

“Nothing More to Conquer”: Müthel’s *Duetto* in the Burney Drawing Room and Beyond

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TAKEN TOGETHER, CHARLES BURNEY’S PUBLISHED accounts of his path-breaking continental tours of 1770 and 1772 and the four volumes of his *General History of Music* (1776–89) make for an epic journey across thousands of miles and hundreds of thousands of words. But however intrepid the traveller, however attentive to his immediate geographical and cultural surroundings, he can never fully shed the psychological baggage of the past. Nor should he. On the title page of the first installment of his diary, which appeared the year after Burney returned from his first musical trip across France and Italy, stand two words—two ideas—that often travel uneasily in each other’s company: “present” and “history” (Figure 1). Even the title-page’s appealing layout, with its carefully judged hierarchy of font sizes and its commodious spacing, cannot fully mask the tension that often troubles both Burney the historian and Burney the traveler, never mind Burney the practical musician. Claiming himself as the first person ever to produce an English language history of music (his rival John Hawkins would publish his *General History* of music that same year of 1776), Burney the eyewitness to continental musical affairs continually grapples with the meaning of the past in the present. The reach of “classics”; the deadening glaze of antiquarianism; the imperatives of innovation; the lingering resonance of the great musical deeds of yore; and the thrill and disappointments of performance experienced first hand—all these elements color Burney’s critical judgment, both as historian and as travel writer.

Burney confronts the past right from the outset of the *Present State of Music* series, for example, when he reflects on what he sees as the stultifying backwardness of French music—an ever-ready target of his scorn: “To stop the world in its motion is no easy task; on we *must* go, and he that lags behind is but losing time, which it will cost him much labour to recover.”¹ This vigorous present-ism might seem strange from a man returned from a journey undertaken for purposes

¹ Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*, 2nd ed. (Becket, Robson, and Robinson: London, 1773), 35.

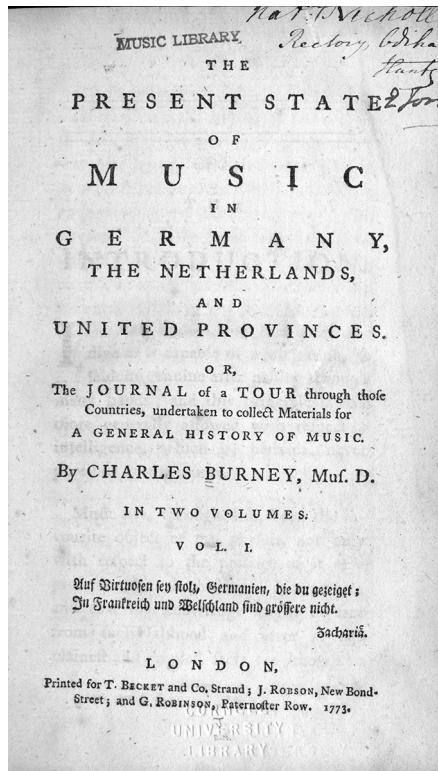


Figure 1 Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*, 2nd edition (London, 1775), title page. Courtesy of Cornell University, Music Library.

of historical research. Yet even as Burney's trek comes to an end nearly twenty years later, at the close of the fourth volume of his *General History*, the present dislodges itself from the grip of the past: "... though I have constantly treated the old masters with reverence, it has never been at the expence of the modern. Indeed, respect for the dead should not annihilate all kindness for the living."²

But Burney's relentlessly forward-leaning critical posture cannot alone explain the spectacular fall from grace of a composer who enjoyed unparalleled esteem within Burney's social circle and in his family in the period between his return from travelling in Europe and shortly before the publication of the first volume of his *History*. In several concerts and get-togethers in the spring and the fall of 1775, Johann Gottfried M  thel's *Duetto in E-flat major* for two keyboard players at

² Charles Burney, *A General History of Music*, 4 vols. (Becket, Robson, and Robinson: London, 1776–89), 4:685.

two separate keyboards—an enormous, difficult, fantastical, flamboyant, pathetic work born in a distant land on the eastern periphery of Europe—enlivened the thriving salon in the Burney house in St. Martin's Street, London, as no other music ever had before. However, after the family had moved away from the beloved house that had hosted so many important musical works and fascinating visitors during the Burneys' residence there, not only did Müthel and his duet disappear from their repertoire, but they also came in for a seemingly unprovoked critical assault in Burney's article on the composer published in March of 1813 in the twenty-fourth volume of Abraham Rees's *Cyclopædia*.

