

# Harpsichord & *fortepiano*

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# The keyboard music of Charles Burney

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Illus.1 Organ by John Snetzler (1754), St Margaret, King's Lynn (photo: Francis Knights, 2014).

Charles Burney (1726-1814) was both a church organist and a busy keyboard teacher for the greater part of his career. He composed and published sets of works for organ, harpsichord and piano in a variety of styles, most of which were likely intended for his students. Burney's fame as a historian and author has long overshadowed his work as a composer, and this article considers his keyboard music, the instruments he owned and wrote for, and places his music in the context of that by his contemporaries.

Burney's own musical tastes – variously, reactionary or progressive – were very dependent on his attitude to repertoire and to national styles, for example favouring early 18<sup>th</sup> century Italian opera over modern French opera, but admiring the new German styles in instrumental music.<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Lockwood summarized this colourfully but inaccurately in 1930 as 'Italians for melody, Germans for harmony, and Britons nowhere'.<sup>2</sup> As a historian, Burney saw himself having a responsibility

to instruct in these matters; in the words of Kerry Grant, 'a good and true taste was developed by instruction from those possessed of the ability to notice, judge, and appreciate what is beautiful, appropriate, harmonious and excellent in art'.<sup>3</sup> The role of historian as cultural educator rather than objective presenter of a factual narrative is not one that would be understood today, but in one respect at least Burney was forced to nail his colours firmly to the mast in terms of style and fashion: his own compositions. While these have not found much favour in modern times,<sup>4</sup> new editions and facsimiles of a number of his printed and manuscript works,<sup>5</sup> together with some recordings, now makes it possible to make a better assessment of Burney the composer, and especially of his keyboard works. For example, the organ collections have been edited by Pierre Gouin<sup>6</sup> and by David Patrick,<sup>7</sup> the piano duet sonatas have recently been recorded by Anne Clemente and Susanna Piolanti on a Kirkman square piano<sup>8</sup> and a selection of organ works is available from Fernando de Luca.<sup>9</sup> Recordings are very important in making fair judgments about repertoire, as professional performances can often make a case for music whose qualities are not evident just from the printed page; Mitzi Meyerson's recording of Richard Jones' Suites (1732), Julian Perkins of Nares' sonatas (1747) and Christopher Hogwood of those by Arne (1756) are all good examples.<sup>10</sup>

Burney received his first keyboard instruction from his organist half-brother James and from Edmund Baker (organist of Chester Cathedral from 1727-1765), and by the age of 17 was 'incessantly' practicing or composing on his sister's old spinet,<sup>11</sup> before being apprenticed to leading composer Thomas Arne (1710-1778) in 1744, a somewhat unsatisfactory experience. From 1746 Burney spent two years providing music for aristocrat Fulke Greville (1717-1806),<sup>12</sup> and at that time he first came across the newly-invented fortepiano, an instrument built by Roger Plenius (1696-1774).<sup>13</sup>

His first published collection was (as was common in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century) a set of trio sonatas (1748),<sup>14</sup> which were self-published; they are in the expected Italianate manner, with interesting chromatic touches and a good understanding of the violin. This was followed by a set of Handelian songs and a cantata on amorous themes as Op.2. There are few orchestral works (an early organ concerto has been lost), but the Sinfonia in C minor (for horns, oboes, bassoons, strings and continuo, with an

additional obbligato oboe) shows what he had learned as an orchestral player in his youth, playing violin or viola in Handel's band.<sup>15</sup> His other music included sets of duets (1754), concertos (c.1760) and chamber music (1769 and 1772). How popular any of these works were is hard to say, but certainly the keyboard pieces were not much copied in manuscript<sup>16</sup> or reprinted. Some, possibly all, of his keyboard music was written for students, or at least used for teaching purposes. At times, Burney would teach for more than twelve hours a day, and between the 1760s and 1780s gave up to 50-60 lessons a week, at as much as a guinea a lesson.<sup>17</sup>

Publication was important for Burney's status and credibility; as a mostly self-taught musician and theorist, he saw that the musical 'doctors' (Croft, Boyce, Greene, Arne, Nares and so on) were respected in Georgian society, and evidently made it his goal both to be a published composer and a Doctor of Music. He achieved his aims triumphantly, and became affluent, well known and well respected in London's musical and literary circles.

Burney was both an entertaining writer and a notoriously opinionated judge of music, and many of his pithy opinions on his predecessors and contemporaries are still quoted extensively in music histories two and a half centuries later. To a considerable extent, his views have formed our modern understanding of music in 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain. While his censure of (for example) 'Dr. Blow's Crudities'<sup>18</sup> is completely understandable to late 18<sup>th</sup> century harmonic sensibilities, as is (to Georgian ears) his complaint about Francois Couperin's highly-ornamented *clavecin* works ('so crowded and deformed by beats, trills, shakes, that no plain note was left'),<sup>19</sup> what Thomas Kelway (c.1702-1782) did in his *Six Sonatas for Harpsichord* (1764) to deserve the comment, 'perhaps, the most crude, awkward, and unpleasant pieces of the kind that have ever been engraved',<sup>20</sup> is not easily comprehensible today. His thoughts on performance are also interesting, including his astonishment at hearing organist Claude Balbastre (1727-1799) playing 'hunting pieces and jigs' between Magnificat verses in Paris in 1770.<sup>21</sup> Burney's enthusiasms were equally warm, as for the touch of Handel the keyboard player: 'so smooth, and the tone of the instrument so much cherished, that his fingers seemed to grow to the keys';<sup>22</sup> or for the sonatas of Johann Schobert (c.1720-1767) ('his pieces for the harpsichord having been for many years the delight of all those who could hear or play them').<sup>23</sup> Quite remarkably, he even appreciated the complex and arcane works of Bach pupil Johann Gottfried Mützel (1728-1788), calling his duet for duet for two harpsichords 'the noblest composition of its kind in the world'.<sup>24</sup>

