

Music from the Jane Austen Songbook

Julianne Baird, soprano

Marcia Hadijmarkos, fortepiano

AND TWO NARRATORS

A Dialogue from Pride and Prejudice

Chastity from Susannah

The poor little Gypsy

George Frederic Handel

Samuel Arnold

A Reading from Pride and Prejudice

Three Irish and Scottish Airs

Robin Adair

William Reeve

She rose and Let me In

The Irishman

Bremner

Anon

A Reading from the novel Emma

The Mansion of Peace

William

(A ballad adapted in English words by T. Billington)

Samuel Webbe

Sonata in C Major, Hob. XVI:35)

Franz Joseph Haydn

A Dialogue from the novel Emma

The Sapling Oak

The Lamplighter

Stephen Storace

Charles Dibdin

INTERMISSION

The Battle of Prague, a Sonata for the Piano Forte (c.1788)

Frantisek Kotzwara

A Reading from Persuasion

What Alas Shall Orpheus Do (Che farò senza Euridice)

La Biondina in Gondoletta

C.W. Gluck

Anon. Venetian Ballad

A Reading from Sense and Sensibility

The Soldier Tir'd

Thomas Arne

A Reading from Emma

Jane Austen's Songbook

PROGRAM NOTE---- Dr. Miriam Hart and Dr. Julianne Baird

Music and the social status it expressed was an integral part of Jane Austen's life. Her novels are replete with details of domestic musical activities. Accounts of public concerts and private balls as well as music programs with 'hired' musicians fill her letters. A dedicated amateur herself, Austen ordinarily played at the pianoforte at least an hour a day before breakfast from the 8-book music collection now preserved in her home at Chawton. For nieces and nephews she practiced "country dances," a number of which appear in her collections.

The popular "conduct books" of the 18th century England, like Thomas Gisborne's *Enquiry in the Duties of the Female Sex*, recommended that a young woman of gentry (as was Austen) pursue "ornamental acquisitions;" her study was to consist of such subjects as music, dance, drawing, Italian and French. These subjects that would allow for "innocent and amusing occupations" for herself and her family, while making her more marketable for marriage. Austen knew her readers' familiarity with conduct books, thus allowing her to satirize the dominant views of women's education. But Austen's musical selections mirror the broad influences, both European and British, that not only reflect 18th century culture but also helped to form it. The songs of Gluck, Handel and others presented here became the songs that the players and their families enjoyed. At home and in concert, this was the popular music of the late 1700s and early 1800s.

Coinciding with music studies (owning an instrument and hiring a music master for your daughter indicated comfort in this class-conscious society) was the development of the fortepiano. By 1770, this instrument had nearly replaced the harpsichord. Austen carefully copied songs for the fortepiano whose ubiquitous presence in homes Austen describes in her novels and letters. Unlike the harpsichord, the fortepiano responded directly to the player's touch, light or forceful, with pedals allowing the player control over sustaining or muting. These subtleties demanded more skill but resulted in far greater self-expression, a difference Austen exploits throughout her writings. Although never devaluing the utility or pleasure of playing for dances, for families or for friends, her writings make it clear that music had increased her own vocabulary, providing her with a deeper and at times metaphorical means of expressing herself. But she also knew and heard many poor, insensitive musicians: Mr. Bennett of *Pride and Prejudice* rightly ends the performance of his youngest daughter, Mary, "also impatient for display," with a sharp, "You have delighted us long enough." And to demonstrate just how uneducated and, consequently, limited is the unlikely heroine of her Gothic parody *Northanger Abbey*, Austen writes, "The day which dismissed the music-master was one of the happiest of Catherine's life."

Each heroine of Austen's novels exhibits a clear musical or non-musical sense; the musical scenes enrich our understanding, and arouse our curiosity about Austen's own musical experiences, experiences she describes throughout her chatty--and sometimes catty--letters. She frequently attended private and public concerts.

Perhaps because Austen was forced to live without an instrument for periods of her life, due to the family's removal to Bath, or to help a relative elsewhere, she criticized those who viewed the fortepiano as merely a stylish possession, another piece of furniture: "I was sorry to hear that she [her cousin, Anna Lefroy] is to have an instrument; it seems throwing money away. They will wish the 24gs. in the shape of sheets and towels six months hence; and as to her playing it can never be anything." Or; "We found only Mrs. Lance at home, and whether she boasts any offspring besides a grand fortepiano did not appear..."

Austen painstakingly copied and bound borrowed music that especially interested her. Two books are in her own hand--one of piano pieces and the other of vocal music (Book III), many pieces of which are presented tonight. Some pieces contain her own suggestions for ornamentation. Prominent themes are naval affairs, country life, drinking songs, love, Turkish and Moorish motifs, female character pieces, and the French Revolution. "William" reflects a girl waiting anxiously on the cliffs for her sailor's return. At last she hears his thrilling signal, a whistle from aboard his ship. In *William*, a parody of a Haydn sonata, two- and four-note whistles mimic the sailor's *sifflet* (Fr.), a pipe of silver or brass used by the boatswain to summon his mates to hoist, heave, slacken, etc. above the roar of roiling seas. The turbulence of the seas and of the girl's spirit are suggested by the Alberti bass. Country songs such as "Oh Nancy" add a pastoral touch to some of the love songs in Austen's collection. Full of braggadocio, "The Irishman" is a zesty lyric with the refrain, "Yet long may he sway with his Alcoran before he can love like and Irishman." No man -- "turbaned Turk," Dutchman, Spaniard, Italian, Russian, Prussian, Swede or Londoner -- can match the Irish lover in this song -- which calls to mind Austen's own Irishman, Tom LeFroy, for whom she had special feelings. She flirted atrociously and was always interested in the politics of love, marriage and money, but, having no dowry, did not marry Tom (or any other). Given Austen's focus on women in her novels and letters, it is not surprising that her collection contains several songs by or about women. It is noteworthy that some of her songs treat the trials of poor street women. "The Poor Little Gypsy", for example, is a begging song.

The novels of Austen reveal her as a keen observer of early 19th century English society. Through her Songbook, Jane Austen herself springs to life: her special likes and dislikes, her boisterous sense of humor, her passions, the way she amused herself and what she was like, relaxing with her family and friends.