



Liner Notes for Selections from **An Evening at Pemberley** The Music of Jane Austen's Heroines

This recital is based on a multimedia project entitled *Music and Morality: The Social Propriety of Music in the Novels of Jane Austen*, which I created as part of my work toward the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the City University of New York, under the guidance of Professor Barbara Hanning, a well-known authority in the field of musical iconography.

Although musical iconography deals primarily with visual symbolism (the depiction of instruments and actual, often identifiable, scores in paintings), my thesis is that Jane Austen employs musical proficiency as a key indicator of principle and morality long before her characters' actions reveal their true natures.

This standard applies primarily to her female characters, since young women were responsible for providing most at-home entertainment and serious musical proficiency was not considered a priority for young men, who were expected to focus on business and sportsmanship. Her heroes all display a genuine appreciation for music, but they never perform; only two male characters, Frank Churchill in *Emma* and John Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility*, actually sing, and we later learn that their motives for doing so are spurious – in both cases, to get close to musically gifted young ladies whom they should not be courting, as each knows he is not in a position to make a public commitment. For men, Austen makes it clear, musical virtuosity is not an honorable pursuit. And even for women, it must be pursued in moderation.

In accordance with the standards of the day, as recorded by contemporary social historians such as Erasmus Darwin, young ladies were expected to have a sufficient degree of musical proficiency to entertain themselves and their close friends and family, but not to arouse

any ambitions of professional performing. Real-life examples from the period, such as the singer Elizabeth Linley Sheridan and the pianist-singer Anne Ford, seem to bear out Austen's premise that too much musical ability tends to get young ladies into trouble (Marianne Dashwood of *Sense and Sensibility* and Jane Fairfax in *Emma* – the respective objects of Willoughby and Churchill – stand out as prime examples). Miss Linley, a celebrated singer, married Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who owned the Drury Lane Theatre – a match that would seem to have made sense – but he forbade her to perform, was flagrantly unfaithful to her, and she died of tuberculosis (and perhaps a broken heart) at the age of 37. Miss Ford was arrested – at her own father's request – when she tried to give a public concert! Though she later married a man who allowed her to perform, she was still the object of some ridicule among her social circle.

Jane Austen seems to follow to the philosophical principle of the golden mean, which was prevalent at the time she was writing, in painting a very clear picture of the level of musical ability she considers appropriate for young ladies – just enough and not too much. Her two best-loved heroines, Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* and Emma Woodhouse in *Emma*, have only a moderate degree of musical skill and Elizabeth at least freely admits that she could play and sing much better if she wanted to. At the same time, some degree of musical proficiency is an absolute necessity for intellectual stimulation and social interaction, and young married women are chided by Austen (notably the silly Mrs. Palmer in *Sense and Sensibility* and the odious Mrs. Elton in *Emma*) for giving up their practicing habits after matrimony.

About the Music

The songs and arias selected for this program were chosen for their relationship with some specific element discussed in my project or in the novels themselves. They require varying degrees of technical skill and reflect the range of musical proficiency which Austen bestows upon her female characters.

Henry Purcell (1658-1695)

The first group of Purcell songs is typical of the music that might have been sung in the evening at home, or at a small party of family and friends. These particular songs are intended to poke fun gently at the dilemmas of Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* as her feelings for Darcy follow their inevitable course from aversion to true love. Each might be associated with a passage from the novel:

What Can We Poor Females Do?

“Women fancy admiration means more than it does.” “And men take care that they should.”

I Attempt from Love’s Sickness to Fly

“Heaven forbid! To find a man agreeable whom one is determined to hate! Do not wish me such an evil.”

Ask Me No More to Love

She was humbled, she was grieved; she repented, though she hardly knew of what... What a triumph for him, as she often thought, could he know that the proposals so proudly spurned only four months ago, would now have been gladly and gratefully received!

Ah, How Pleasant ’Tis to Love

“I am the happiest creature in the world. Perhaps others have said so before, but none with such justice.”

Man Is For the Woman Made

By Elizabeth’s instructions [Georgiana] began to comprehend that a woman may take liberties with her husband, that a brother will not allow in a sister more than ten years younger than himself.

