and balanced the grace and passion of secular music with dignity while completely avoiding any theatrical elements.

DRAMATIC MUSIC: While Burney's views on sacred music were governed by a desire for propriety, where dramatic music was concerned, it is clear that he placed extreme importance on variety and contrast while at the same time emphasizing the need for unity between the many disparate elements involved in dramatic music. In his *Essay on Music Criticism* Burney gives the following criteria for mastery of dramatic music.

> ...If the character, passion, and importance of each personage in the piece is not distinctly marked and supported; if the airs are not contrasted with each other, and the part of every singer in the same scene specifically different in measure, compass, time and style, the composer is not a complete master of his profession.[70]

Burney's dramatic aesthetic was largely formed by Rousseau's, whose *Dictionnaire* was the basis for his articles on dramatic music in the *Cyclopaedia*. Rousseau's work was, however, more than thirty years old at the time of Burney's *Cyclopaedia* articles, and based on ideas which were formed

---

[68]Ibid., "Jommelli".

[70]*History*, ii, p. 9.

while Rousseau was in Italy thirty years previous to that.[71] Thus Burney's views regarding dramatic music were uncharacteristically conservative and routine in comparison with his overall aesthetic appreciation of originality, novelty and progression.

When discussing dramatic music in his *History,* opera garners the majority of Burney's attention. Burney felt opera to be the "*completest concert*" which his readers could attend. As "to the most perfect singing, and effects of a powerful and well-disciplined band, we are frequently added excellent acting, splendid scenes and decorations, with such dancing as a playhouse, from its inferior prices, is seldom able to furnish."[72] Notably it is still a "concert" with emphasis on the music which characterizes Burney's view of opera.

Predictably, Italian opera dominates Burney's discussion of the dramatic music of all eras. His comments on the works of Reinhard Keiser sum up his opinion of German opera of the seventeenth-century:

> For grace and facility I do not recommend him; indeed, they were little sought or known during his time; but for modulation, ingenuity and new ideas, he scarcely had his equal...
>
> Of the many other German composers of the last century, whose works I have not been able to find, I make no doubt but that as far as harmony, contrivance, complication, and diligence could carry them, they were superior to all other musicians of the time. But

---

[71]Grant, p. 221.

[72]*History,* ii, p. 676.

> during the present century, by a more frequent intercourse with Italy and the best compositions and vocal performers of that country, with the establishment of Italian operas in all the principal courts of Germany, the inhabitants of that vast empire have cultivated Music to a degree of refinement, particularly instrumental, beyond any former period in the history of the art...[73]

In acknowledging the achievements of the Germans, Burney still ultimately credits the Italian influence for their cultivation of truly refined and tasteful music.

Regarding English opera in the seventeenth-century, Burney felt the music unworthy of much comment and confined his remarks primarily to the quality of the poetry and explanations of the poetic allusions, particularly those of Shakespeare. Only Henry Purcell is recognized with anything better than contempt. Indeed, in some respects Burney's praise of Purcell rivalled that which he lavished on Handel and other Italianate composers:

> ...The variety of movement, the artful, yet touching modulation, and, above all, the exquisite expression of the words, render it [*King Arthur* (1691)] one of the most affecting compositions extant to every Englishman who regards Music not merely as an agreeable arrangement and combination of sounds, but as a vehicle of sentiment, and voice and passion.
>
> There is more elegant melody, more elaborate harmony, more ingenious contrivance, in motion and contexture of the several parts in the works of many great composers; but to the natives of England, who know the full power of our language, and feel the force, spirit, and shades of

---

[73]Ibid., p. 463.

> meaning... I must again repeat it, this composition will have charms and effects, which, perhaps, Purcell's Music can only produce.[74]

Though a firm advocate of the Italian style, Burney obviously maintained a healthy respect for the power and beauty of his own native tongue and was even more impressed by a compatriot composer who was sensitive to it.

Without doubt, however, Burney was predisposed to opera in the Italian style. His aesthetic was influenced particularly by the Neapolitan school; the style "invented by Vinci, Hasse, Porpora, and Pergolesi has been pushed perhaps as far as it will go by Jommelli, Galuppi, Piccini, Sacchini, Paesiello, and Sarti."[75] Burney was a firm believer that the accompaniment should be subordinate to the melody, and it was this aspect of the Neapolitan style which seems to have most attracted him:

> Vinci and Pergolesi have been imitated near 50 years; and in Dramatic music it must be owned that the symmetry, Grace, accent and beauty of the melodies, and clearness and tranquility of the accompaniments were so near perfection that much derivation from them could not be admitted but at the expense of poetry, nature and simplicity. Melodies loaded with ornaments, and turbulent accompaniments may enrich a score that's made for a fastidious and critical Eye, but will always injure the effect to the Ear in performance, unless poetry and passion are wholly sacrificed.[76]

---

[74]*History*, ii, p. 393.

[75]Burney as quoted in Grant, p. 236. It should be noted that though Hasse, a German, is included in this list of Neopolitan Composers he was nonetheless trained in the Neopolitan style and became perhaps its leading exponent.

[76]Ibid.

Handel is easily the most dominating presence in Burney's operatic discussion and it is often in comparison to the Neapolitan school of composers that he receives the greatest praise from Burney. Despite his distaste for some aspects of Handel's style, Burney nonetheless admired Handel for his genius.

> These [arias from Siroe] were composed in 1728, about the time that Vinci and Hasse had begun to thin and simplify accompaniment, as well as to polish melody. In the first of these Airs the voice-part is beautiful and a canevas for a great singer; in the second, the effects by modulation and broken sentences of melody are truly pathetic and theatrical: the first violin admirably filling up the chasms in the principal melody, while the second violin, tenor, and base, are murmuring in the subdued accompaniment of iterated notes in modern songs. By these two Airs it appears that Handel, who always had more solidity and contrivance than his cotemporaries, penetrated very far into those regions of taste and refinement at which his successors only arrived, by a slow progress, half a century after.[77]

Burney also recognized the genius of Handel, though indirectly, in his lament of the lack of originality in contemporary English composers. In commenting on the music of Handel's opera *Otho* (1723), Burney states:

> ...The passages in this and the other operas which Handel composed about this time, became the musical language of the nation, and in a manner proverbial, like the bon mots of a man of wit in society. So that long after this period all the musicians in the kingdom, whenever they attempted

---

[77]*Account*, p. 21. See also Grant, p. 240.

> to compose what they called Music of their own, seemed to have had no other stock of ideas, than these passages.[78]

To Christoph Wilibald Gluck, in comparison to Handel one of the most progressive operatic composers of the day, Burney makes only the barest of mention. Burney felt that Gluck's operas contained too much drama, to the point that it detracted from the music. As ever, anything not Italian was deemed inferior by Burney, though in the following comments he does grudgingly acknowledge Gluck's apparent improvement over previous French operatic composers.

> Indeed his *Armide*, in 1777, did not quite fulfil the ideas of grace, tenderness, and pathos, which some of the scenes required, and auditors accustomed to Italian Music expected: However his operas were excellent preparations for a better style of composition than the French had been used to; as the recitative was more rapid and the airs more marked than in Lully or Rameau...[79]

In a dedicatory preface to his opera *Alceste* (1767), Gluck summarized the main aspect of his attempt to reform Italian opera: "to confine music to its proper function of serving the poetry for the expressions and situations of the plot."[80] Such an elevation of poetry over music disturbed the natural balance that Burney felt should exist between the two.

---

[78]*History*, ii, p. 722.

[79]Ibid., p. 972.

[80]As quoted in Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1960), p. 474.

Ultimately this resulted in the fact that, though Burney was able to recognize the quality of Gluck's music, by virtue of his life-long allegiance to the older Italian styles he was never to truly appreciate the music of one of the greatest reformers in operatic history.

Burney also spent considerable time in his *History* discussing aspects of various librettos. He regarded them as a whole, however, as being of secondary importance to the music. Burney believed that "Music is the *first* consideration in operas and oratorios."[81] Typical are the following comments made about a French comic opera by Louis Joseph Saint-Amans (c1749-1820).

> ...A great deal of pretty music was thrown away on bad words... But this music, though I thought it much superior to the poetry it accompanied, was not without its defects; the modulation was too studied, so much as to be unnatural, and always to disappoint the ear.[82]

These comments are weighted to the merits or defects only in the music and not to any consideration of the textual problems. However, by the same token, comments such as these are evidence that Burney did in fact recognize the ability, if properly used, of music and text to reinforce each other. His reliance on the musical message of opera can be seen to parallel the modern view of opera put forth by Edward Cone:

---

[81]Ibid., p. 509.

[82]*Tours*, i, p. 14.

"We must always rely on music as our guide toward an understanding of the composer's conception of the text."[83] This view was also echoed by Joseph Kerman who states regarding operatic criticism that "the final judgement, then, is squarely musical, but not purely musical, any more than it is purely literary."[84]

For Burney a good libretto must provide the composer with images sufficiently vivid to move the emotions of his listeners but without becoming overly passionate or violent. Burney felt that in opera "...the narrative must be short, the incidentals numerous and rapid in succession, the diction rather sweet and flowing, than strong and nervous: as the words of an air should merely serve as an outline for melody to colour."[85]

The poet/librettist who, for Burney, was most able to achieve these ideals was the Abate Metastasio. Burney's admiration of this eminent lyric poet abounds throughout all his writings, but culminated in his writing of the *Memoirs of the Life of Metastasio*, which he regarded as a "kind of

---

[83]Edward T. Cone, "The Old Man's Toys: Verdi's Last Operas," *Perspectives USA*, 6 (1954). As quoted in Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1956), pp. 21-22.

[84]Kerman, p. 17.

[85]Charles Burney, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Abate Metastasio* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1796), ii, p. 253n. See also Grant, p. 223.

supplement to my *General History of Music*."[86] Burney pronounces Metastasio "the best lyric poet and writer of operas, or dramas for music in Italy, during the last century, or perhaps during any age, or in any country."[87] Burney felt Metastasio was the first to achieve "the difficult task of rendering so wild and incongruous a compound of seemingly heterogeneous ingredients and absurdities, as an *opera*, a rational entertainment."[88] Burney's approbation of Metastasio can perhaps be more accurately assessed however in relationship to more modern criticism such as that of Joseph Kerman who pronounces Metastasian opera as "...impassive and highly predictable" and whose "awful symmetry is not naturally dramatic at all; opera was always in danger of collapsing into a catalogue of 'affects' spaced off and displayed by means of recitative."[89] Given this perspective it would seem that Burney, showing more signs of his conservative approach to opera, was more interested in Metastasio's ability to organize than in his ability to produce a truly dramatic musical experience.