## Burney's instruments

The keyboard was ever-present throughout Burney's career, and his observations on the changes in preference for instruments during this period of major musical aesthetic development are particularly valuable. Burney's trips to the continent confirmed his Anglocentric opinion of the superiority of English harpsichord (if not organ) building,<sup>25</sup> and his memorable comment on the numerous ottavini he found in Italy ('the keys are so noisy, and the tone so feeble, that more wood is heard than wire')<sup>26</sup> has cast a pall over the reputation of these little 4' instruments from which they are only now starting to recover. His particular interest in keyboard instruments is shown in the numerous references in his travel books<sup>27</sup> and the articles he wrote at end of his career for Abraham Rees' massive *Cyclopaedia*, and he was friends with leading keyboard makers, visiting their workshops and sharing his opinions of their work. For example, Burney wrote to Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826),<sup>28</sup> then the American Minister Plenipotentiary in Paris, on 20 January 1787<sup>29</sup> with reference to a harpsichord the latter had ordered from Kirkman, and which Burney was keeping an eye on: 'I visited Kirkman from time to time whenever I came to town, and saw the Instrument in every stage of its construction', and he found the results admirable: 'As a Harpsichord I never heard a better instrument or felt a more even and pleasant touch. The Tone is full, sweet, and equally good through the whole scale', even admiring the special celestine Stop (using a complex mechanism with resined horsehair) added by patentee Adam Walker, with some difficulty and against the advice of Kirkman: 'it is much more easily used than any I ever tried'.<sup>30</sup>

## Organs

Burney held four organist's posts during his career, for more than half a century in total; 'The organ provided a background to Burney's whole musical life' (Percy Scholes).<sup>31</sup> His first post was at St Dionis Backchurch in the City of London (1749-1751); then St Margaret's, King's Lynn (1751-60), where he moved for his health; Oxford Chapel<sup>32</sup> (1773-c.1802); and finally the Royal Hospital Chelsea (1784-1814),<sup>33</sup> at that time known as Chelsea College.<sup>34</sup> Burney was very fortunate to have access to substantial instruments there by some of the leading builders of his day: Harris, Schrider and Snetzler.

[1] The church of St Dionis, Backchurch, London, built in 1674 to designs by Christopher Wren after the previous church was destroyed in the Great Fire of London, was itself demolished in 1879; the 1724 organ was the last one built by Renatus Harris (c.1652-1724),



assisted by his son John.<sup>35</sup> The specification can be found in the Sperling Notebooks,<sup>36</sup> and the three manuals had 28 stops, including a large selection of reeds. The first organist for the new instrument was composer Philip Hart (in post 1724–1749), who Frank Dawes describes as ‘a composer of very real distinction’.<sup>37</sup> The parishioners who elected the young Burney to the post doubtless hoped they had secured a successor of similar ability.<sup>38</sup>

[2] The Priory Church of St Margaret, King’s Lynn originally had a 1677 Dallam organ on the central screen, which had been transferred from a Cambridge College.<sup>39</sup> Damage caused by the collapse of the tower in 1741 meant that a new instrument was required (the old one was ‘execrably bad’, according to Burney),<sup>40</sup> and a substantial new three-manual, 27-stop west gallery<sup>41</sup> organ was installed by John Snetzler (1710–1785) in 1754 (illus.1). By then Burney had been there for two years, and it is likely that the commission was given shortly after his arrival – Burney would have known Snetzler through his connection with Kirkman – and that he had some hand in designing its specification; Snetzler gained the preference rather than the Minster purchasing a second-hand Harris instrument from Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin.<sup>42</sup> As well as a Dulciana on both Choir and Swell, unusual at this date, Snetzler’s instrument had a wide GG/AA-e<sup>3</sup> compass, and the first 16’ manual Bourdon seen in Britain.<sup>43</sup> It was his first major church instrument, and helped establish his reputation. The opening recital was favourably reported in the press: ‘Last Sunday the new Organ at King’s Lynn, Norfolk, erected in St. Margaret’s Church by Mr. John Snetzler, of Oxford Road, was opened by Mr. Burney, and gave the utmost Satisfaction, being for Sweetness of Tone and Variety of Stops, universally esteemed one of the finest Instruments in England’ (*London Evening Post*, 28 March 1754).<sup>44</sup>

[3] The organ of Oxford Chapel was built in 1724 by Christopher Schrider (c.1680–1751), and had two manuals and just nine stops (including a three-rank Cornet and a Cremona);<sup>45</sup> it was replaced by a Hill instrument in 1852. An engraving by Hogarth (illus.2) shows the organ in the background; it has a three-tower case in the Father Smith manner, but unlike Schrider’s 1712 instrument at the Chapel Royal, Hampton Court Palace, has a small central tower (if the engraving is accurate) rather than a large one. William Boyce had been organist of Oxford Chapel in 1734–1736. The building, designed by James Gibbs in 1722, was a Chapel of Ease to Marylebone Parish Church, and the modest demands on the organist were probably such that Burney was able to hold this post in tandem with his role at Chelsea College without difficulty.

[4] Renatus Harris built an organ for the chapel of the Royal Hospital Chelsea in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century; only the case survives, and houses the present modern instrument. The original specification is not recorded, but it is likely to have been similar (if smaller) than his St Dionis, Backchurch instrument. It was rebuilt by Gray 1811 or 1818 (the date is uncertain), which suggests major work was necessary by then to bring the instrument up to modern requirements – a small pedalboard was added, for example.



Illus.2 The interior of Oxford Chapel. Plate 2 of William Hogarth’s *Industry and Idleness* (1747).

### Harpsichords

Tradition associates several harpsichords with Burney, including a now-lost instrument by Merlin, his piano-builder, mentioned in a letter of 1775.<sup>46</sup> The most important of these (in the sense that it was very likely his, and still survives) is of 1788.<sup>47</sup> This was a standard late model built by Jacob and Abraham Kirkman, with a compass of FF-F, two manuals, 8’8’4’ and lute stops,<sup>48</sup> together with a Venetian swell to provide dynamics. The provenance from the original owner (‘reputed to have belonged to Burney’) is via a Mr Wilson, who sold it to the British Museum keeper, antiquarian and instrument collector Edward Croft-Murray (1907–1980)<sup>49</sup> for £300; its present whereabouts are unknown. This is almost certainly the one seen by Ralph Kirkpatrick<sup>50</sup> on a visit to Britain in the summer of 1947. Why Burney would have acquired a new harpsichord in his early sixties is a mystery, since he would surely have already owned such an instrument, a normal five-octave double-manual.

