

CECILIA BURNNEY

The Forgotten Music

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Cecilia Burney (1788-1821) was the daughter of Charles Rousseau Burney and Esther Burney and the granddaughter of esteemed musicologist Dr. Charles Burney. Charles was the nephew and pupil of Dr. Burney, a musician and music teacher to aristocratic ladies. His wife Esther (also known as Hetty) was a harpsichordist and music teacher. Cecilia likely received musical instruction from her father Charles.

The late eighteenth century saw the transition from the harpsichord to the piano or piano-forte with manufacturers such as Broadwood and Érard continually making advances in the mechanism and construction of the instrument. Charles Burney wrote in detail on this transition in his article "Harpsichord" in *The Cyclopædia*.¹ With the arrival of Johann Christian Bach in London in 1762 and his influence on Queen Charlotte, the embracing of the pianoforte as a concert instrument was launched. Charles Burney himself purchased an instrument by Broadwood, along with Muzio Clementi (1752-1832).² Given the exposure to music, it is not surprising that Cecilia would follow in the family footsteps.

With the transition to the piano came an interest in Sonatas written initially for the harpsichord, then the harpsichord or piano, and finally the piano. Composers explored the genre, taking advantage of the extended range of the instrument, its ability to produce wide dynamic ranges and its ability to sustain the tone. English pianos featured a heavier touch and a fuller and more powerful tone than the Viennese pianos produced at the time. They also had a longer "after-ring" with composers having to notate shorter note values to facilitate a clearing of the tone where rests are inserted. The English pianos also had a more powerful treble range allowing melodic lines to sing out.

The Piano Sonata Op 2, 'Le séjour agréable' is one of the few works that remain by Cecilia Burney. The Sonata was bound in a privately owned collections of scores, the volume collected by Miss Margaret "Peggy" Hazlitt, c. 1795-1817 who was the sister of well-known author and critic, William Hazlitt. Most of the scores in this volume have watermarks dating from 1811 to 1817. After Peggy died in 1841, the score was left to the family she had lived with and was taken to Australia when they emigrated in the late 1840's. The volume is currently housed in the Sydney Living Museums (Historic Houses of Trust of New South Wales). A scan of the score can be found on the Petrucci Music Library IMSLP website and is also published by One Eye Publications in a collection, "Keyboard Sonatas by Women: Classical Era."

The Sonata is presented in two movements, an *Andantino cantabile* and a Rondo, *Allegro Scherzando*. The first movement is composed in Sonata-Allegro form without the Development section in D Major in 2/4 time. The first theme is presented in the Tonic key beginning with a

¹ Charles Burney, "Harpsichord," in *The Cyclopædia; or, Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature*, ed. Abraham Rees, vol. 17 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1819), 344.

² Clark, K, 2019 'The Early Pianoforte School in London's Musical World: 1785-1800: Technology, Market, Gender and Style' PhD, University of Toronto, Toronto.

piano dynamic. After the initial chord, the second and sixth measures feature a short descending scale passage followed by dotted rhythm and culminating with a *crescendo* into *fortissimo*. (Example 1) The initial sixteen bars are repeated an octave lower.

Example 1 (mm. 1 – 8)

Andantino cantabile



The Bridge passage that follows continues the dotted rhythm in the right hand. There follows a return of the descending scale passage and a modulation into the dominant key of A Major. An Italian Augmented 6th chord is used in m. 63, indicating a more sophisticated knowledge of harmony.

The second theme is presented in A Major and again utilizes scalar passages, this time ascending followed by a descending chordal arpeggiation. (Example 2)

Example 2 (mm. 70 – 77)



This passage is sixteen measures in length, followed by a return of the initial theme, this time in the dominant key and again culminating with a *crescendo* into *fortissimo*. There follows a seventeen-measure retransition alternating between dominant and tonic chords in A Major, a modulation back to D Major and a minor subdominant chord in measure 15. The passage ends with a dominant 7th chord in D Major and a fermata.

The Recapitulation ensues with the first theme in the Tonic key this time only presented once. The bridge passage follows, modulating to E minor in the fifth measure, then into A Major and returning to D Major in measure 151. Measures 151 through 158 serve as a cadenza followed by a Coda with material from the first theme. The movement concludes with an *accelerando* culminating in a *fortissimo*.

The second movement is a playful Rondo in D Major with four episodes and in triple meter. The main theme incorporates both dotted quarter and dotted eighth notes with an upward motion, capturing the *scherzando* character of the movement. (Example 3)

Example 3: (mm. 1 – 8)

Allegro Scherzando



The first four measures are repeated, this time with turns on the dotted quarter note. The second half of the theme continues the dotted rhythm, this time with a downward motion.

The first episode is in A major and utilizes triplets in the right hand for 4 measures, followed by alternating triplets between the hands for six measures. In measure 27, Burney continues the triplet rhythm in the left-hand accompaniment and incorporates the dotted rhythm in the right hand. Measures 30 through 37 revert to solely triplet rhythm.

The theme returns in the tonic key, now with turns adorning the dotted quarter notes in the first phrase and unadorned quarter notes in the second phrase. The second half of the theme is the same as initially stated.

Episode two remains in the tonic key and continues the dotted rhythm. Triplets in the right-hand return in measures 64 and 65, followed by the dotted rhythm to conclude the episode.