Burney could be considered in the forefront of the avante garde in his acceptance and encouragement of modern original music. On the surface, Burney's criticisms of opera

---

[86]Ibid., i, p. 330.

[87]"Metastasio", *Cyclopaedia*. See also Grant, p. 223.

[88]Ibid.

[89]Kerman, p. 49.

were not obviously different in approach or content from his usual critical requirements of all secular music. Originality, expression, and taste were all to be expected and Burney does not substantially depart from his usual terms and precepts in his discussion of individual operas or numbers. When viewing his discussion of opera as a whole, however, we are able to find in him a more conservative side.

Burney spends an inordinate amount of time discussing opera in his *History*. He chronicles the early attempts at opera in England through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and almost the entire fourth volume is devoted to a single chapter (VI) entitled "Origin of Italian Opera in England, and its Progress there during the present Century." This lengthy chapter is also notable for the minute and voluminous descriptions of Handel's operatic works, typically characterized by dry, shopping list-like chronicling of the various recitatives, arias and choruses contained in different works. It is in his detail of Italian, and particularly Handelian, opera seria to the near exclusion of all other types and composers, notably Gluck and his progressive reforms, that we are able to see Burney in his most conservative and censorial state.

CHAMBER: For Burney, and others of his day, chamber music typically encompassed all compositions which were neither

sacred nor dramatic. As such, Burney's discussion of chamber music also includes secular vocal music and keyboard works.

Where secular vocal music is concerned, Burney reverts to his typical form in his approbation of Italian music and his distaste of older music. Of sixteenth-century English music in particular, Burney is less than enthusiastic. Typical are his comments on Thomas Morley's "Cease Myne Eyes": "Those who are not accustomed to the Music of the sixteenth century, will be much embarressed with the broken phrases and false accents of the melody, in which there is so total a want of rhythm, as renders the time extremely difficult to keep with accuracy and firmness."[80] Burney's tastes were definitely more Italianate and, despite his earlier praise of Purcell's mastery in setting English, takes his cue from Rousseau in the belief that English was inferior to Italian as a language fit for singing. In a letter to Mrs. John Hunter, Burney complains of contemporary English vocal music:

> My notions of long for good music are very different from those mere rhymers and balladmongers, who being totally ignorant of music, and still more of good singing take no thought of the necessary symmetry of melody... of a thought or a verse, when the voice is either corrupted by a nazel or gutteral sound, such as in nrn [sic], or hissing double ss, snarling or utterly stopt by a mute consonant, such as d, k, p and t...[81]

---

[80] *History*, ii, p. 89.

[81] CB to Mrs. John Hunter, n.d. (Osborn collection), as reproduced in Grant, p. 184.

Burney's lukewarm response to English vocal music can perhaps be traced to the relative lack of success of his own songs. In 1798 Burney composed a song to commemorate Admiral Nelson's victory over the French fleet near Alexandria. The song does not appear to have been published, and his settings of John Courtenay's *Four Patriotic Songs* were dismissed, even by himself as trifles and "Hullabaloo". Burney was much more successful in his imitative keyboard compositions but his relative lack of success as a songwriter only served to underscore his distaste for English songs in general.

Regarding keyboard music, however, Burney's views were tempered by no such hidden prejudices. Typically Burney is not supportive of the early works which he reviews. Of the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book* Burney notes:

> It has been imagined that the rage for variations, that is, multiplying notes, and disguising the melody of an easy, and, generally well-known air, by every means possible, was the contagion of the present century; but it appears from the *Virginal Book*, that this species of *influenza*, or *corruption of air*, was more excessive in the sixteenth century, then at any other period in Musical History.[92]

In these comments it is apparent that Burney felt such inadequacies of compositional practice were almost equally as obtrusive in his own day. Though Burney advocated novelty and variety, it is clear that these virtues were not considered

---

[92]*History*, ii, p. 77.

valuable for their own sake. Tasteful employment was still the determining factor.

Despite his general distaste for the pieces in the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*, Burney does, nonetheless, note the superiority of those compositions by William Byrd.

> Crowded and elaborate, as is the harmony, and uncouth and antiquated the melody, of all the pieces in this collection there is manifest superiority in those of Bird over all the rest, both in texture and design.[83]

Specifically, Burney cites the excellence of Byrd's melodies which were "of the best and most chearful kind, of the times, and are still airy and pleasing."[84]

As with his history of dramatic music, Burney is notably brief in the *History* in his dealings with much seventeenth-century music. When English music is concerned this can perhaps be explained by the puritan strictures on music during this period which through their "proscription of choral services and the wanton destruction of service books put an end to English musical tradition..."[85] Despite an extensive treatment of Elizabethan virginal music there is virtually no mention of the development of the organ or harpsichord. The noted composers Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck and

---

[83]Ibid., p. 78.

[84]Ibid.

[85]Henry Raynor, *Music in England* (London: Robert Hale, 1980), p. 89.

Michael Praetorius, though not English, are also passed over completely.

Even in his own century Burney only focuses on those whom he felt were instigating the most revolutionary changes in the art of keyboard music. Amongst those worthy of Burney's pen were Handel, Domenico Alberti, Domenico Scarlatti and Emanuel Bach. Of the first three, Burney writes "Handel's compositions for organ and harpsichord, with those of Scarlatti and Alberti, were our chief practice of delight."[96] Of Emanuel Bach, Burney was even more ebullient in his praise, writing in his *Tours* that

> ...he is not only one of the greatest composers that ever existed, for keyed instruments, but the best player, in point of *expression*; for others, perhaps, have as rapid execution: however, he possesses every style... He is learned, I think, even beyond his father, whenever he pleases, and is far before him in variety of modulation; his fugues are always upon new and curious subjects, and treated with great art as well as genius.[97]

Later, in private correspondence, Burney is no less impressed stating that the younger Bach

> stands so high in my opinion, that I should not scruple to pronounce him the greatest writer for the Harpsichord now alive, or that has ever existed as far as I am able to judge, by a comparison of his works with those of others, and by my own feelings when I hear them performed.[98]

---

[96] *History*, ii, p. 405.

[97] *Tours*, ii, p. 219-220.

[98] CB to Christoph Daniel Ebeling, (Nov. 1771). As reproduced in Grant, p. 193.

In these comments we can also glimpse some of Burney's bolder assertions, especially concerning the talents of the elder Bach. Though Burney does, throughout his writings, recognize J.S. Bach as one of the "greatest musicians that ever existed,"[99] his opinion is, nonetheless, constantly tempered by the fact that Bach's music was then considered to be out of date.[100] Burney felt the elder Bach had an abundance of genius and invention, but that they were not adequately governed by good taste. Burney was, it is to be remembered, aiming much of his writing at amateur and hobbyist musicians. In the eyes of this public, to praise too highly a master of fugues and canons was to praise a form of music that was commonly only practised by old-fashioned professors.

In his general discussion of instrumental music it is also interesting to note Burney's nationalism, chiefly as manifested in his lamentations on the lack of any English school to compare with France, Germany, or Italy. Burney mourns the early deaths of Orlando Gibbons, Pelham Humphrey, and Henry Purcell.

---

[99]*History*, i, p. 726.

[100]Also of consideration is the simple fact that not a lot of Bach's music was yet available in England. Roger Lonsdale points out that Burney was "much more familiar" with the compostions of C.P.E. Bach "than with those of his father J.S. Bach, whom he considered to be merely the composer of some dry and pedantic music for the organ." The extent of Burney's familiarity with the music of J.S. Bach must therefore be questioned. See Lonsdale, p. 118.

> If these admirable composers had been blest with long life, we [England] might have had a Music of our own, at least as good as that of France or Germany; which, without the assistance of the Italians, has been long admired... As it is, we have no school for composition, no well digested method of study, nor, indeed, models of our own. Instrumental Music, therefore, has never gained much from our own abilities; for though some natives of England have had hands sufficient to execute the productions of the greatest masters on the continent, they have produced but little of their own which is much esteemed.[101]

As outlined in his *Essay on Music Criticism*, Burney's critical judgements of instrumental music are largely governed by the presence or lack of instrumental technique displayed both compositionally and in performance.

Regarding the general state of chamber and orchesteral music in the seventeenth century, Burney was unusually vitriolic in his criticisms. Regarding this music Burney judged "all instrumental Music, but that of the organ seems to have been in a very rude state at this time throughout Europe... All the Music, even for keyed-instruments, is dry, difficult, unaccented, and insipid."[102]

Of particular interest regarding instrumental music is Burney's recognition of Haydn. Burney's admiration of Haydn, already touched upon, seems to have been particularly stimulated by his instrumental music. Haydn's instrumental music appears to have had a particular power over Burney and

---

[101]*History*, ii, p. 405.

[102]Ibid., p. 285.

his comments are regularly spiced with the various moods Haydn's music raised in within him. The reasons for this are perhaps known only to Burney himself, but it is evident that this master had particular power to engross Burney and lead him away from his usually much drier and more technically oriented observations on instrumental music. Typical are his remarks on Haydn's instrumental *Passione* ["The Seven Last Words." 1785] which Burney felt was "among his...most exquisite productions."[103]

> These strains are so truly impassioned and full of heart-felt grief and dignified sorrow, that though the movements are all slow, the subjects, keys, and effects are so new and so different, that a real lover of Music will feel no lassitude, or wish for lighter strains to stimulate attention.[104]

Burney felt Haydn's instrumental works in general were no less praiseworthy and no less emotionally involving.

> There is a general chearfulness and good humour in Haydn's allegros, which exhilerate every hearer. But his adagios are often so sublime in ideas and the harmony in which they are clad, that though played by inarticulate instruments, they have a more pathetic affect on my feelings, than the finest opera air united with the most exquisite poetry.[105]

---

[103]Ibid., p. 959.

[104]Ibid.

[105]Ibid., p. 960.

It is interesting to note that, while Haydn received such lavish praise in the *History*, Mozart is only given a one-line mention. After recognizing Mozart's childhood successes Burney, to his credit, recognized him as "now no less the wonder of the musical world for his fertility, and knowledge, as a composer."[106] Whatever else might be said of him, Burney was always cognizant of true talent.