A second Kirkman associated with him is now in the Beurmann Collection.<sup>51</sup> This is a near-identical instrument in terms of design and specification, and was a new harpsichord chosen by Burney in 1768 for the tuition of two fortunate 14-year-old girls in Wendover,





Illus.3 Charles Burney, Largo from Sonata No.1 in F (1777).

Buckinghamshire. It remained in that family, and in 1855 was demonstrated to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert by pianist Charles Salaman (1814-1901); author Malcolm Salaman (1855-1940) then inherited it, after which it passed out of the family.

The association of Burney with two instruments by the Kirkman family of London (together with Shudi, the leading and most productive English harpsichord makers of the period), suggests that Kirkman instruments are particularly appropriate for the performance of Burney's music. By 1810 Burney no longer had a double-manual harpsichord, as Wesley found when he wished to demonstrate the Goldberg Variations to him (see below): 'As Burney did not possess the requisite two-manual harpsichord, Wesley proposed that he and Novello should play the Variations as a duet on two pianos, using Burney's Broadwood grand and another similar instrument which they would have specially transported to Chelsea for the purpose'.<sup>52</sup>

#### *Fortepianos*<sup>53</sup>

Burney appears to have been an early convert to the piano (as well as Greville's piano, he became familiar with the instrument at the house of Samuel Crisp (1707-1783) in the 1760s),<sup>54</sup> and at the end of his life was only

agreeing with accepted wisdom in noting that 'the harsh scratching of the quills of a harpsichord can no longer be borne'.<sup>55</sup> Although outmoded by new musical styles and requirements, the instrument did not completely die out, as Peter Holman has recently shown.<sup>56</sup>

Burney bought a piano from instrument maker and inventor Joseph Merlin (1735-1803)<sup>57</sup> in 1777; they were friends, and Merlin was responsible for the upkeep of Burney's keyboard instruments in London. The compass was extended for the purpose of duet playing, and the instrument eventually bequeathed to his musical daughter Esther: 'My large Piano Forte with additional keys at the top and bottom originally made by Merlin with a compass of six octaves the first that was ever constructed expressly at my desire for duets à quatre mains in 1777'.<sup>58</sup> What these extra notes outside the standard FF-F compass (probably CC-c<sup>4</sup>) were actually needed for is unclear; exactly as in the extension of clavichord ranges in Germany and Scandinavia during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>59</sup> the makers ran ahead of the composers in terms of the notes required. A six-octave Broadwood was included in the sale of Burney's library on 8 August 1814: 'a "very capital grand piano-forte, by Broadwood, with additional Keys, treble and bass, having 6 octaves, in handsome mahogany case",<sup>60</sup> but a reference in Burney's will (12 January 1807)

makes it clear that this and the Merlin instrument were one and the same: it was made 'by Broadwood in the Merlin case', hence a rebuild.<sup>61</sup> The will also mentions a 'small Piano Forte made by Broadwood, with additional keys in the Treble, an excellent instrument for a small room', probably a square piano with an extension above f<sup>3</sup>.<sup>62</sup> Burney's 'auction room'-type descriptions in his will are intriguing, and suggest a particular care with regard to instruments, and fondness towards these tools of his trade. Correspondence from 1810 in respect of the need to bring in a second piano for a duet performance of Bach's Goldberg Variations<sup>63</sup> demonstration makes it clear that he had no other instrument to balance the Broadwood piano.<sup>64</sup> Of that performance, Burney (whose equivocal attitude to the music of J. S. Bach has been noted)<sup>65</sup> suggested that the work might be broken up in the performance: 'Suppose we decimate the 30 variations, & divide them into 3 Decads; performing 10 once, or twice, if we like or dislike them much, each day? wch will allow us time to breathe, digest, & judge'.<sup>66</sup> Wesley's retort showed he understood the work better than Burney: 'With regard to your Plan of Decimation I cannot but think that as it is always a cruel one in the military Sense, so it would be partly, in our small musical Regiment of 30.- The whole Series will not employ much more than *one* Hour to prevade, & I must say, that I fear a considerable Degree of the immediate Contrast between the several Sections, would be diminished by a Chasm.-As the Variations are all upon *one* Theme, & that Theme is every where felt throughout, at least as strongly as the Characteristic Letter in a Greek Verb, there is no Probability of *your* letting any Part of them run to Waste'. The performance duly took place on 20 July, and a note by Vincent Novello testified to its success: 'the very pleasant meeting we had together at the Doctor's apartments in Chelsea Hospital, when I played the whole of the "30 Variations" by Sebastian Bach, as Duetts with Sam Wesley, to the great delight of Burney, who acknowledged to us both, that he had formed a very inadequate opinion of Sebastian Bach's fertility of invention and versatility of style, till he had heard our performance of those extraordinary specimens of counterpoint, called the "30 Variations"'. Not least interesting is Burney's willingness to change his mind about a composer at the age of 84.

Earlier in his career, Burney had also owned or commissioned several square pianos by Johann Pohlman (fl.1767-1793), 'the best maker of the small sort, by far', as is clear from a letter he wrote to the Rev Thomas Twining (1735-1804)<sup>67</sup> on 21 January 1774: 'Pohlmann then for 16 or 18 guineas makes charming little Instruments, sweet and even in Tone, & capable of great variety of piano & forte, between the two extremes of pianissimo and

fort[issi]mo. Those for 16 gns only go down to double G, without a double G#; but for 2 gns more he has made me two or three with an octave to double F and F#, with a double G#'.<sup>68</sup> The additional two guineas extended the compass from GG/AA upwards to FF upwards, three additional bass notes of occasional utility.