For this monumental reference work Burney wrote the musical entries, an ambitious project that occupied several years and counted as the aged historian's last great literary undertaking: viewed together these articles make up a veritable dictionary of music. While some of the musical figures mentioned in the *Present State* were eventually included in the canon of musical works that Burney did so much to foster (in spite of his oft-professed allegiances to the present), the once-lionized Müthel was pilloried by him in the *Cyclopædia* in surprisingly harsh terms.³ Although the *Duetto*'s treatment sheds light on Burney's attitude toward music history and his apparent devotion to up-to-date musical style at the turn of the nineteenth century, fashion and historiography cannot alone explain the work's astonishing fall from critical grace. I hope to suggest here that possible reasons for the work's later critical battering can be found in Burney's own biography, and that the piece's reappraisal reflects the sometimes melancholic shadows that lengthened in his life after 1800 when the European travels and his labors as a London man of music and letters had already themselves become part of history.

That Burney is a crucial figure for our understanding of the keyboard culture of both England and the continent is attested to by his oft-cited and irreplaceable account of C. P. E. Bach at the clavichord in his house in Hamburg when the pair met there in 1772. The Müthel *Duetto*, in Burney's initial view, participated in this same form of sublime Bachian expression laced with emotion and difficulty. The work's changing status within his own evolving music aesthetics says much about the reception of the *Duetto* and the meaning of the Burneys' famed salon long after it had ceased to function. Müthel's duet demarcates, I will claim, not only a radical, if inconsistent shift in Burney's critical thinking,

³ On Burney and the formation of the musical canon, see William Weber, *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-Century England: A Study in Canon, Ritual, and Ideology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 219–22.

but also an implicit reckoning with his social standing, itself bound up with his many-faceted musical activities.

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Müthel's duet was composed and published in 1771 in Riga, a city Burney had not even come close to in his tour through the German states; it lay some eight hundred miles—hard overland miles—beyond Prague, the easternmost stop on the Englishman's itinerary. Like the continent itself, the European musical repertoire was a vast geography, as Burney noted in (perhaps ironically) heroic tones at the close of the third volume of the travel diaries:

When a student upon keyed instruments has vanquished all the difficulties to be found in the lessons of Handel, Scarlatti, Schobert, Eckard, and C. P. E. Bach; and, like Alexander, laments that nothing more remains to conquer, I would recommend to him, as an exercise of patience and perseverance, the compositions of Müthel; which are so full of novelty, taste, grace, and contrivance, that I should not hesitate to rank them among the greatest productions of the present age.⁴

While establishing Müthel's pedigree by citing his studies with Johann Sebastian Bach and his friendship with Emanuel Bach, Burney was also keen to stress the uniqueness of the younger man's approach: "The style of this composer more resembles that of Emanuel Bach, than any other. But the passages are entirely his own, and reflect as much honour upon his head as his hand."⁵

Müthel's music was an alluring destination. Even if the *Duetto* exudes the grandeur of antiquity through the conjured deeds of Alexander the Great, the work "is but little known in Germany," claims Burney.⁶ It is the famed musical traveler who aptly brings back tidings of a distant hero among whose greatest deeds the *Duetto* was counted. The three published volumes of Burney's diaries thus finish with an imagined tour to the distant Baltic shores that were home to the elusive clavichord virtuoso who would supposedly only play when deepest snow blanketed Riga. A contemporary masterpiece whose performance required immense skill and commitment, the *Duetto* was not a short walk in the park, but could be compared instead to a military campaign.

It is unlikely that Burney acquired the *Duetto* print immediately after its publication in 1771; more probably, his Hamburg host—and later antagonist—

⁴ Burney, *Present State of Music in Germany, The Netherlands, and United Provinces*, 2 vols. (London: Becket, Robson, and Robinson: 1773), 2:328–29.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 329.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Christoph Daniel Ebeling, or another German acquaintance keen to buttress the status of his countrymen in the European cultural rankings, had directed the English traveler towards Mützel's music in the summer of 1772 when Burney was in northern Europe.⁷ It is even possible that Burney acquired the *Duetto* in Hamburg and brought it back with the many other books and scores he collected while on the trip; or perhaps he had it sent from the Continent after his return to London. It had certainly arrived by 1775, and in time enough to allow for the "patience and perseverance" of those who were to learn and perform it in the spring and fall of that year.

Burney had rarely and reluctantly performed on his tours, effacing from the published diaries those privately noted encounters when he could not avoid playing in public.⁸ Burney was not himself the one to undertake an assault on the Mützel *Duetto*, that fearsome foe for any keyboard battler: the welter of specialty ornaments and cascades of thirty-second (even sixty-fourth) notes were enough to scare off many (see Example 1).⁹ Resolve and skill were required to come to terms with the eccentricities of the *Empfindsamer Stil* at its most exaggerated and exuberant (as can be seen already from the opening page—and as every example below shows).

That Burney remarked on the difficulties of Mützel's music in the published diaries would seem to suggest his familiarity with the duet and other keyboard works by at least 1773, unless, as sometimes happened, he was simply parroting opinions garnered on his travels. Yet in closing the *Present State* with two full pages devoted to Mützel (twice the space dedicated to the Mozart family a few paragraphs earlier), Burney emphasizes the intricacies of the music, his description capped with reference to the vaunted duet and suggesting his own actual experience of the work: "Indeed [Mützel's] writings abound with difficulties, which to common hearers, as well as common players, must appear too elaborate; for even his accompaniments are so charged as to require performers, for each instrument, of equal abilities to his own, which is expecting too much, in

⁷ For Ebeling's heated exchange with Burney after the appearance of the latter's diaries from his German tour, see Vanessa Agnew, *Enlightenment Orpheus: The Power of Music in Other Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 16–20.