In his *Essay on Music Criticism*, Burney touches on all the fundamental aspects of criticism which are to be found within his writings. Burney remained largely unswerving in his critical criterion, as evidenced by his lifelong admiration of Handel and Haydn. This consistency could sometimes manifest itself in a conservativeness as glimpsed in his blinkered view of dramatic music. Secure, however, in his belief in the superiority of his taste and using his Johnsonian skill and charm as writer, Burney was more than adequately able to defend his critical bent throughout the course of his life. Indeed he gained considerable respect for the fairness and perceived accuracy of his judgement.

---

[106]Ibid.

# Chapter IV

## BURNEY AND HAWKINS: CONTRASTING CRITICAL STYLES

In contrast to Burney, whose musical opinions won popular acceptance, stood the figure of Sir John Hawkins, whose musical views, primarily as outlined in his *General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, were to be largely rejected by the public. Hawkins' *General History* was published in its entirety in 1776, the same year as Burney's initial volume. In style, philosophy, and methodology Burney and Hawkins represented a complete antithesis, each harbouring beliefs which were classical in their polarity. Thus these two eminent men were to go head to head in competition for much the same readership and create a rivalry which was to last for the remainder of their lives.

The conflicts and animosity between Burney and Hawkins have long been the subject of debate. The rejection and eventual discreditation of Hawkins and his writings was stimulated and abetted in no small way by Burney himself. Burney was maliciously instrumental in securing scathing and

vitriolic reviews of both Hawkins and his *History*.[1] However, less discussed have been the differences in critical opinion and approach which also contributed to and characterized this feud.

The roots of the critical differences between Burney and Hawkins lie in their diametrically opposed attitudes towards the role of music. For Burney, music was "at best but an amusement". In the opening pages of his *History*, Burney gives the following definition: "Music is an innocent luxury, unnecessary, indeed, to our existence, but a great improvement and gratification of the sense of hearing."[2] However, Hawkins felt that music "was intended by the Almighty for the delight of his rational principles, and a deduction of the progress of science..."[3] Furthermore, Hawkins desired to "reprobate the vulgar notion that its [music's] ultimate end is to excite mirth."[4]

Hawkins was tied to a rather more conservative approach, and was much less influenced by progressive works, such as Avison's *Essay on Musical Expression*, which recognized

---

[1]For more information regarding this darker vindictive side of Burney's personality, see Roger Lonsdale's colourful account in "Burney and Sir John Hawkins, 1770-89", *Dr. Charles Burney*, op. cit. pp. 189-225.

[2]*History*, i, p. 21.

[3]John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, 5 vols. (London, 1776) New ed., 2 vols. (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), p. xviv.

[4]Ibid.

and, to a certain extent, legitimatized the belief that the prime function of music was to raise the emotions. Hawkins remained true to the traditions of classical scholarship, which exist without connection to contemporary tastes. One natural reason for this seeming conservatism was that, though a keen amateur musician, Hawkins was primarily employed as a magistrate and author. As such he was educated in and closely allied to the neoclassical literary traditions of authors such as Johnson, one of his closest friends. Thus Hawkins was still clinging to the concept of the moral utility of music rather than allowing the "vulgar notion" that its purpose was merely to "excite mirth."

In some sense the differences in critical approach between Hawkins and Burney reflect and highlight a division between progressive and conservative music criticism. The more progressive school of musician/critics as represented by Avison and Burney lean heavily on the nature of individual, taste-based, reactions to music and seek to judge it accordingly. The more conservative and traditional school, having strong ties to neoclassical literary criticism, is represented by Hawkins, Addison and other author/critics. This conservative approach was unwilling to put such authority in any individual and sought more "scientific" principles on which to base an objective judgment.

Another fundamental distinction which contributed to a difference in critical perspective was Hawkins' belief that

"Music was in its greatest perfection in Europe from about the middle of the sixteenth to the beginning of the seventeenth Century; when, with a variety of treble instruments, a vicious taste was introduced, and harmony received its mortal wound."[5] Hawkins goes on to praise a number of Elizabethan composers "whose works shew deep skill, and fine invention."[6] Burney, on the other hand, was firmly convinced that the standards of his own day were infallible criteria for judging music; he held that the art of music developed through graduated stages, each superior to the former. For Burney, contemporary music had merely begun to escape 'barbarism', and to approach perfection only since the period to which Hawkins ascribed its greatest excellence.

Nowhere are these critical differences more evident than in each author's comments on Gesualdo. Hawkins states of Gesualdo, "the distinguishing excellences of the compositions of this admirable author are, fine contrivance, original harmony, and the sweetest modulation conceivable."[7] Superficially, Hawkins' criteria for excellence in composition are remarkably similar to Burney's in their advocation of novelty and originality. However, Burney had obviously read

---

[5]John Hawkins, *The Complete Angler* (London, 1760), p. 238. As quoted in Lonsdale, p. 190.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Hawkins, *History of Music*, i, p. 441.

and disagreed with Hawkins' opinion.[8] Burney's comments on Gesualdo are more of a thinly veiled attack on Hawkins and his taste than a considered judgement of the composer. Burney writes:

> With respect to the *excellencies* which have been so liberally bestowed on this author [Gesualdo].., they are all disputable, and such as, by a careful examination of his works, he seemed by no means entitled to. They have lately been said to consist in 'fine *contrivance, original harmony,* and the *sweetest modulation conceivable*'... His *original harmony,* after scoring a great part of his madrigals... is difficult to discover; for had there been any warrantable combinations of sounds that Palestrina, Luca Marenzio, and many of his predecessors, had not used before him, in figuring bases, they would have appeared. And as to his *modulation,* it is so far from being the *sweetest conceivable,* that, to me, it seems forced, affected, and disgusting.[9]

This diatribe, though a bitter condemnation of both Hawkins and Gesualdo, nonetheless contains hints of Burney's critical credo of allowing a critic the right to sense and judge music on the basis of personal feelings. This occurs most obviously in the final sentence with the simple inclusion of the words "to me" which allows for the legitimacy of contrasting feelings.

---

[8]Burney seems to have acquired a copy of Hawkins' *History* soon after its publication in November of 1776. His copy is replete with handwritten corrections and comments on Hawkins' material and now resides in the British Museum. See Lonsdale, p. 203.

[9]*History,* ii, p. 180.

In this case, history has proven Hawkins' opinion to be the more accurate. Burney has fallen prey here to the pitfalls of basing his invective on the perspective of contemporary eighteenth-century taste. As our modern tastes have generally recognized the genius and originality of Gesualdo, Burney is made to look the less discerning of the two. However, as Lawrence Lipking points out, "it is significant that Hawkins as well as Burney refers to Gesualdo as an *author*. Neither historian can have possessed much more than a paper knowledge of the highly original sounds of the madrigals..."[10] In other words, the opinions of both men would have been based largely on speculation rather than on any true familiarity with Gesualdo's actual music.

The relative emphasis that is placed on criticism in each author's work is another example of the wide philosophical gulf which separated Burney and Hawkins. Musical criticism for Burney was, obviously, of prime importance as shown by his inclusion of the "Essay on Music Criticism" and, indeed, as is evident in the constant flow of criticism throughout his *History*. Musical criticism is, however, much harder to find in Hawkins' *History*. "Repelled by disciples of taste--by Avison, Rousseau, and Burney--he [Hawkins] often speaks as if music criticism has been no more than the airing of arbitrary opinion."[11] Where Burney bases his authority to

---

[10]Lipking, p. 279.

[11]Ibid., p. 250.

criticize in his musical experience and developed taste, Hawkins, being a mere amateur musician and therefore noticeably less qualified to criticize by Burney's standards, looked for some sort of judgemental consensus within the musical community. When such a consensus is lacking, Hawkins, to all outward appearances, refuses to judge, preferring instead to write short biographical sketches of composers accompanied with musical examples of their compositions. Typical are the following remarks made of John Taverner: "John Taverner, mentioned by Morley in his Catalogue, and also in his introduction... was organist of Boston in Lincolnshire and of Cardinal, now Christ Church college, in Oxford."[12] There follows a lengthy discussion of some episodes from Taverner's life and of his "famous" father Richard. There is, however, no mention or description of his music save the publication of a single three-part motet, "O Splendor Gloriae". It is entirely left to the reader to judge the quality of Taverner's music, saving perhaps the influence inferred by mentioning Morley's recognition.

Burney, in dealing with Taverner is, however, typically much more opinionated and infers a direct criticism of Hawkins' impartiality:

> I can venture to give a character of Taverner from an actual survey of his principle works, which have been preserved, and which I have taken the pains to score. This author is in general very

---

[12]Hawkins, *History of Music*, i, p. 354.

> fond of slow Notes... Long notes in Vocal Music, unless they are to display a very fine voice, have little meaning, and wholly destructive of poetry and accent; but our old composers have no scruples of that kind...[13]

Regarding Hawkins' similarly benign discussion of the composer John Sheperd, Burney, as was the case with Gesualdo, felt obliged to respond in his own *History*. He attacks Hawkins, though never by name, for his lack of taste and even for his methodology:

> If we were to judge of JOHN SHEPARD [d.c. 1563] by a specimen that has lately been given of his abilities [Hawkins' published "Stev'n first after Christ"[14]], he would seem the most clumsy Contrapuntist of them all, and not only appear to be less dexterious in expressing his ideas, but to have fewer ideas to express; yet, in scoring a Movement by this author, from a set of MS. books, belonging to Christ-Church College, Oxon, he appears to me superior to any Composer of Henry the Eighth's reign...
>
> This shews the fallacy and injustice of determining an author's character by a single production; of whom, when more can be found, the best should be chosen.[15]

Though Burney includes a short analysis of Sheperd's *Motettus No.I*, by using only one example his work he is equally

---

[13]*History*, i, p. 786.

[14]Burney seems to have been particularly concerned with a clumsy Counter-tenor passage, Bar 16, which contains an odd leap of a sharp seventh (A down to B flat) followed by an ascending leap of a ninth (B flat to C). See Hawkins, *History of Music*, i, p. 359.

[15]*History*, i, p. 794.

guilty, as he accuses Hawkins, of "the fallacy and injustice of determining an author's character by a single production". Once again Burney, in following his taste and giving in to his distaste for Hawkins, is made to look none too discerning. By proclaiming Sheperd, now almost entirely forgotten, "superior to any Composer of Henry the Eighth's reign" over such notables as John Taverner and Robert Fairfax, Burney might be accused of being blinded by vindictiveness.