### *Clavichords*

Although the clavichord was relatively little known or used in Britain by the later 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is possible that Burney had an interest in it. The sole surviving English instrument (C-d<sup>3</sup>, triple fretted) was built by an otherwise unknown keyboard maker, Peter Hicks.<sup>69</sup> Payments dated from between 1769-1772 in the Broadwood books<sup>70</sup> ('Peter Hicks for tuning Harpd') suggest a plausible date for the instrument, and this turns out to be an interesting dating: in October 1772 Charles Burney had visited C. P. E. Bach in Hamburg, and heard him play on his favourite Silbermann clavichord, publishing an account of his continental travels the following year. Is it just possible that Burney, on his return to England, commissioned from London builder Peter Hicks a clavichord for himself? The Hicks instrument is of a small design that was not common after the very beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and might even have been copied from an earlier German clavichord, but using woods and materials of the current Georgian style.

### **Burney's keyboard compositions**

Burney's four keyboard collections discussed here are (conveniently) for the three principal keyboard instruments of the period: organ, harpsichord and piano.<sup>71</sup> However, this does make stylistic comparison difficult – the instruments were not all written for in the same way – and makes analysis of Burney's own musical development over that period of forty years more complicated. The references to 'young organists' as potential purchasers (are these slightly apologetic?) in the first and last collections are interesting; it is not clear why the collections should not have been presented more as musical compositions than as teaching music, and it is possible that Burney (more or less self-taught as a composer) was actually insecure about his own creations. It might also explain his tendency to avoid keyboard counterpoint early in his career, good fugue writing being the measure of a well-trained Baroque composer.

### *Organ music (1751, c.1790)*

The *VI Cornet Pieces with an Introduction for the Diapasons, and a Fugue* (1751) appeared soon after



Burney's appointment to St Dionis. They probably reflect the music he played there and that he taught his students,<sup>72</sup> with the publication also helping build his reputation at the church. The style of these cornet voluntaries, with a loud solo stop in the right hand, is fundamentally Handelian, possibly as filtered through John Stanley (1713-1786), who had recently published an important set of voluntaries (Op.5, 1748). They are bookended with a slow modulatory Introduction, and a Fugue in F minor that owes everything to Handel's *Six Fugues or voluntaries* of 1735. The one voluntary where Burney experiments with a more modern style (No.5 in Eb) is the least successful, but otherwise these are highly competent works that balance elements like sequence and modulation well, and yet have touches such as triplet figuration and a style of ornaments that show they come from a younger generation.

The *Preludes, Fugues and Interludes: for the Organ, Book 1*<sup>73</sup> were published in c.1790. This was Burney's first organ publication for nearly forty years, and it might have been expected that it would contain compositions collected over that period. However (and allowing for the fact that Burney still deferred to Handel as the timeless model for fugal technique), the styles of many movements are up to date. There are harmonic and melodic moments reminiscent of C. P. E. Bach and Haydn, and even Mozart (Haydn and Mozart's keyboard works were being published in London from the late 1760s and early 1770s). Also is evidence is the transfer of piano figurations such as Alberti basses and broken-chord figurations to organ music. The ten groups of pieces ('arranged in all the keys that are most perfectly in tune upon that Instrument', and therefore implying meantone temperament) nearly all consist of a prelude (called an 'Introduction') and a fugue; several include an interlude and final fughetta too. There are no more cornet voluntaries, tastes having changed – Burney's own article on the organ for Rees' *Cyclopaedia* (not published until 1819) condemns a 'trifling and vitiated style of performance' that had become common in such virtuosic voluntaries.<sup>74</sup> Throughout, the composer's contrapuntal technique is fluent and assured, and a comparison of the C minor Fugue with the F minor Fugue that ends the 1751 collection shows the development of Burney's skills over the period.

### *Harpsichord sonatas (1761)*

Numerous sets of keyboard sonatas were published in 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain, and it is important to understand the musical and social context for these in order to give them a fair hearing. Before the invention of the solo keyboard public recital at the very end of the

century, such music was written for the edification of learners and the pleasure of domestic audiences; one must imagine friends or proud parents listening in the drawing room to a young player who has mastered a new work by a fashionable composer. The music was designed to entertain, and composers were acutely aware of changes in musical styles, and the effects of special devices like hand-crossings to garner applause from both players and listeners. As Robert Falkener wrote in his *Instructions for Playing the Harpsichord* (2/1774): 'the Thirst after Novelty in the present Age is so insatiable, that nothing will go down but what is new'. Burney, as a busy teacher to guinea-a-lesson pupils of the gentry, was as aware of these requirements as anyone.

John Harley<sup>75</sup> sees Burney's set as being influenced by the harpsichord sonatas published by Arne (1765) – evidently a popular publication – and by John Jones (1754 and 1761), in that they incorporate suite-like characteristics.<sup>76</sup> Arne's Sonata No.7 in A in particular is certainly a possible model for several movements in Burney's set. Domenico Scarlatti was also an important figure, and it is interesting, given the Scarlatti harpsichord 'cult'<sup>77</sup> in England that followed Thomas Roseingrave's 1739 Scarlatti edition, that the composer's keyboard music gets little detailed mention in the *History*.<sup>78</sup>

Burney's *Six Sonatas for the Harpsichord* of 1761 (later republished by Bremner in 1766) are in the keys of A, F, D, Bb, G and D; there are no works in the minor. Each has three or four movements, and the first five begin with a Prelude, the styles of which are deliberately varied. Handelian influence is dealt with swiftly at the outset: the Prelude of Suite No.1 is in an improvisatory manner which draws on Handel's Prelude to his Suite No.1 in the same key from the 1720 set; thereafter, Handel is little in evidence. There are few slow movements as such (only the Affettuoso of the Suite No.4 requires the ability to shape expressive lines)<sup>79</sup> and only two minuets. Imitation is similarly near-absent (a rare example is found in the first Sonata's Presto), the composer perhaps making an association of counterpoint more with organ music. What Burney does provide is well written music that falls comfortably under the hands, and often seems more difficult than it is (a fact that would be appreciated by students); hand-crossing is found throughout, and the composer has taken pains to provide a wide variety of styles and textures. Fashionable triplets are used extensively, and effects like repeated notes are made a feature (Sonata No.6, first movement). There is a careful use of both melodic and harmonic chromaticism from time to time; while the underlying harmonic structures are often very simple (and Italianate), interest is still maintained through devices like arpeggios across the

instrument's compass and well placed ornamentation. Scarlatti's influence is heard not only in the hand-crossings (much easier on a two-manual instrument, which is probably what was intended), but in the entire final sonata, where patterns from the 1739 set and elsewhere are pervasive.