Anonymous, French 18th Century

Ed. J.B. Wekerlin

Trois Bergerettes

L’amour s’envole

Jeunes fillettes

Venez, agréable printemps

The ability to speak French fluently was considered an absolute necessity for young ladies of refinement in Jane Austen’s day, and continued to be so well into the twentieth century. For this reason, if no other (and there are plenty of wonderful reasons to sing French music), some French selections must be included in any representative program of music that might have been sung by Austen’s heroines. However, because England and France were at war, either directly or indirectly, for most of Jane’s short life, and because two of her brothers rose to distinction in the Royal Navy, it seems unlikely that French music would have been terribly popular in her own household or indeed, that newly written French pieces would have been widely available in England during the American and French Revolutions or the Napoleonic Wars. For this reason, the French pieces chosen date from before these conflicts. They are charming, light-hearted, and well within the technical reach of all her fictional heroines.

George Frideric Handel
(1685-1759)

“**Sweet Bird**,” from Handel’s opera *L’Allegro, Il Pensieroso*, is considerably more difficult and would have served as a showpiece for a particularly proficient amateur – a lovely and useful way of presenting the young lady to potential suitors at a family soirée.

By the addition of flute and continuo, a small ensemble could be created – possibly including gentlemen friends or even a “ringer” brought in to play one of the instruments. Handel’s music, both sacred and secular, was extremely popular throughout Britain and would almost certainly have been a staple for home representation. This aria is not intrinsically demanding, but may be ornamented to a greater or lesser degree depending on the talents and range of the singer.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

Selections from *Le nozze di Figaro*

Voi che sapete
L’ho perduta, me meschina
Deh vieni, non tardar

The three arias from *Le nozze di Figaro* are among Mozart’s most accessible for amateur singers. While a relatively untrained singer can navigate most of the Mozart *soubrette* arias with little trouble, these three pieces are interesting in that they are typically sung onstage by three different voices: lyric mezzo-soprano (“Voi, che sapete” – Cherubino), *soubrette* soprano (“L’ho perduta, me meschina” – Barbarina), and lyric-coloratura soprano (“Deh vieni, non tardar” – Susanna); yet their ranges and tessituras are virtually identical. In fact, Susanna’s “Deh vieni” requires her to sing a major third lower than Cherubino’s “Voi, che sapete”, although Susanna is almost always cast as a soprano (Cecilia Bartoli being an exception) and Cherubino as a mezzo (though sopranos have long appropriated this charming aria as a recital and concert selection).

We know that “Deh vieni” was written for the English singer Nancy (Anna) Storace, who returned home in the 1790s and presumably would

have done a great deal to popularize Mozart's music in Britain. Although audiences and conductors obviously demand greater technical skill when these arias are sung by professionals, the vocal lines and ranges, as well as the accompaniments, of all three are simple enough to make them entirely feasible for amateur performers. This hardly seems unintentional, as it would have served to promote sales of the music for the publisher and a broader familiarity with the composer's work. "Voi, che sapete" was chosen for Jennifer Ehle as Elizabeth to sing (in English) in the 1995 BBC production of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Joseph Haydn
(1732-1809)

She never told her love
The Mermaid's Song
My mother bids me bind my hair

The Haydn songs are charming and simple, and would have served very well in an at-home setting. Haydn spent considerable time in England and wrote a number of works there including several symphonies, his oratorio *Creation* (in which some of the solos were written for Nancy Storace), and the *Lord Nelson Mass*, commemorating the heroism of the British Navy in its battles against Napoleon.

It seems quite likely that Jane Austen might have attended a concert of one of these works, and certainly that she would have been familiar with some of Haydn's music (she herself was an accomplished amateur pianist). Jane's two naval brothers, Frank and Charles, are represented handsomely in her novels by Captain Frederick Wentworth (*Persuasion*) and Lieutenant William Price (*Mansfield Park*). Thus, it seems appropriate to include a nod to Haydn in this program. "My mother bids me bind my hair" was also featured (perhaps butchered is a better term!) in the BBC *Pride and Prejudice* as one of Mary Bennett's display pieces at the Netherfield ball.