In his *History*, Hawkins tries to overcome what he saw as a lack of accepted standards for music criticism. Hawkins found such a consensus in literary criticism and was greatly influenced by it, especially in his florid prose. In many of his comments, which might pass for criticisms, Hawkins tries to establish the appearance of a consensus. In typical praise of ancient music Hawkins remarks: "The memory of Orlando de Lasso is greatly honoured by the notice which Thuanus has taken of him, for, excepting Zarlino, he is the only person of his profession whom that historian has condescended to mention."[16] Here Hawkins attempts to replace a personal opinion by substituting a reputation based on the consensus of others. Burney, on the other hand, still mentions the attention Thuanus paid Lasso but has the courage, based on a belief in the superiority of his own taste, to offer an entirely personal judgement. In comparing Lasso with

---

[16]Hawkins, *History of Music*, i, p. 349.

Palestrina, Burney emphatically states that his compositions "are much inferior to those of Palestrina.., for by striving to be grave and solemn they only become heavy and dull; and what is unaffected dignity in the Roman [Palestrina], is little better than the strut of a dwarf upon stilts in the Netherlanders."[17] It is possible that Burney's extreme opinion of the "Netherlanders" may have been influenced by the animosity which existed between the English and the Dutch at this time.[18] Nonetheless, such a pointed and comical criticism was entirely out of the question and entirely inappropriate as far as Hawkins was concerned.

Burney, and many other critics of Hawkins, were quite aware of his predilection for attempting to rate composers according to the degree of mention that other historical authors had made of them. This awareness was made all too obvious in Burney's satirical poem on Hawkins "The Trial of Midas the Second," which includes the lines "Black-Lettered Chains his cold Ideas bind/Nor let Conviction beam

---

[17]*History*, ii, p. 252-253.

[18]The British were outraged that the Dutch were able to break their blockade and secretly provide the Americans with arms and supplies during the revolution of 1776. The Dutch were also the first country to officially recognize the independence of America by saluting their flag and thus further insulting the British who were theretofore allies with the Dutch. For more information on this little discussed aspect of the American revolution, see Barbara W. Tuchman, *The First Salute* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988).

upon his Mind."[19] Hawkins, in trying to eliminate subjective taste from his criticism, had merely lost the respect of his colleagues who interpreted his restraint in judgemental matters as an inability to think for himself.[20]

In basing his opinions and scholarship on the opinion of previous authors, Hawkins was remaining true to the traditional conventions of classical scholarship which existed without connection to the contemporary tastes that ruled Burney's criticism. To some extent Hawkins was influenced by his friend Horace Walpole who encouraged him to write an antiquarian history of music much in the image of his own *Anecdotes of Painting*.[21] Walpole's later opinion of Hawkins' *History* sums up the tradition of antiquarian scholarship which was represented within its pages. Walpole, somewhat amusedly, states: "They are old books to all intents and purposes, very old books; and what is new, is like old books too, that is, full of minute facts that delight antiquaries--nay, if there had never been such things as parts and taste, this work would

---

[19]Charles Burney, "The Trial Of Midas the Second," in the John Rylands Library. The poem was never published, though parts are published in Percy Scholes, *The Life and Activities of Sir John Hawkins* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1978), pp. 140-48.

[20]Hawkins and his *History* were the brunt of numerous satires. Burney's "Trial of Midas" was never published but others, such as one by George Stevens in the *St James Chronicle* (December, 1776) were. Besides taking a conservative approach to judging music, Hawkins' *History* was criticized for its dry prose and "chaotic lack of systematic arrangement." Scholes, *Hawkins*, p. 127.

[21]Lipking, p. 237.

please everybody."[22] This statement takes on a high degree of irony when it is realized that Burney, the desciple of taste, fully intended his *History* to appeal to, and influence, the tastes of as large a readership as possible and was, as we shall later see, largely successful in his attempt.

While Burney did not ignore the value of antiquarian-style research, he was nonetheless more concerned with the state of contemporary music. Almost as if in scorn of authors such as Hawkins, who had an antiquarian reliance on books, Burney states his intention to "fly to Italy... and allay my thirst of knowledge at the pure source."[23] In a similar correspondence with David Garrick, Burney states his goals of being able "to get, from the libraries to the viva voce conversations of the learned, what information I could relative to the music of the ancients; and the other was to judge with my own eyes of the present state of modern music in the places through which I should pass, from the performance and conversation of the first musicians in Italy."[24] No longer

---

[22]Walpole to Lady Ossory, (3 December 1776) Walpole's *Correspondence*, xxxll (New Haven, 1965), p. 333. Also reprinted in Lipking, p. 237.

[23]CB to William Mason (27 May 1770), copy (Osborn Collection). Also reprinted in Scholes, *The Great Doctor Burney*, i, pp. 148-50.

[24]CB to David Garrick (October 17, 1770). Reprinted in Howard Brofsky, "Doctor Burney and Padre Martini: Writing a General History of Music", *The Musical Quarterly* lxv, No.3 (July, 1979), p. 313.

interested in the antiquarian obsessions of past authors, Burney shows his desire to break with the classical traditions that bound Hawkins. In his interest in and admiration of Rousseau and the Encyclopédists, Burney had become a progressive child of the enlightenment, much more so than Hawkins who was still bound to his study of non-contemporary authors.

Despite his conservative approach to music, however, Hawkins was often much more passionate, and much more willing to inflict a personal judgement where literature was concerned.[25] Indeed, he was often quite captious of the critical style of the greatest literary critic of the day, Samuel Johnson. In his *Life of Johnson*, Hawkins is almost passionate in his conviction. "It is nevertheless to be questioned, whether Johnson possessed all the qualities of a critic...he was a scrupulous estimator of beauties and blemishes, and possessed a spirit of criticism, which, by long exercise, may be said to have become mechanical."[26] This decidedly pointed criticism is mitigated, of course, by the fact that Johnson was no longer able to defend himself. James Boswell would later use Hawkins' sometimes less than complimentary opinions of Johnson as an excuse to write his

---

[25]Indeed, literature was a major influence on Hawkins and his *History*. Nowhere is this more evident than the inclusion, in the preface, of a discussion of the attitude towards music that various authors, such as Bacon, Milton, Dryden, Addison and others, expressed in their works.

[26]Hawkins as quoted in Lipking, p. 254.

own biography of Johnson. With respect to allowing oneself more license to criticize only after your target has died, Hawkins is, ironically, rather similar to Burney, who liberally criticized the composers of earlier epochs.

Unlike Burney's direct and engaging prose, Hawkins' writing would often verge on the poetic, including fanciful descriptions of rapture when faced with music that he felt to be truly praiseworthy. Nowhere is this poetic style more in evidence than in an account of Handel's performance on the organ:

> ...But who shall describe its effects on his enraptured auditory? Silence, the truest applause, succeeded the instant he addressed himself to the instrument, and that so profound, that it checked respiration, and seemed to controul [sic] the functions of nature, while the magic of his touch kept the attention of his hearers awake only to those enchanting sounds to which it gave utterance.[27]

In these comments, which seem more typical of the emotive musical criticisms of the high romantic era, Hawkins resorts to a sort of spiritual justification for his praise. There is no mention of the technical aspects of the music which might have inspired such rapture. With such pompous prose we are again reminded of the seriousness with which Hawkins viewed music: this was no mere amusement but something that was capable of controlling "the functions of nature."

---

[27]Hawkins, *History of Music*, ii, p. 912.

In his *History*, Hawkins attempted to overcome the critical concept of taste in two ways. First he would attempt to establish a type of historical consensus of opinion based on the mention that previous writers had made of his subject.[28] Though such a consensus might arguably be viewed as still being based on taste it can also be likened to the legal concept of establishing precedent for a judgement, a method with which Hawkins would have been only too familiar in his profession of Magistrate. The other method Hawkins substituted for subjective taste, especially where little or no historical consensus appeared to exist, was to make an emotional and passionate assertion, as evidenced in his comments on Handel's organ playing. This rhetorical approach also has a legal analogy in the impassioned and emotional pleas made by lawyers to convince judge and jury of the righteousness of their case.

In employing such methods to infer a judgment, Hawkins was using the only avenue of criticism that he felt was justified. Unlike Burney's, his *History* is not the work of a professional musician. As Percy Scholes points out: Burney "had been articled to the leading composer of his day [Arne],

---

[28]It is also interesting to note the contrasting methods of research used by Hawkins and Burney. Burney was reluctant to rework the work of previous authors and was thus motivated to go into the field in order to gain as much first hand information as possible. Hawkins was noticeably tied to pouring over opinions and scholarship of earlier writers. This may also help to explain his preoccupation with older music to near exclusion of contempory, as he had not the body of literature from which to draw information on the contemporary state of music.

whereas Hawkins was articled to an attorney."[28] There is no evidence that Hawkins ever received any formal musical training while Burney, on the other hand, earned his living from the practice of music throughout the entirety of his life. Hawkins could little criticize that which he felt unqualified to produce or even play. Thus he relied on diligent antiquarian research to find the opinions of others to set the precedent for, and lend more credibility to, his own opinions. Burney, however, was secure in the knowledge of his own musical abilities and experience, to the extent that he felt authorized to be able to make an informed and learned judgement on the music of others as well as to instruct the public's taste.

The relative effectiveness of the different approaches to criticism that each man held is difficult to judge. In heavily relying on historical precedent, Hawkins would, at least on the surface, appear to stand the best chance of having his opinions reinforced today, and indeed such is the case with his opinion of Gesualdo and with most of his approbation of early music. Burney, in keeping with his belief in the constant improvement of music over time, naturally dismissed much ancient music as inferior to that of more recent times. Musical historians today have taken a more relativistic approach and rediscovered the value of much of

---

[28]Scholes, *Hawkins*, p. 130.

this early music. Consequently, Burney's opinions regarding the inferiority of ancient music are noticeably out of favour.

Where the reliability of Hawkins' approach breaks down is of course when dealing with music that was more contemporary to him, music which had little or no historical precedent on which to base a judgement. As has been pointed out, Hawkins in these instances would often resort to an impassioned plea to back up his instincts. However, more often than not, Hawkins' solution was simply to avoid or ignore modern music. It is in dealing with contemporary music that Burney's taste, and his reliance on it, may be favourably compared to Hawkins' reliance on historical precedent as a method for judging music.