### *Duet sonatas (1777-1778)*

The composition of music for two keyboard instruments dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Giles Farnaby's 'Duet for two virginals' in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book<sup>80</sup> is the earliest surviving English work), and as instruments became more plentiful, duets for pairs of organs, harpsichords and clavichords were composed; one strong tradition for this was within the Bach family. The expansion of keyboard compasses also meant that there was now more physical room for two players at one keyboard (there are early 17<sup>th</sup> century examples by Nicholas Carlton and Thomas Tomkins), and a four-hands tradition was born. Mozart composed such works, and he and his sister Nannerl had performed duets on one harpsichord in London in 1765, which Burney may well have been aware of.<sup>81</sup> The Preface to the first book of Burney's *Four Sonatas or Duets for Two Performers on One Piano Forte or Harpsichord* correctly states that these were 'the first that have appeared in print', and mentions previous 'ingenious compositions' for two harpsichords or pianofortes from Germany (likely meaning the Bachs). The four-hand model is then presented as more convenient from the point of view of space and ease of tuning, and duet performance recommended as beneficial to the student from the point of view of developing a good sense of both rhythm and ensemble.<sup>82</sup>

These two volumes of four sonatas were apparently published in consecutive years, the first probably testing the public demand for such new repertoire before the second followed it.<sup>83</sup> The eight works, in F, D, Bb, C, Eb, G, D and F, all major keys (like the 1761 set), follow the two-movement form that was then fashionable for keyboard sonatas, with the first normally slower (but usually not much) than the second; there is nothing slower than Andante here (apart from one Largo, illus.3), and nothing faster than Allegro. They may well have been composed for his students: Harley notes as one of their merits that they give each player 'worthwhile things to do',<sup>84</sup> and this was part of Burney's purpose ('each Performer should try to discover when he has the *Principal Melody* given to him'). These two sets were important models for a genre that would become significant in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as social chamber music became an important part of middle-class life.

Although Burney's six-octave Merlin piano expressly

for playing duets dates from exactly the same time, in the eight published sonatas the normal FF-F<sup>3</sup> piano or harpsichord<sup>85</sup> compass is retained, and in fact less use is made of the lowest register than might be expected, given the space constraints of two (probably female) performers in bulky clothes sitting at one instrument.<sup>86</sup> The left hand *primo* and right hand *secondo* are in fact often very close together, meaning that the players have to negotiate the central keyboard space with some care, especially if using the single manual of a piano rather than the two manuals of a harpsichord. Burney makes this precise point in his Preface: 'though, at first, the near approach of the hands of the different performers may seem awkward and embarrassing, a little use and contrivance with respect to the manner of placing them, and the choice of fingers, will soon remove that difficulty'.

The style of the works is very different from the 1761 harpsichord sonatas; Burney would have developed as a composer in the intervening decade and a half, and was writing for a different instrument, but he was also largely inventing a new way of making music on the keyboard, with possibilities for rather complex textures. For example, the second movement of the Sonata No.1 uses octave writing, sustained trills, internal accompaniment figures, on-beat accents and bass pedal notes, sometimes combining these. Dynamics are an important part of balancing the importance of each part of the texture. Burney's new manner of writing for the keyboard was likely influenced by orchestral writing of the period, where different instruments were melodic and accompaniment roles at different times (it would be very straightforward to orchestrate some of these duo sonatas). Parity between the parts is maintained, and (for example) the *secondo* opens the second movement of Sonata No.2 on their own, for 18 bars. The tradition of four-hand composition seems to have caught on, and only four years later J. C. Bach included two duo sonatas in his Op.18 set, published by Welcker.

### Conclusion

While John Harley may be right to point out that Burney, 'for all this breadth of knowledge, critical acumen and common sense, had an underlying belief that music had only begun to approach perfection in his own age',<sup>87</sup> the historian was also a rather harsh critic of his own contemporaries. While he treats the works of Handel (especially the operas) at great length and in great detail, the solo keyboard works rate barely a mention.<sup>88</sup> But in his discussion of that composer's contemporaries, Handel is portrayed almost as a shadow that lay across British composition during the 18<sup>th</sup> century: Burney



observed that ‘from the death of Purcell to that of Arne, a period of more than fourscore years, no candidate for musical fame among our countrymen had appeared, who was equally admired by the nation at large’. However, we do not know what Burney thought of the harpsichord and organ works of musicians like Arne, Smith, Handel, Jones, Nares, Boyce, Greene, Croft, Stanley, Chilcot and Felton.<sup>89</sup> Apart from his intemperate condemnation of Kelway (see above), there are specific comments only on the keyboard music of Geminiani (‘rendered impracticable by crowded harmony and multiplied notes’),<sup>90</sup> J. C. Bach (‘in general his compositions for the piano forte are such as ladies can execute with little trouble’),<sup>91</sup> Roseingrave (‘the harmony in the voluntaries...is rendered harsh and ungrateful by a licentious and extravagant modulation’)<sup>92</sup> and Greene (‘the harpsichord lessons, which he published late in life, though they discovered no great powers of invention, or hand, had its day of favor, as a boarding-school book’).<sup>93</sup> In these, almost no praise is to be found, only a typically Georgian view that excess of all kinds is to be avoided (an exception is allowed for Scarlatti, whose ‘original and happy freaks’ and ‘new and bold effects’ were ‘produced by the breach of almost all the old and established rules of composition’).<sup>94</sup> It is thus difficult to judge what Burney would have regarded as successful keyboard compositions; probably those in which ‘pleasing melody’ and ‘ingenious invention’ are united. As Burney said of Greene with respect to Handel, the former ‘had the misfortune to live in the age and neighborhood of a musical giant, with whom he was utterly unable to contend’,<sup>95</sup> and this might be thought to serve as an epitaph on 18<sup>th</sup> century British keyboard music generally.<sup>96</sup> Regardless, this is not a just assessment; British keyboard music (including Burney’s own) began taking interesting stylistic directions well away from Handel even during his lifetime, and Burney’s possible ‘anxiety of influence’ (in the words of Harold Bloom) should not blind us to the fact that there is much good music from the second half of 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain still waiting to be investigated. Burney’s own music too awaits fairer judgment from history than it has so far received.