"**Lo, Here the Gentle Lark**" has been a much-loved concert piece for coloratura sopranos since it was written in the early nineteenth century. Sir Henry Bishop wrote many songs in what Sergius Kagen calls "an old-fashioned" style, meaning that his work harked back to the eighteenth century — which may have been an intentional exercise in nostalgia for what must have been a simpler time (pre-Industrial Revolution). The theme of resistance to change in the form of increasing industrialization and urbanization recurs in Austen's work, especially *Mansfield Park*. The Bishop piece, like the Handel aria, demands a higher degree of

technical skill and would have probably been performed at a more formal party with flute and piano accompaniment. Like “Sweet Bird,” it requires both singer and flute to emulate the sounds of nature, evoking the popular pastoral themes of the day — in an era when “singing like a bird” was a compliment and not an insult! The piece was actually first performed in 1819, two years after Jane Austen’s death and one year after the posthumous publication of her last novel, *Persuasion*. However, we may infer from the conclusions of Austen’s novels that Darcy and Elizabeth, Mr. Knightley and Emma, and her other heroes and heroines lived happily ever after, no doubt continuing to hold musical *soirées* in their homes for many years to come. Thus, I trust I may be forgiven for including this quintessentially English piece, since it has served singers of my voice type so faithfully for nearly two centuries.

Taken together, these selections represent a spectrum of music with which both Jane Austen and her imaginary characters would have been expected to be familiar. The choices range from those that would have been popular and available early in her life (the Purcell and Handel) to those that would have been composed and performed toward the end (the Haydn and Bishop). None is outside the realm of possibility for an amateur performer — perhaps with some simplified ornamentation in the more florid arias — and all might well have been heard in the halls of Hartfield, Netherfield, or Pemberley.

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- *English Translations* -

L'Amour s'envole

Love is but a timid child,
Coldness frightens him.
Freedom alone may guide him
In the ways of the heart.

While free he fears nothing,
Laughter and gladness follow him;
But if he's once constrained,
He'll fly away and not return.

Love is but a timid child, etc.

Jeunes fillettes

Girls, seize the moment!
Violets bloom only in spring.
La, la, la, la riette,
La-ri-la-lon-la.

Flowers blossom, then they fade and die;
So does love quickly pass us by.

Girls, seize the moment, etc.

When you are young, let a lover woo;
But if he's fickle, you be fickle, too!

Girls, seize the moment, etc.

Venez, agréable printemps

Oh, hasten, fair springtime,
Reviving all nature.
With brilliant verdure
Decorating the meadows and fields.

The gardens are covered with flowers,
The roses are ready to bloom;
Opening beneath dawn's tender rays.

A thousand amorous nightingales
Are singing in their bowers,
Telling us in their language
That to love is to live!

Voi, che sapete

You know the answer, you hold the key;
Love's tender secret share with me.
Ladies, I beg you, share it with me.

This new sensation I undergo,
It is so different from all I know.
Filled with excitement, walking on air;
First I am happy, then I despair.

One moment chilly, next time aflame;
Not for a moment am I the same.
I am pursuing some sunny ray,
But it eludes me, try as I may.

I can't stop sighing, hard as I try,
And then I tremble, not knowing why.
From this dilemma, I find no peace,
And yet I want it never to cease.

You know the answer, etc.

L'ho perduta, me meschina!

I have lost it, Heaven help me,
I have lost the little pin.
How on earth could that have been?

I can't find it! I can't find it!
This is awful, simply awful,
Oh! What trouble I am in.

I keep looking, but cannot find it.
This is dreadful, I am desperate,
This is my unlucky day!

Cousin Susanna, and the Count,
What will they say?
What will they say?

Deh vieni, non tardar

This at last is the moment,
So divine and so cherished,
I've longingly awaited.
Soon he will come here,
With loving arms to embrace me,
And no fear shall mar our rapture!
Close to the heart of Nature's friendly powers,
Delicate fragrant flowers,
The pine trees, the sky surrounds us.
Aiding the lovers,
Night casts her veil around us.

Beloved, don't delay, the night is falling.
Hasten where love's delight is sweetly calling.
Until the stars grow pale, and night is waning.
While the world is still a calm is reigning.

The brooklet rustles on, the breeze is blowing.
And the timorous heart with hope is glowing.
The flowers all with shining dew are gleaming,
While the world is still asleep and dreaming.

Come, my beloved! The starry sky above you.
Come, beloved, with all my heart I love you.