When Hawkins revelled in the music and composers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he was equally oblivious to the merits of contemporary music. For example, he avoids all mention of Thomas Arne, the leading English composer of the age. In his belief that "harmony received its mortal wound" at the beginning of the seventeenth century with the intrusion of a "vicious taste," Hawkins' system and science of judgement has let him down. In modern times we have been able to recognize the merits of Arne, Gluck, Haydn and others active in Hawkins' day. Ironically, we base much of this recognition precisely on the same consensus of value to which Hawkins did not then have access. Individually we rely on personal taste to guide our

feelings, much as Burney advocated. However, the larger value of composers and their works is ultimately a decision made by cultural consensus as viewed from some sort of historical perspective. This is born out time and time again in music, as in the other arts, where the value of a contemporary artist is recognized only after time has provided the necessary critical perspective.

In relying on taste, Burney was free to recognize the talents of less well known contemporary musicians, such as Mozart and Beethoven, who would later be deified by history. With his highly developed taste, he was able to recognize greatness and to begin the process of establishing the consensus that would ensure that judgement. Taste is a double edged sword, however, and much like his distorted perception of the music of Gesualdo and other early figures, Burney was guilty of exalting the virtues of now all but forgotten contemporary composers such as Charles Frederic Abel (1723-87) and John Galliard (1687-1749).[30]

In short, whether one employs personal taste or historical consensus as the ultimate arbiter in musical judgements, each has its unique strengths and weaknesses. In contrast to Burney and Hawkins however, most critics, lay or professional, would be less likely to be so firmly entrenched in either camp. Most critics instinctively employ, or are at

---

[30]For Burney's discussion of these composers and their compositions, see *History*, ii, p. 1028, p. 989.

least influenced by, both approaches when forming a musical value judgement. It should also be recognized that criticism which heeds individual taste and yet remains able to recognize the value of historical consensus would appear to be the ideal.

That serious scholarly musical criticism has survived to this day seems directly attributable to the presence of individual opinion as championed by Burney. The inherent opportunity for dissent, and the interest and passion generated by that dissent, alone would seem to have insured its survival. In a system such as Hawkins', this opportunity is non-existent. Individuality of opinion and, therefore interest, are both lost. In basing his musical criticism on personal taste Burney was instrumental in formulating and propagating some of the most predominant values that have characterized musical criticism to this day.

# Chapter V

## BURNEY'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN MUSIC CRITICISM

Burney's achievements as a music historian have long been acknowledged. Though subsequent scholarship has much improved the accuracy of information contained in his *History*, it, along with his *Tours*, are still extremely valuable primary sources of eighteenth-century musical thought. In much the same manner as Burney is regarded as one of the first important music historians, he may be just as highly regarded as one of the founding fathers of modern musical criticism.

Burney's accomplishments as a critic and historian have sustained a large amount of controversy. Perhaps the most virulent debate has concerned the relative merit of his *History* in comparison to Hawkins'. This comparison has continued to fuel debate well into our own century and as Kerry Grant has remarked, "biographers, historiographers, musicologists, dilettantes, and students of literature endlessly compare the two works."[1]

---

[1]Grant, p. 285.

One of the most reasoned attempts to resolve this debate was written in 1832 and anonymously published in the *Harmonicon* as part of a biography of Burney subsequent to his death in 1814.

> Between the two rival histories the public decision was loud and immediate in favour of Dr. Burney. Time has modified this opinion, and brought the merits of each work to their fair and proper level--adjudging to Burney the palm of style, arrangement, and amusing narrative, and to Hawkins the credit of minuter accuracy and deeper research, more particularly in parts interesting to the antiquary and literary world in general. Hawkins wrote in the temper, and with all the attachments and even prejudices of an age which, at the moment he gave his labours to the world, had already passed away; so that his musical readers had little or no sympathy with his opinions or feelings. Burney, on the contrary, felt it impossible to expect that music, which, above all other arts, so much depends on imagination and feeling, should ever be permanent; and that although there are, no doubt, particular periods at which one might wish it to stop if it were possible, yet as that wish cannot, perhaps fortunately, be gratified, it is best to comply with necessity, in good humour, and with good grace... In conformity with this feeling Dr. Burney marched with the age, and produced a book which carried its own welcome with it.[2]

This evaluation of the two works is extremely accurate in the recognition of Burney's ability to write with the taste and style contemporary with his age and in its observation that Hawkins suffered from being tied to an older, more conservative, classical literary tradition which had almost

---

[2]*Harmonicon,* X (1832), p. 216. The authorship of this particular biography is unknown, but Kerry Grant speculates that it was by Burney's friend William Ayrton. See Grant, p. 285.

ceased to exist at the time his history was presented to the public.

Despite considerable previous and subsequent debate, Burney nonetheless emerged as the premiere English music historian/critic of his day. Perhaps the greatest proof of the influence of Burney's *History* is found in its imitation by later historians and critics. The complete title of Thomas Busby's musical history of 1819, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Times to the Present, Condensed from the Works of Hawkins and Burney*,[3] testifies to the completeness and importance of both previous works. Similarly, George Hogarth's *Musical History, Biography, and Criticism* (1835) concludes by merely "quoting Burney on the moral value of musical pastimes."[4]

Nor was the influence and imitation of Burney's writings limited to English musical historians. The eminent German historian/biographer Ernst Ludwig Gerber's *Neues historisch-biographisches Lexikon der TonkÜnstler* (1812-13) relied extensively on Burney's *History*. Hans Lenneberg states that "one of the main soures for Gerber II [*Neues historisch-biographisches Lexikon*] was Burney's history," and while he

---

[3]Thomas Busby, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Times to the Present, Condensed from the Works of Hawkins and Burney*, 2 vols. (London: For R. Phillips and sold by T. Hurst, 1819).

[4]Lipking, p. 323.

cites both Hawkins and Burney he "preferred Burney [as] most of the later entries give Burney as his source."[5] Gerber saw Burney as being, unlike Hawkins, the first author to concentrate on writing a history of the art rather than the artists.[6]

Other German writers also borrowed extensively from Burney, often to an extent that would ordinarily be considered plagiarism. One such example was Johann Forkel's *Allgemeine Geschichte der Musik* (1788 and 1810), which was considered by many to contain direct, uncited quotation of Burney's work. This accusation is made evident in an anonymous review of Forkel's work made in the *European Magazine*:

> ...We are told that A Dr. Torkel [sic], in writing a History of Music in that language lately, has so closely adopted his [Burney's] plan, opinions, and manner, in the first volume, chapter by chapter, that people are tempted, notwithstanding the author's science, to call it a translation...[7]

By the time of the last volume of his *History*, Burney was very much aware of Forkel's borrowings and in his chapter entitled "Music in Germany During the XVII Century", after recognizing

---

[5]Hans Lenneberg, *Witnesses and Scholars* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1988), p. 31-32.

[6]Ibid., p. 33.

[7]*European Magazine* XVI (1789), p. 104. Also quoted in Grant, pp. 292-293.

Forkel as "a composer, voluminous musical critic and historian" dispatches him with the following pointed footnote:

> I am sorry that the third volume of this author's *General History of Music* which is confined chiefly to the Music of Germany, was not published before this chapter was written; as it would probably have saved me as much trouble in seeking, selecting, and arranging the materials, as my first volume seems to have saved him, as far as he has hitherto advanced in his work; which from the great resemblance of its plan to that of my own, I can hardly praise with decency.[8]

Though Burney was obviously aggravated by the theft of his scholarship, it nonetheless served to increase his fame and reputation throughout Europe. The fact that so many English and European scholars who followed Burney felt compelled to repeat his work is evidence enough of the importance and impact of his accomplishment. Indeed, as Lawrence Lipking remarked, "a century would pass before their [Burney's and Hawkins'] own work was bettered in England."[9] Undoubtedly the scope and completeness of Burney's and Hawkins' histories must have proven extremely daunting to subsequent historians. It appears that, rather than try to compete, many authors merely adopted the exhaustive scholarship already carried out by Burney and Hawkins. At least to some extent, the incredible industry of both Hawkins and Burney elevated the understanding

---

[8] *History*, ii, p. 961. See also Grant, p. 293.

[9] Lipking, p. 323.

of the art and history of music to such a level as could no longer be completely held in the mind of a single scholar.

Burney's philosophic views on music have, however, not always encountered the same degree of support as did his accomplishments as historian. In the latter part of the nineteenth century the philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) railed against his musical views, though apparently somewhat misguidedly. In seeming support of Spencer's attack on Burney, Julius Portnoy derisively states:

> ...Burney, had among his other resounding judgments on music, declared that it was a sensualistic art of low aesthetic value. In defence of the value of music, Spencer ranked music as the highest of the fine arts..,"as the one which, more than any other, ministers to human welfare."[10]

Whatever else Burney may or may not be accused of saying, the statement that music was "of low aesthetic value" is almost certainly not accurate. Portnoy, and apparently Spencer before him, seem to base their argument with Burney on his belief that "Music is an innocent luxury, unnecessary, indeed to our existence, but a great improvement and gratification of the sense of hearing."[11] While a statement such as this might seem to undermine the potential value of music in everyday existence, it in no way depreciates music's aesthetic value.

---

[10]Julius Portnoy, *The Philosopher and Music* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1954), p. 186. No citation is given for either Burney's statement or Spencer's quote.

[11]*History*, i, p. 21.

On the contrary, it was the elevation of the musical art to a state of esteem comparable with literature and other arts, which motivated Burney to first begin writing his *History*. The mere fact that Burney interspersed so much criticism within his historical commentary only adds to the aesthetic importance that Burney gave to music.

As evidenced by their borrowing of Burney's work, tacitly or overtly, many German scholars such as Forkel, Gerber and others already mentioned, endorsed Burney and his opinions. It is interesting to note, however, that it was also from Germany that Burney's opinions drew much criticism. Many Germans never forgot Burney's somewhat low opinion of them as outlined in his *Tours*. The evaluation by Christoph Daniel Schubart, contributer to *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, published in 1806, is a case in point.

> Burney, doctor of music, has become known in all of Europe by his *Musical Travels* and especially by his *History of Music*. Although his travels contain many correct and profound observations and show an extraordinary knowledge of music, his own opinions are too British, i.e. too bold, and are often absolutely wrong... Burney travelled much too fast and too carelessly, to be able to observe with philosophical composure. He treats us Germans with far too little justice, where it is due. He only lets us have virtuosity and diligence, but denies our musical genius--a defamation which is being refuted throughout the whole history of music... His *Musical History*, which he collected and wrote during twenty years, contains a prodigious amount of erudition, easily available to those with enough money; but the work is full of errors; his

> opinion is not his own, but mostly French, and his "aesthetic feeling" does not mean much.[12]

In this critique, Schubart might well be accused of many of the same national prejudices of which he felt Burney was originally guilty in his *Tours*. The assertion that Burney's opinions are "too British" in the *Tours* and "mostly French" in his *History* certainly underlines the obvious German prejudice of this review. Interestingly, however, Schubart does correctly recognize the influence of the French *Encyclopédistes* on Burney's musical philosophy.