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## Endnotes

- For the historical background to Burney’s life and career, see Percy A. Scholes, *The Great Dr. Burney: His Life, His Travels, His Works, His Family and His Friends*, 2 vols. (London, 1948), Roger Lonsdale, *Dr. Charles Burney: A Literary Biography* (Oxford, 1965) and Slava Klima, Garry Bowers and Kerry S. Grant (eds), *Memoirs of Dr. Charles Burney, 1726-1769* (Lincoln, 1988). The Burney Centre also maintains a bibliography and links at <https://www.mcgill.ca/burneycentre/resources/charles-burney-1726-1814>.
- Elisabeth M. Lockwood, ‘At Dr. Burney’s’, *Music & Letters* xi/1 (January 1930), pp.78–86 at p.86.
- Kerry Grant, *Dr. Burney as Critic and Historian of Music* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1983), p.300.
- ‘It would be difficult to find amongst Burney’s published organ works many pieces which would be considered worth revival to-day’; Percy Scholes, ‘A New Enquiry into the Life and Work of Dr. Burney’, *Proceedings of the Musical Association* (1940-1941), pp.1-30 at p.6. Scholes’ generally dismissive attitude towards Burney’s compositions – crucially, in Scholes (1948) – has hindered subsequent appreciation of them.
- All four of Burney’s keyboard collections are now available in facsimile or as editions on IMSLP, <https://imslp.org>.
- Pierre Gouin, IMSLP.
- Fitzjohn Music Publications, <https://www.impulse-music.co.uk>.
- Brilliant Classics 95447 (2017).
- Charles Burney, Selected Preludes, Fugues and Cornet Pieces*, Amazon, Spotify, Apple Music.
- Glossa GCD 921805 (2010), Avie AV2152 (2008) and L’Oiseau-Lyre DSLO502 (1974, r/2013) respectively.
- See John Harley, *British Harpsichord Music* (Aldershot, 1994), vol.ii, pp.186–187.
- Eva Badura-Skoda, *The Eighteenth-century Fortepiano Grand and its patrons* (Bloomington, 2017), p.3.
- Margaret Debenham and Michael Cole, ‘Pioneer Piano Makers in London, 1737–74: Newly Discovered Documentary Sources’, *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* xlii/1 (2013), pp.55–86 at p.56.
- A second set followed in 1759.
- For records of Burney’s participation in London performances, see Simon McVeigh, *Calendar of London Concerts 1750-1800* (2014), <http://research.gold.ac.uk/10342>.
- See, for example, GB-Cul Add.6619; Harley (1992), p.38.
- Harley (1994), p.183. By 1772 Burney was quite a wealthy man, as his insurance policy for £2,200 shows; see Lance Whitehead and Jenny Nex, ‘The Insurance of Musical London and the Sun Fire Office 1710-1779’, *Galpin Society Journal* lxxvi (March 2014), pp.181-216 at p.191. At his death, his assets were worth nearly £10,000; see Scholes (1948), vol.ii, pp.261–73. For more about teaching fees and the demands on Burney and others during the period, see