The theme once again returns, presented as in the initial statement for nine measures, then inserting a brief cadenza marked *scherzando* with the dotted rhythm in the right-hand figures. The initial eight measures of the theme return, the dotted quarter notes decorated with turns.

The third episode again remains in the tonic key but alternates the measures with the triplet and dotted rhythm.

A brief return to the main theme (eight measures) is followed by the fourth episode of thirty measures, the longest in the movement. The rhythm in the right-hand has alternating passages of dotted rhythm and triplets. At measure 124 an *ad lib* is indicated, perhaps allowing a brief improvisation by the performer. Thereafter, the left-hand becomes more forceful with octaves and larger chords. The episode concludes with a *scherzando* indication in measure 142.

The final statement of the theme is brief and unadorned. The movement ends *forte*.

Burney has several dynamic indications in the first movement but few in the second movement. The harmony is primarily diatonic with a few secondary chords inserted. The result is pleasing to the ear and the lack of dynamic indications allow for interpretation by the performer.

The only other score this author has located is “Lady Avondel’s Song”, the words taken from “The Refusal” by Mrs. West, composed and respectfully dedicated to Mrs. Holroyd, a family friend. It was published in London by Chappell & Co. in 1817. Copies are held in the University of Glasgow Library, the University of St Andrews Library and the British library.

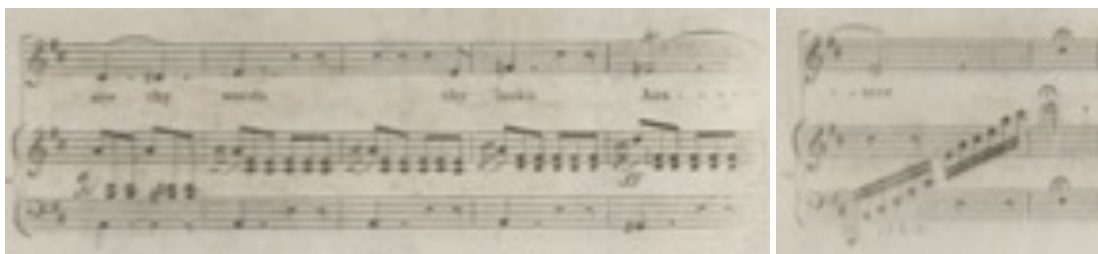
Oh tell me, Oh tell me have I, have I lost they Heart.
Cold are they words, they looks Austere.

Fear not, Fear not, Fear not the secret to impart.
No loud complaints shall reach thine Ear.
No loud complaints shall reach thine Ear.
Unseen by Thee, Unseen by Thee my tears shall flow.
Till sorrow wastes my youthful bloom.

Life will not always strive with woe
And grief is silent in the Tomb.

The song is set in D Major, in 6/8 time with a *Lento* tempo indication. It opens with a piano introduction seemingly innocent with a lilting rhythm and diatonic harmony. When the voice enters, the tension is evident by the second measure with the voice rising on the repeat of the words, “Oh tell me.” The words “lost thy heart” are punctuated with rests between the words. The piano begins the image of coldness with arpeggios on beat one and the voice has a chromatic ascent on the words, “Cold are they words, thy looks..” and finally a trill and *fortissimo* marking on “Austere.” An arpeggio in the piano is concluded with a fermata. (Example 4).

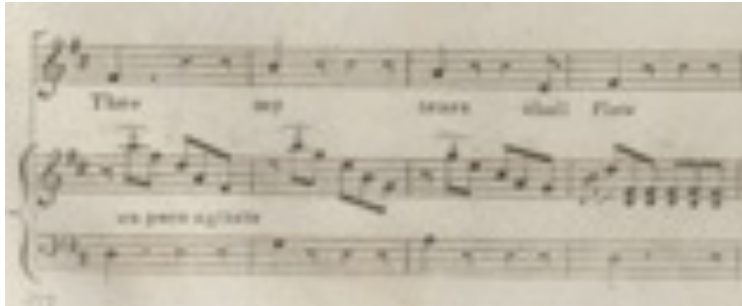
Example 4: (mm. 19 – 25)



The passage that follows is marked *dolce* and the words, “Fear not, Fear not, Fear not the secret to impart” again rise to a to a *fortissimo* indication and trill on “impart.” The ensuing passage begins with a piano dynamic with a fermata on the second statement of “Ear.”

The tension quickly builds in the words “Unseen by Thee my tears shall flow,” with an *un poco agitato* in the piano and rests separating the words. (Example 5).

Example 5: (m. 45 – 48)



An extended arpeggio in the piano occurs on the words “bloom.” For the final words “in the Tomb” the composer has indicated *perendosi* and a *pianissimo* dynamic. Another extended arpeggio occurs in the piano on the final word.

“The Refusal” is a highly expressive song with a wide range of dynamics and word painting in contrast to the Sonata. The writing would seem to indicate that these are not the first attempts at composition. Women were not encouraged to pursue higher levels of learning. “A little music, a little drawing, and a little dancing were sufficient; and these should be only slightly pursued so as to distinguish a lady of fashion from an artist.”³ It was also the custom of the Burney family to burn manuscripts of children at their fifteenth birthday.⁴ Given Cecilia’s short life, there may not have been a great deal of music written or preserved. What remains provides evidence of musical ability and training. We are left to wonder what else she produced or might have produced.

³ Hemlow, Joyce: *The History of Fanny Burney*, Oxford, 1958, pg 265.

⁴ Hemlow, pg 1