Though his scathing opinions of French music would have seemed to preclude the possibility, Burney also received many accolades from France. The most important French recognition of his work was his election, in 1810, to the French Institute as an honorary Correspondent of its "Classe des Beaux Arts".[13] Burney was particularly thrilled with this award and in 1806, before the award was made official, commented to his daughter Fanny: "I own myself as much astonished as flattered even by the report, if that sh$^{d}$ be all the notice bestowed on a man who has been all his life abusing the music in France,... particularly the Vocal, as violently as Jean Jacques..."[14]

---

[12]Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, ed. Ludwig Schubart (Vienna: J. V. Degen, 1806), p. 258. Translated in Grant, p. 294.

[13]Lonsdale, p. 470.

[14]*Memoirs*, d'Arblay, iii, pp. 389-90. Also see Lonsdale, pp. 459-460.

Despite some criticism, there can nonetheless be little doubt as to Burney's eminence as a critic and historian of music at this time. His professed desire not to alienate his readership apparently succeeded to the point of blinding even the French to his most obvious prejudices.

More recently Burney's critical achievements have from time to time lost some of their lustre. There is no doubt that Burney magnificently fulfilled his own ambitions which, in regard to his *History*, consisted of filling a "chasm in English literature" and developing and instructing public taste. However, with the constant expansion of historical perception Burney's *History* is today often regarded more as a personal record rather than the monumental work which dominated musical historiography in England and much of Europe for more than a century. It is easy for modern scholars to reject Burney's opinions as out of date or, especially in the realm of ancient music, inaccurate. From today's perspective, with two hundred more years of musical scholarship from which to draw upon, it is easy to forget that Burney had only a fraction of the information available to him as has since been compiled. Indeed, many modern critics fail to comprehend that it was from the initial Herculean efforts of scholars such as Burney that modern musical scholarship was able to progress. For Burney, the primary sources of musical art were the manuscripts and prints of music themselves. The collection and copying of these works was one of his prime objectives in

gathering the information necessary for his *History*. Burney and, to a lesser extent, Padre Martini and John Hawkins can be regarded as compiling some of the earliest and most comprehensive collections of music for historical rather than practical performance purposes. They also can be regarded as providing later scholars with the first clear skeleton of a chronology of composers and historical styles of composition. Authors and musicologists who today discredit Burney and his opinions are often blind to his contribution to their field. Jack Westrup accurately points out:

> It has become the fashion nowadays to poke fun at Burney. Writers who have not a tithe of his musicianship or literary skill amuse themselves by ridiculing his opinions because they are supposed to be out of date. This is a tedious pastime.[15]

Despite such observations there exists a solid body of critics who continue to recognize the importance of Burney's achievements. Joseph Kerman, for example, has labelled Burney "the first and one of the shrewdest music historians."[16] Peter Kivy offers this apt summation of Burney and his character as "a kind of musical Dr. Johnson, with great sallies of wit, often censorious, but seldom cruel or undeserved; something of a heroic figure, bouncing back from

---

[15]Jack Westrup, *Purcell*, The Great Composer Series (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1937), p. 273. See also Grant, p. 303.

[16]Joseph Kerman, *The Elizabethan Madrigal; A Compariitive Study* (Philadelphia: AMS, Galaxy Music Corp., 1962), p. 161.

adversity, steady to his artistic standards, honest and square-dealing in financial matters at time when it must have been very easy to be lax."[17]

While admittedly romanticized, such a picture of Burney is, for the most part, accurate. It should however be noted that whether or not Burney was entirely "steady to his artistic standards" is open to serious question. There can be little doubt that just as Burney based his criticism on personal taste, his personal taste was often influenced by that of others. Such an instance has already been outlined in regard to Burney's desire to accommodate the King in his support of Handel's music. Burney also tempered his writing and opinions so as to conform, as much as possible, to the popular opinions of the day, thus, as has been mentioned, avoiding the alienation of his more learned or fashionable readers. This is laid against what must surely be viewed as Burney's most significant critical dictum of judging musical works according to one's individual learned taste. Indeed, it is Burney's seeming desire to be all things to all people that has cast the most doubt on the value of his opinions. The inherent contradiction of a serious critic torn by a desire to ingratiate himself to as many other people as possible is the

---

[17]Peter Kivy, "Introduction" to *An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminister Abbey*, Charles Burney Author, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. vii.

largest problem to be overcome when coming to terms with Burney's criticism.

In coming to any understanding of the true value of Burney's work in contemporary terms, we inevitably are faced with the problem of separating Burney from his subjects. The problem is summed up by Carl Dahlhaus:

> Reading documents in a way that reflects history involves being caught up in a sort of 'source-critical circle' in which knowledge of the persons, things and events spoken of is constantly measured against what is known about the author himself: his reliability and inclinations, the purpose the document was meant to fulfil and the formal tradition it is dependent upon. What Charles Burney has to say about C.P.E. Bach is a source not only on Bach but on Burney as well; and the more precise the text seems in one direction the more reliably it can be interpreted in the other. [18]

If we are to apply Dahlhaus' precept to Burney's case we are acutely aware that Burney's purpose in writing his *History* was to instruct taste and fill what he saw as a gap in English literature. We have also found that Burney had, at least to some degree, begun a new formal tradition in breaking from the previous neoclassical literary traditions in his proponence of the emotional impact of music and on his reliance on individual taste as an arbiter of judgment. It is in measuring Burney's reliability and inclinations that we are left in some doubt as to Burney's true colour.

---

[18]Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*, J.B. Robinson translator (London: Cambridge Press, 1983), p. 34.

In order to gain some measure of this aspect of Burney we are forced to, in turn, weigh the question of whether or not "a work of interpretive scholarship [such as Burney's] suffers from the aesthetic prejudices of the writer" against whether or not "the impulse to make a contribution to knowledge is the more effective for being based on individual preference."[18] Though the answers are not completely clear, it seems evident that in this instance the latter principle overrides the former. The incredible industry with which Burney tackled his mammoth project and his perseverance in the face of many setbacks and bouts of self doubt, are evidence enough of his genuine passion and commitment to his project. Without such sincerely heart-felt motivation and conviction it is extremely unlikely that Burney would have ever engaged in such lively musical commentary as is contained in his writings. It is precisely the colourfulness of his prejudiced opinions and his complete belief in his own taste that give his *History* and *Tours* their importance as critical testaments. Indeed, the initial question of whether interpretive works suffer from the individual prejudices of their author must be written off to a large degree. In any interpretive work, especially one so concerned with, and dominated by, criticism as Burney's, the author's prejudice will always be present to

---

[18]Frank Harrison, Mantle Hood, Claud Palisca, *Musicology* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1963), p. 18.

some degree. It is impossible, indeed undesirable, to divorce ourselves from our individual opinions as authors. It is far more likely that Burney's work would have suffered more had he, like Hawkins, been less willing to expose his prejudices.

A typical modern scholarly view of Burney's prejudicial shortcomings is offered by Lawrence Lipking: "...Burney's attention to his readers suffers from one grave drawback: the course of the *History* is dictated by outside forces."[20] An almost identical conclusion is also reached by Kerry Grant:

> The study of Burney's papers has placed in relief his limitations as an objective observer of the music of his time. His most important failings derive from a single factor: his sometimes practical, or perhaps merely egotistical, need to accommodate himself to an audience of diverse tastes... Judging him in the harshest light, it may be said that his impulse to be agreeable led him to sacrifice objective criticism for praise.[21]

While these assessments of Burney's prejudice are accurate, they also assume the existence of purely objective criticism. Every critic of literature, art, or music is subject to a variety of extrinsic influences. Burney, perhaps only slightly more so than the average scholar of today, tailored his criticism in response to his social aspirations. However, even modern scholars are subject to some of these same pressures. It seems unlikely that any scholar today would write, or

---

[20]Lipking, p. 320.

[21]Grant, p. 305.

attempt to write, a work which he or she knew would be universally unpopular. Indeed it is the "outside forces" which today often provide the necessary motivation to initiate a scholarly work. As authors and critics we are all, to a greater or lesser extent, subject to the same failings as Grant ascribes to Burney. This is not to deny the validity of Grant's claim. Burney's need to accommodate himself to the widest possible audience is undoubtedly his greatest weakness as a critic. However, we need to recognize and understand the larger context of the claim. When Burney calls John Shepherd "superior to any Composer of Henry the Eighth's reign" we do not, or should not, automatically adopt his opinion as fact and attempt to measure the value of his criticism based on our perception of his accuracy. Burney's criticism is remarkable, not for the accuracy or the validity of his judgments but rather for the reasoning, rationality, and methodology which lie behind them. It is in Burney's critical process that we are given the most accurate and informative glimpse into the workings of an eighteenth-century music critic.

A more positivestic view of Burney's writing is to recognize the largely successful attempt that was made to reconcile extremes. It seems almost ironical that Burney wanted to elevate the standing of the art of music to the realm of science while at the same time advocating such a seemingly subjective and unscientific concept as taste. Burney was also able to combine the conservative neoclassical style

of Johnson and other literary figures with the progressive musical opinions of Rousseau and the Encyclopédiste's. Burney also maintained a reputation as progressive, largely because of his endorsement of the principles advocated by the Encyclopédistes, while still supporting increasingly outmoded Neapolitan influenced compositions. However, Burney can also be accused of fostering and promoting extreme points of view in his lifelong proponence of Italianate musical style above all others, and in his chronocentric belief in the superiority of modern music over ancient. Thus we can characterize Burney and his musical criticism as classic reconciliations themselves, progressive yet also conservative.

In reconciling these extreme positions, judging by the wide acceptance his works acheived, Burney can be considered as extremely successful. His works were able to appeal equally to the professional musician and amateur, the aristocracy and the middle class, the scholar and the hobbyist. The wide appeal of works which were so liberally spiced with the pointed opinions of one man is an accomplishment in any era.