- Howard Irving, "The Necessity of Giving Continual and Fatiguing Lessons": William Crotch on Music Teaching in London', *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* xxxv/2 (December 2004), pp.151-167.
- 18 Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period, to which is prefixed, a Dissertation on the Music of the Ancients*, vol.i (London, 1776, 2/1789), vol. ii (1782, r/1811-12), vols.iii-iv (1789); ed. Frank Mercer in 2 vols. (London, 1935, r/1957); see Burney (1935), vol.ii, p.353.
- 19 Burney (1935), vol.ii, p.996.
- 20 Burney (1789), vol.iv, p.665. Charles Wesley was moved to poetry: 'Kelway's sonatas who can hear, / They want both harmony and air, / Heavy they make the player's hand, / And who their tricks can understand?'
- 21 Burney (1771), p.38.
- 22 Quoted in Robert Marshall, 'Bach, Handel, and the Harpsichord', in Mark Kroll (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to the Harpsichord* (Cambridge, 2019), p.274.
- 23 Burney (1935), vol.ii, p.956. Bremner seems to have published all of Schobert's Opp. 1-14 in a short space of time (about 1770), possibly at Burney's recommendation; by 1775 there were 16 opus numbers in his catalogue; see Ronald R. Kidd, 'The Emergence of Chamber Music with Obligato Keyboard in England', *Acta Musicologica* xlv/1 (January-June 1972), pp.122-144 at p.143.
- 24 Francis Burney, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney: Arranged from his own Manuscripts, from Family Papers, and from Personal Recollections, by his Daughter, Madame d'Arblay* (London, 1832), vol.ii, p.55; the 1777 concert where this performance took place is described in detail by Burney's daughter (see also Scholes (1948), pp.335-339). The reference might be to Mützel's C major duet, or the very elaborate work in Eb.
- 25 He praises for example the instruments at St Omer and Cologne; see Burney (1771), vol.i, pp.3, 68.
- 26 Charles Burney ed H. Edmund Poole, *Music, Men, and Manners in France and Italy 1770* (London, 1969), p.69.
- 27 Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (London, 1771), and Percy A. Scholes (ed), *Dr. Burney's Musical Tours in Europe: An Eighteenth-Century Musical Tour in France and Italy* (London, 1959); Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands and United Provinces* (London, 1773), and Percy A. Scholes (ed), *An Eighteenth-Century Musical Tour in Central Europe and the Netherlands* (London, 1959).
- 28 Later President of the United States (1801-1809). Jefferson's 1762 Kirkman single survives at his house in Monticello, <https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/harpsichord>, but is not identified in Donald Boalch, ed Charles Mould, *Makers of the Harpsichord and Clavichord* (Oxford, 3/1995). For Kirkman and his instruments, see Charles Mould and Peter Mole, *Jacob Kirkman, Harpsichord Maker to Her Majesty* (Ellesmere, 2016).
- 29 See Raymond Russell rev Howard Schott, *The Harpsichord and Clavichord* (London, 2/1973), pp.180-182 and <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/> Jefferson/01-11-02-0061 for texts of their correspondence. This instrument has not survived.
- 30 The 1768 Kirkman (see below) also had a celestine stop. For Walker, see Edward L. Kottick, *A History of the Harpsichord* (Bloomington, IN, 2003), p.378.
- 31 Scholes (1941), p.5.
- 32 Now St Peter's, Vere Street, a deconsecrated church.
- 33 Burney had more or less retired by 1805, but remained in post until his death.
- 34 For the history and specification of these organs, see Scholes (1948), vol.ii, pp.318-320 and the National Pipe Organ Register, [www.npor.org.uk](http://www.npor.org.uk).
- 35 This was Renatus' last organ; some pipework survives in the Mander organ at Merchant Taylors' Hall, London; see Stephen Bicknell, *The history of the English organ* (Cambridge, 1999), p.142n, with a photograph of c.1870 at p.159. The original contract survives; see H. Diack Johnstone, 'Philip Hart', *Musical Times* cvi/1471 (September 1965), p.685.
- 36 Andrew Freeman and James Boeringer (eds), *Organa Britannica: Organs in Great Britain 1660-1860: a Complete Edition of the Sperling Notebooks and Drawings in the Library of the Royal College of Organists* (Lewissburg, PA, 1989), p.311. It is also listed at <https://www.byersmusic.com/pepusch-and-the-organ-voluntary-in-c.php>, a supplement to David Byers (ed), *John Cbr. Pepusch, Voluntary in C for Organ* (Vienna, 1988).
- 37 Frank Dawes, 'The Music of Philip Hart (c.1676-1749)', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 94th Session (1967-1968), pp.63-75 at p.64.
- 38 See F. G. E[wards], 'Dr. Charles Burney (1726-1814). A Biographical Sketch', *Musical Times* xlv/737 (1 July 1904), pp.435-439, at pp.437-438. The organ specification is given in Percy A. Scholes, 'The Election of a London Organist Two Centuries Ago', *Musical Times* lxxxiii/1189 (March 1942), pp.73-75.
- 39 Anon, 'A Visit to King's Lynn. With New Burneyiana and Arneiana', *Musical Times* xlv/472 (1 December 1904), pp.790-793 at pp.792-793.
- 40 Burney (1832), vol.i, p.89. The old instrument was finally disposed of at auction for £33 in 1758; see Percy A. Scholes, 'A Wonderful New Organ of 1754', *Musical Times* lxxxiii/1190 (April 1942), pp.108-110 at p.109.
- 41 For an 1873 photograph of the original location, see Bicknell (1999), p.175.
- 42 Bicknell (1999), p.176.
- 43 For Snetzler and his instruments, see Alan Barnes and Martin Renshaw, *The life and work of John Snetzler* (Aldershot, 1994).
- 44 Quoted in Scholes (1942), p.109.
- 45 Freeman (1989), p.311.
- 46 Lars E. Troide (ed), *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, vol.ii, 1774-1777 (Oxford, 1990), pp.77-78.
- 47 Boalch (1995), p.455.