That his writings succeeded to such a great extent is due to two reasons. Firstly we must simply recognize the innate rationality and accuracy of Burney's opinions; it is only in the odd instance, such as when dealing with Shepherd, Gesualdo or J.S. Bach, that Burney's criticism has failed to

stand the test of time. In other words, history has proven Burney right far more often than wrong.[22]

The second, and perhaps more important, reason for Burney's success lies in his ability as a writer. Above all else Burney's writing was, and remains, extremely readable. In the style of his long-time friend Samuel Johnson, Burney constantly couches even his harshest criticisms in wit and humour. The following review of his *History*, instigated by Burney but written by his friend Thomas Twining, appeared in the *Monthly Review.*

> To Dr. B, the praise is justly due, of having first begun to supply, in a masterly and able manner, a vacuity in our English literature..,a certain amenity, which is the character of Dr. B's manner of writing, and which may be best defined, as the diametrical opposite to everything that we call dull and dry.[23]

Though this review was written by a friend it nonetheless serves to underline Burney's charm and expertise as an author. These abilities, combined with his experience, taste, and exhaustive research, provided the eighteenth-century reader with a sensible, understandable, and entertaining view of the art to that time. Without seriously avoiding or omitting any topic or era, Burney succeeded in reducing the entire history

---

[22]In some sense this can be viewed as a testament to Burney's belief in the superiority of his own taste or, more generally, in the superiority of a developed, experienced and learned taste.

[23]*The Monthly Review*, no. i (1790), p. 277. Also published in Lipking, p. 321.

of an art into a format that could be understood and appreciated by all. Early in his *History* Burney stated that he "would rather be pronounced trivial than tiresome."[24] Burney was never close to being either and through the innate readability of his text was extremely successful in his desire to appeal to as broad a readership as possible.

To some degree, though perhaps not as strongly as in his own day, Burney's writings have continued to retain their universal appeal. Modern scholars still regularly consult and quote Burney's descriptions and comments on the age. It is even arguable that Burney's usefulness as a historical documentarian has broadened his academic appeal from his own day. Today, with the increasing importance of interdisciplinary studies, Burney's works and criticism have applications to social, literary, and philosophic history and theory, as well as their traditional applications in music.[25] Though his works have long since lost their currency to the non-musician, the timelessness of his entertaining, straightforward, and engaging prose still ensures the lay readers of today easy access to Burney's world.

---

[24]*History*, i, p. 5.

[25]Other important, primarily non-musical, works which have included significant reference to Burney and his critical observations include: Benjamin C. Nangle, 'Charles Burney, Critic', *The Age of Johnson*. Frederick W. Hilles Editor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 99-112. and William and Ariel Durant, *Rousseau and Revolution* (New York; Simon & Schuster, 1967).

Burney's writings also have specific applications in the realm of authentic performance practice. Burney, much more than Hawkins, was a professional musician whose prime concern was with the music of his generation and, perhaps above all else, his writings have always represented important contemporary guides to eighteenth-century music. In successfully trying to avoid dry musical description, Burney's musical depictions are hardly detailed enough to provide accurate information regarding practical performance considerations. Nonetheless, his writings, especially his *Tours*, contain a wealth of information regarding the attitudes and settings which surrounded eighteenth-century concert life in Europe. The importance of a contemporary observer was realized by Burney himself as evidenced by his eloquent statement that "learned men and books may be more useful as to ancient music, but it is only living musicians that can explain what living music is."[26] Much to the frustration of many "authentic" music enthusiasts, we can never experience the music of the eighteenth-century in exactly the same manner as a listener living at that time. In our quest to understand the music and musical life of this era we are now relegated, as Burney was in his study of ancient music, to the study of books. Given the frustration that he himself encountered in

---

[26]Charles Burney as quoted in Harrison, Hood, and Palisca, *Musicology*, p. 16.

trying to accurately piece together the musical history of the ancients, Burney, in his vivid, though by no means infallible, descriptions of the musical life and tastes of eighteenth-century Europe, seems to have anticipated the problems that future scholars would encounter in trying to gather a complete picture of his own age. Burney's statement regarding "living music" is proven accurate if only by the existence of his own work, for indeed there are few, if any, other primary sources from this era that come so close to bringing the age alive for modern scholars.

Burney's criticism should be venerated for its ability to provide us with insight into the musical life as it was, and not as we may imagine it to have been.[27] Even so, we must take into account that Burney's view of music was a decidedly personal one, as his reliance on the superiority of his own taste would dictate. Ultimately, his opinions, whether influenced by outside forces or not, are his own. Roger Lonsdale has aptly proclaimed Burney the "unchallenged arbiter of musical taste in England."[28] This epitaph no doubt would have pleased Burney and, in regard to his being an arbiter of musical taste, it is an accurate assessment. We must, however, be wary of carrying Burney's critical influence too far and

---

[27]Given these terms it is evident that Burney's writings, particularly when related to his contemporary experiences, are extremely valuable to those driven to reconstruct accurate venues and atmospheres in the interest of historical performance.

[28]Lonsdale, p. 223.

must not misconstrue the essentially individual nature of Burney's "taste-based" criticism. Indeed, part of Burney's own efforts were directed towards the recognition and development of an individual-learned taste within all listeners. There were certainly other critical voices in this era, many of whom offered contrasting opinions to those of Burney, C.P.E. Bach and Friedrich Marpurg, for example. None, however, was so eloquent nor, consequently, so influential in enhancing public belief in the accuracy of their judgement. This eloquence, combined with his groundbreaking reliance on taste, also resulted in his pivotal role in the development of the art of music criticism.

Though Burney was never to write musical criticism as such for any of the periodicals or newspapers that were

abundant in London at this time,[28] his engaging style and eagerness to praise or criticize carry many of the marks of modern journalistic music criticism. His reliance on the superiority of his own taste is yet another common denominator he shares with much modern music criticism. For nearly the first time in the history of music criticism Burney represented a qualified musician's point of view, a point of view which has also set the standard for most good criticism of today, though few critics can now claim Burney's status of a full-time working musician and critic. So too can we look to the obvious thought, care and attention that Burney gave to his criticism as evidence of his awareness of the importance of music criticism. Burney's credo of fairness to all and mitigating his criticism of living composers are still prime

---

[28]It is true that Burney never wrote music criticism for any of the periodicals. However he did engage in writing book reviews for *The Monthly Review*, from the years 1785-1802. These reviews were not limited to books on music but included subjects such as Italian literature, art, drama, biographies and memoires of eminent men with whom he had been aquainted, and contemporary English literature. Burney's interest in literature is also manifest in his *History* where Burney felt that music and poetry were "so closely connected that it is impossible to speak of one without the other." This point of view led him, in his *History*, into frequent digressions into Provençal, Italian, and English poetry. His literary criticism is considered much more conservative and traditional in its content than is generally the case with his musical criticism. Burney's critical principles and style were, to an even greater extent than his musical writings, influenced by Samuel Johnson who had dominated English literary criticism to that point. For more information regarding Burney's literary criticism see Benjamin Nangle, "Charles Burney, Critic", *The Age of Johnson*, ed. Frederick Hilles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 99-109.

consideration of serious modern critics. Indeed, to call Burney the father of modern musical criticism seems not to stretch the point.

Finally we must attempt to place Burney within the context of the Age of Enlightenment. With its central emphasis on the study of mankind and the encouragement of human rationality and education to combat prejudice and superstition, the Enlightenment was certainly the most important movement in eighteenth-century thought. Within this movement, however, Burney may be regarded by some as an enigma. In his admiration of Rousseau and the Encyclopédistes, Burney was most definitely allied with the centres of enlightened thought. His *History* is the product of an enlightened mind in its attempt to foster, record and comment on the progress of music, and more generally, civilization. In his *Essay on Criticism* we find an attempt at establishing and codifying principles with which one might improve one's taste. Indeed, it can be said that Burney tried to rationalize taste. However, it may be argued that merely basing his criticism on individual taste accompanied, as it must be, by individual prejudices, is a fundamental contradiction of Enlightenment principles. Ultimately there can be little rationalization of individual musical preference; this view commonly manifests itself in statements such as "to each his own" or "I know what I like". However, to reduce Burney's philosophy to such aphorisms is entirely to miss his point,

which, in direct concord with the goals of the Enlightenment, was the development of learned taste. Though Burney acknowledged the individual right to pleasure or displeasure according to personal whim, his critical principles were intended to raise the level of taste in order to refine the power of discernment, to praise only that which was worthy of praise and, consequently, raise the level of the art and of civilization. The improvement of taste through the application of many of the suggestions found in his *Essay on Music Criticism*, and indeed throughout all of his writings, represents a direct attempt to embody the enlightened ideals of the improvement of the self and of civilization through learning and reason. In the end, however, it is nonetheless ironical that such an enlightened age when Newton, Herschel and others were dismantling the Aristotelian theory of a stationary Earth at the center of the universe also saw Burney, an avid astronomer in his own right, constructing a universe of taste with the individual at its center.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY


Allen, Warren Dwight. *Philosophies of Music History: A Study of General Histories of Music 1600-1900.* New York: Dover Publications, 1962.

Avison, Charles. *An Essay on Musical Expression.* London: For Locker Davis, 1753. Reprint, New York: Broude Brothers, 1967.

_____. *Mr. Avison's Reply to the Author of Remarks On His Essay on Musical Expression.* London: printed for C. Davis, 1753.

Balderston, Katherine. "Dr. Johnson and Burney's History of Music," *Publications of the Modern Languages Association* No.49 (1934), 966-969.

Bate, Walter. *The Achievement of Samuel Johnson.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1955.

Boswell, James. *Life of Johnson.* 2nd edn., Edmond Malone, editor, 4 vols. London: Henry Baldwin for Charles Dilly 1793. Reprint, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934-50.

_____. *Travels in Europe* London, 1764.

_____. *Boswell's London Journal, 1762-1763.* Frederick Pottle, Editor. London: William Heineman Ltd., 1950.

Boomgaarden, Donald R. *Musical Thought in Britain and Germany During the Early Eighteenth Century.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1987.

Bouhours, Père. *La Manière de bien penser.* Paris, 1687. New edn. Paris: Charles-Nicholas Poiriou, 1743.

Boyd, William. *The History of Western Education.* London: Adam & Charles Black, 1969.

Brofsky, Howard. "Doctor Burney and Padre Martini: Writing a General History of Music," *Musical Quarterly* LXV (1979), 313-45.

Brown, A Peter. "The Earliest English Biography of Haydn," *Musical Quarterly* LIX (1973), 339-54.

Brownell, Morris R. *Samuel Johnson's Attitude to the Arts.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

_____. "Ears of an Untoward Make: Pope and Handel," *Musical Quarterly* LXII, (1976), 554-570.

Bukofzer, Manfred F. *Music in the Baroque Era.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1947.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful.* London, 1753, Reprint, Menston, England: The Scolar Press Ltd., 1970.

Burney, Charles. *An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster-Abbey, and the Pantheon. In Commemoration of Handel.* London: Reprinted for the benefit of the Musical Fund, T. Payne and Son and G. Robinson, 1785. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1979.

_____. *A General History of Music, from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period.* 4 vols. London: T. Becket, J. Robson, and G. Robinson, 1776-89. Reprint, 2 vols. Frank Mercer, editor. New York: Dover Publications, 1957.

_____. *The Present State of Music in France and Italy: or The Journal of a Tour through those Countries, undertaken to collect Materials for a General History of Music.* London: T. Becket, J. Robson, G. Robinson, 1771. Reprint, New York: Broude, 1969.

_____. *The Present State of Music in Germany, The Netherlands, and the United Provinces, or The Journal of a Tour through those Countries, undertaken to collect Materials for a General History of Music.* London: T. Becket, J.Robson, G. Robinson, 1773. 2 vols. Reprint, New York: Broude, 1969.

_____. *Dr. Burney's Musical Tours in Europe.* P.A. Scholes, editor, 2 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.

_____. *Music, Men, and Manners in France and Italy, 1770.* H. Edmund Poole, editor. London: Eulenburg, 1969.

_____. *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Abate Metastasio.* 3 vols. London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1796. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1971.

Burney, Francis. *Memoirs of Dr. Burney.* 3 vols. London: E. Moxon, 1832. Reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1975.

Busby, Thomas. *A General History of Music from the Earliest Times to the Present, Condensed from the works of Hawkins and Burney.* 2 vols. London: R. Phillips, 1819.

Calvocoressi, M.D. *The Principles and Methods of Music Criticism.* London: Oxford University Press, 1931.

Careri, Enrico. "The Correspondence between Burney and Twining about Corelli and Geminiani," *Music and Letters* XLII, (1991), 38-47.

Cole, Elizabeth. "Stafford Smith's Burney," *Music and Letters* XL (1959), 35-38.

Cowart, Georgia. *The Origins of Modern Musical Criticism: French and Italian Music 1600-1750.* Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981.

Dahlhaus, Carl. *Foundations of Music History.* J.B. Robinson, translator. London: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Davey, Henry. *A History of English Music.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964.

Dean, Winton. "Criticism." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* ed. Stanley Sadie. London: MacMillan, 1980. Vol. 5, 36-50.

Deutsch, O. E. "Haydn's Hymn and Burney's Translation," *Music Review* IV (1943), 157-63.

Durant, Will and Ariel. *Rousseau and Revolution: The Story of Civilization.* Vol X. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967.

Edwards, F. G. "Dr. Charles Burney (1726-1814): A Biographical Sketch," *Musical Times* XLV (1904), 435-9, 513-15, 575-80.

Elledge, Scott. *Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays.* New York: Cornell University Press, 1961.

Fénlon, Françoise. *Lettre sur les occupations de l'Académie française.* Paris, 1714.

Fiske, Roger. *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Graf, Max. *Composer and Critic: Two Hundred Years of Music Criticism*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1946.

Grant, K.S. *Dr. Burney as Critic and Historian of Music*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983.

Griffin, Sister Mary Ignatia. "The Trial of Midas the Second, or Congress of Musicians by Dr. Charles Burney, 1777." Ph.D. dissertation, Fordham University, 1962.

Gutkelch, A.C. ed. *The Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison*. London: G. Bell & Sons, 1941.

Hagstrom, Jean. *Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1952.

Harris, James. *Three Treatises*. London: H. Woodfall for J. Nourre; and P. Vaillant, 1744. Reprint, New York: Garland Publishing, 1970.

Harrison, Frank, Mantle Hood and Claude V. Palisca. *Musicology*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1963.

Hawkins, Sir John. *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*. 5 vols. London, 1776. Reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1963. 2 vols.

_____. *Life of Samuel Johnson*. London: Chambers for Chamberlain, Colles, Burnet, Wogan, Exshaw, White, Bryne, Whitestone, Moore and Jones, 1787. Reprint, New York: Garland Publishing, 1974.

_____. *The Complete Angler*. London, 1760.

Hazen, Allen T. *Samuel Johnson's Prefaces and Dedications*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937.

Hogarth, George. *Musical History, Biography and Criticism*. New York: J.S. Redfield, C. Hall, 1848. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1969.

Hogarth, William. *The Analysis of Beauty*. (London, 1753), reprint, Menston, England: Scholar Press, 1971.

Hogwood, Christopher and Richard Luckett. eds. *Music in Eighteenth-Century England*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Hughes, Rosemary. "Dr. Burney's Championship of Haydn." *Musical Quarterly* XXVII (1941), 90-96.

Ingarden, Roman. "Artistic and Aesthetic Values," *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*. Joseph Margolis, editor. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987, 117-132.

Jackson, William, of Exeter. *Observations on the Present State of Music in London*. London: Harrison and Co., 1791.

Johnson, Samuel. *A Dictionary of the English Language*. London: W. Strahan for J. and P. Knapton; T and T Longman; C. Hiltch and L. Hawes; A. Millar; and R. and J. Dodsley, 1755. New edn. London: Printed for G & J Offor, 1822.

_____. *Lives of the Poets*. London: E. Newberg, 1779-1781. New edn. George Birbeck Hill, editor. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1905.

Kassler, J.C. "British Writings on Music, 1760-1830: A Systematic Essay toward a Philosophy of Selected Theoretical Writings." Ph.D. dissertation, Musicology, Columbia University, 1971. 2 vols.

_____. "Burney's Sketch of a Plan for a Public Music School," *Musical Quarterly* LVIII (1972), 210-34.

Kerman, Joseph. *Opera as Drama*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1956.

_____. *The Elizabethan Madrigal: a Comparative Study*. Philadelphia: AMS, Galaxy Music Corp., 1962.

Kimmey, John A. *A Critique of Musicology*. New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1988.

Klima, S. Gary Bowers and Kerry Grant, eds. *Memoirs of Dr. Charles Burney 1726-1769*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988.

Lang, Paul Henry. *Music in Western Civilization*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1969.

Lenneberg, Hans. *Witnesses and Scholars*. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1988.

Lipking, Lawrence. *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.

Lippman, Edward A. *Musical Aesthetics: An Historical Reader.* New York: Pendragon Press, 1986.

Lonsdale, Roger. *Dr. Charles Burney: A Literary Biography.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.

_____. "Dr. Burney and the Monthly Review," *Review of English Studies* XIV (1963), 346-358 and XV (1964), 27-37.

_____. "Dr. Burney and the Integrity of Boswell's Quotations," *Papers of the Bibliographic Society of* America LIII (1959), 327-331.

Lovell, Percy. "Ancient Music in Eighteenth-Century England," *Music and Letters* LX (1979), 401-415.

Mackerness, E.D. *A Social History of English Music.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966.

Marshall, Dorothy. *Dr. Johnson's London.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1968.

Murata, Margaret. "Scylla and Charybdis, or Steering Between Form and Social Context in the Seventeenth Century," *Explorations in Music, the Arts, and Ideas.* Eugene Narmour and Ruth Solie, editors. Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1988.

Nangle, B. C. "Charles Burney, Critic," in *The Age of Johnson: Essays Presented to Chauncey Brewster Tinker.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949.

Oldman, Cecil B. "Charles Burney and Louis DeVisme," *Music Review* XXVII (1961), 93-97.

Palisca, Claude V. *Baroque Music.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1968.

Petty, Fred. "*Italian Opera in London, 1760-1800,*" Ph.D. dissertation, Musicology. Yale University, 1971.

Piozzi, Hester Lynch (Thrale). *Thrailiana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale, 1776-1809,* Katherine C. Balderston, editor. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951. 2 vols.

Portnoy, Julius. *The Philosopher and Music.* New York: The Humanities Press, 1954.

Raeburn, Michael. "Dr. Burney, Mozart, and Crotch," *Musical Times* XCVII (1956), 514-20.

Raynor, Henry. *A Social History of Music*. London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972.

Rees, Abraham, ed. *The Cyclopaedia; or, Universal Dictionary of the Arts, Sciences, and Literature*, London: Printed for Longman, Hurst Rees, Orme and Brown, 1802-19. 39 vols.

Roberts, W. Wright. "The Trial of Midas the Second," *Music and Letters* XIV (1933), 302-12.

Robertson, Philip E. J. *Jean Jacques Rousseau's Doctrine of the Arts*. Berne: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1984.

Roscoe, Christopher. "Haydn and London in the 1780's," *Music and Letters* X (1968), 203-12.

Rousseau, Jean Jacques. *A Complete Dictionary of Music*. Translated by William Waring. London: For J. Murray, 1779. Reprint, New York: AMS, 1975.

Rowen, Ruth. "Some Eighteenth Century Classifications of Musical Style," *Musical Quarterly* XXXIII (1947), 90-101.

Scholes, Percy A. *The Great Dr. Burney*. London: Oxford University Press, 1948. 2 vols.

_____. *The Life and Activities of Sir John Hawkins*. London: Oxford University Press, 1953. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1978.

_____. "Notes on a Collection of Burneyana," *Music Review* III (1942), 130-144.

_____. "Burney, Charles," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie. London: MacMillan, 1980. Vol. 3, 488-492.

Schubart, C. F. D. *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst*. Vienna: J. V. Degen, 1806. Reprint, Leipzig: Reclam, 1977.

Schueller, Herbert M. "Imitation and Expression in British Music Criticism," *Musical Quarterly* LXXIV (1948), 550-61.

_____. "The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns", *Music and Letters* XLI (1960), 313-30.

Smollett, Tobias George. *Travels Through France and Italy*. London, 1766. Reprint, London Clarendon, 1979.

Sparshott, F.E. "Aesthetics of Music." *The New Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. ed. Stanley Sadie. London: MacMillan, 1980. Vol. 1, 120-134.

Stevenson, R. "The Rivals-Hawkins, Burney, and Boswell," *Musical Quarterly* XXXVI (1950), 67-88.

Strunk, Oliver. *Source Readings in Musical History: The Classic Era*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1950.

Tuchman, Barbara. *The First Salute*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1988.

Weiss, Piero and Richard Taruskin. *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1984.

Wellek, René. *A History of Modern Criticism 1750-1950*. 5 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955.

Westrup, Jack. *Purcell*. The Great Composers Series. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1937

Wimsatt, W.K. and F.A. Pottle, *Boswell for the Defence*. London: Oxford Press, 1960.

Young, Percy M. *A History of British Music*. London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1931.