- 48 This is described as 'Model C' in Mould (2016), pp.87-88, the most common surviving design (82 of 163 instruments).
- 49 See <https://www.monumentsmenfoundation.org/croft-murray-maj-edward-teddy>.
- 50 'I saw some beautiful old harpsichords, including Dr. Burney's Kirkman...', letter to John Challis, August 1947; Meredith Kirkpatrick (ed), *Ralph Kirkpatrick: Letters of the American Harpsichordist and Scholar* (Rochester, NY, 2014), p.63.
- 51 For a detailed description and illustrations, see Andreas Beurmann, *Harpsichords and more* (Hildesheim, 2012), pp.224-227. See also Boalch (1995), p.437.
- 52 Philip Olleson, 'Dr. Burney, Samuel Wesley, and J. S. Bach's Goldberg Variations', in Jon Newsom and Alfred Mann (eds), *The Rosaleen Moldenhauer Memorials: Music from Primary Sources. A Guide to the Moldenhauer Archives* (Washington, DC, 2000), pp.169-75 and <https://www.loc.gov/collections/moldenhauer-archives/articles-and-essays/guide-to-archives/goldberg-variations/>.
- 53 For a catalogue of surviving fortepianos, see Martha Novak Clinkscale, *Makers of the Piano 1700-1820* (Oxford, 1993), now online at <http://earlypianos.org>.
- 54 Badura-Skoda (2017), pp.4-5. For a summary of the transition between harpsichord and piano, see Howard Schott, 'From Harpsichord to Pianoforte: A Chronology and Commentary', *Early Music* xiii/1 (February 1985), pp.28-38.
- 55 [Charles Burney], 'Harpsichord' in Abraham Rees (ed), *The Cyclopaedia*, xviii (London, 1819).
- 56 Peter Holman, 'The harpsichord in 19th-century Britain' *Harpsichord & Fortepiano*, xxiv/2 (Spring 2020), pp.4-14.
- 57 For Merlin, see Margaret Debenham, 'Joseph Merlin in London, 1760-1803: the Man behind the Mask. New Documentary Sources', *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* xlv (2014), pp.130-163; and Badura-Skoda (2017), pp.430-432.
- 58 Boalch (1995), p.129. The earliest six-octave piano may have actually been built by Johann Georg Volkert soon after 1770; see Badura-Skoda (2017), p.432.
- 59 Slight extensions above  $f^{\sharp}$  appear mid-century, and five-and-a-half then six octaves from 1783 and 1794 respectively; see Francis Knights, 'Exploring Chopin on the clavichord', *Tangents* xlv (October 2019), pp.1-4 and Bernard Brauchli, *The Clavichord* (Cambridge, 1998), p.179.
- 60 Alec Hyatt King (ed), *Catalogue of the Music Library of Charles Burney, sold in London, 8 August 1814* (Amsterdam, 1973), p.40.
- 61 Broadwood made his own six-octave pianos from 1790: Badura-Skoda (2017), p.432.
- 62 This was to go to his daughter Sarah, on the grounds that she would not have room for a larger instrument; Scholes (1948), vol.ii, pp.268-269.
- 63 There were two recent published editions, by Nägeli (c.1800) and Hoffmeister (1803); see Olleson (2000), n.18.
- 64 Burney's rented suite of rooms at Chelsea College was not large, and would have restricted the number of instruments he was able to house.
- 65 See Scholes (1948), vol.ii, pp.210-223. For the English 'Bach' movement, see F. G. E[dwards], 'Bach's Music in England', *Musical Times* xxxvii (1896), pp.585-587, 652-657, 722-726 and 797-800 and Samuel J. Rogal, 'For the love of Bach: the Charles Burney – Samuel Wesley correspondence', *Bach* xxiii/1 (Spring-Summer, 1992), pp.31-37.
- 66 Letter from Charles Burney to Samuel Wesley, c.15 July 1810, quoted in Olleson (2000).
- 67 For the extensive Burney-Twining correspondence, see Enrico Careri, 'The Correspondence between Burney and Twining about Corelli and Geminiani', *Music & Letters* lxxii/1 (February 1991), pp.38-47.
- 68 Quoted in Warwick Henry Cole, 'The Early Piano in Britain Reconsidered', *Early Music* xiv/4 (November 1986), pp.563-566 at p.563.
- 69 See Francis Knights, 'The Peter Hicks clavichord in the Victoria & Albert Museum', *Clavichord International* xxv/1 (May 2021).
- 70 Barbara Broadwood and others, [manuscript of household and business accounts 1769-1791], Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS. Eng. misc. c.529. See Charles Mould, 'The Broadwood Books: I', *The Harpsichord Magazine*, i/1 (October 1973), pp.19-23 and 'The Broadwood Books; II', *The English Harpsichord Magazine*, i/2 (April 1974), pp.47-53 at p.52.
- 71 For publication details, see John Harley, *British Harpsichord Music* (Aldershot, 1992), vol.i. There are copies of all Burney's keyboard publications in the British Library.
- 72 'Proper for young Organists and Practitioners on the Harpsichord'; they are intended for the former instrument, but playable on the latter. The c.1790 volume is 'for... YOUNG ORGANISTS, for whose use this book is particularly calculated'.
- 73 In his will, Burney noted there were enough unpublished pieces in his library to make a 'second book'; Scholes (1940), p.6 and Scholes (1948), vol.ii, p.266.
- 74 Bicknell (1999), pp.213-214. Aspects of organ performance practice in England at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, from descriptions by John Marsh (1791) and Jonas Blewitt (c.1795), are discussed in Philip Norman, 'Two Organ Guides from Late 18th-Century England', *Musical Times* cxxviii/1726 (November 1986), pp.637-643.
- 75 Harley (1994), p.126.
- 76 Burney was a subscriber to the 1761 collection, but there is no evidence of influence (a shared nod to Scarlatti can be seen in the C major Vivace of Jones' first book and the D major Brillante of his second).

- 77 See Richard Newton, 'The English Cult of Domenico Scarlatti', *Music & Letters* xx/2 (April 1939), pp.138-156 and Cooper (1989), pp.268-274.
- 78 Burney even owned a Scarlatti keyboard manuscript, collected on his travels (see Newton (1939), p.151).
- 79 It is possible that Burney was following C. P. E. Bach's *Kenner und Liebhaber* distinction, with slow music and works in minor keys requiring more of a 'connoisseur' than he expected of his purchasers.
- 80 See Jon Baxendale and Francis Knights (eds), *The Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*, 3 vols (Tynset, 2020), vol. i, p.242.
- 81 Mozart is barely mentioned in Burney's *History*, but does receive a glowing testimonial: 'the wonder of the musical world for his fertility and knowledge, as a composer'; Burney (1935), vol.ii, p.960.
- 82 There is also a *Sonate à 3 mains* of c.1780; again, this was not a new idea, both Byrd and Bull having written such pieces.
- 83 Pieter Minden (ed), *Charles Burney, Sonatas or Duets For two Performers on One Piano Forte or Harpsichord*, facsimile edition (Wolfenbüttel, 1988). The first set was written in November 1776, and Roger Lonsdale notes that this was the first music Burney had published since he began his literary career, and may have been intended to remind his historian rival Sir John Hawkins of his superiority as a professional musician; see Lonsdale (1965), p.199.
- 84 Harley (1994), p.142.
- 85 The instruments are mentioned in that order on the title page (even though the parts are marked 'Cembalo'), and the frequent and varied dynamic indications clearly support this order of preference.
- 86 Cooper (1989), pp.21-22.
- 87 Harley (1994), p.191.
- 88 The organ concertos, and Scarlatti's sonatas, are singled out for implicit praise; Burney (1935), vol.ii, p.1008.
- 89 For a chronological catalogue of publications by these and many others, see Harley (1992).
- 90 Burney (1935), vol.ii, p.992.
- 91 Burney (1935), vol.ii, p 866.
- 92 Burney (1935), vol.ii, p 706. Burney did however admire Roseingrave's legendary improvisation skills (p.705) and did similar justice to Kelway as a player (p.1009).
- 93 Burney (1935), vol.ii, pp.489-490.
- 94 Burney (1935), vol.ii, p.1008.
- 95 Burney (1935), vol.ii, p.489.
- 96 It is regrettable that British 18<sup>th</sup> century keyboard music continues to be neglected by modern scholarship; for example, it barely rates a mention in a standard text like Robert L. Marshall (ed), *Eighteenth-century Keyboard Music* (London, 2/2003).