⁸ See for example his grudging performance at a very English expatriate gathering in Rome in November of 1770. Charles Burney, *Music, Men, and Manners in France and Italy, 1770*, ed. H. Edmund Poole (London: Folio Society: 1959), 204. See also Burney, *An Eighteenth-Century Musical Tour in France and Italy*, ed. Percy A. Scholes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 293.

⁹ A complete performance of the *Duetto* on two clavichords, by Peter Sykes and David Yearsley, can be heard on the website accompanying this volume.

D U E T T O.

Allegro moderato, e cantabile.

Clav. I.

Clav. 2.

dolce.

*) Druckfehler corrigirt.
DUETTO.

A

f. marc.

Example 1 Johann Gottfried M  thel, Duetto, 1st mvt, mm. 1–13.

musicians of this nether world.”¹⁰ The duet was a touchstone of contemporary German expressivity and technical difficulty.

To this day the quirks and relishes of M  thel’s high style confuse, even thwart,

¹⁰ Burney, *Present State of Music in Germany*, 2:330.

many who try to tackle the piece. While Burney may not have been willing to attempt to learn and perform the duet, he did have at his disposal family forces that could meet the work's demands. His eldest child Esther, nicknamed Hetty, and her husband (also her cousin) Charles Rousseau Burney had been married in London in September of 1770 while the bride's father was in Italy on his first continental tour; Burney learned of the nuptials while he was in Naples in October.¹¹ Born to his first wife Esther Sleepe and named after her, Hetty had been a child prodigy on the harpsichord and offered living proof of her father's own talents as a teacher, since she was, he claimed, "a better player at seven years old than I had been at seventeen."¹² Hetty's husband Charles Rousseau Burney, who is immortalized wearing a fine red coat and holding a score in Thomas Gainsborough's portrait from around 1780 now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, had been drafted as a performer for the 1769 performances surrounding the conferral of his future father-in-law's doctorate in music at Oxford University.¹³ A flamboyant keyboard virtuoso, gifted improviser, violinist, and composer of keyboard music, Charles Rousseau was a jobbing harpsichordist on the London scene and one of the major attractions at the Burney musicales. If Charles Burney had brought back a copy of the Müthel duet from his 1772 trip, then the keyboard couple would have been able to spend much time practicing the work before presenting it repeatedly in 1775: even for talented keyboard players such as Hetty and Charles Rousseau Burney it would have taken more than a little preparation to make sense of the layers of ornaments and performance markings.

Although he sometimes complained about the distractions of the musical salon that diverted him from his labors on the *General History*, Burney had in this husband-wife pair of keyboard aces a valuable asset that could expertly advertise his own leading literary product to that point—the tour diaries. These three volumes closed by listing works—chief among them the Müthel *Duetto*—that opened new musical realms extending to the eastern edge of the continent. Just as the Polynesian Mai had been brought back to the Burney residence in the company of Charles's son James Burney (a naval officer on Captain Cook's second voyage), so too, the Müthel duet appeared as booty from Charles Burney's

¹¹ Percy A. Scholes, *The Great Doctor Burney*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 1:177. Burney was informed of the marriage from his travelling companion Captain Forbes, who had just learned of the union by post.

¹² Quoted in Howard Irving, *Ancients and Moderns: William Crotch and the Development of Classical Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 152. See also Scholes, *The Great Doctor Burney*, 1:98–99.

¹³ Frances Burney, *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, vol. 1, 1768–1773, ed. Lars Troides (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 71.

travels. For the many visitors who came to the St. Martin's Street salon and who knew the diaries, hearing the Müthel must have immediately put them in mind of Burney the writer and traveler.

Writing in the middle of November 1775 to his friend Thomas Twining, himself an eager musical amateur and enthusiastic admirer of the music of C. P. E. Bach, Burney mentions the Müthel duet as the centerpiece of a major musical gathering at his house: "We had all the great Volk here on Sunday to nothing but Harp^d Lessons & duets,—and a song or two by M^{rs} Burdenel."¹⁴ Reading these passages against the diaries of another daughter, Frances [Fanny] Burney, it is clear that the source of the excitement is Müthel's *Duetto*. While proud of the effect his daughter and son-in-law had on the guests, Charles Burney also laments the distraction from his literary efforts: "All were so charmés that I shall be forced to sacrifice another blessed day to let some other great Volk hear our rumbles."¹⁵ Burney conjures an extraordinary scenario in which the rich and powerful debase themselves before him, not, as one would expect, the other way around: "[Lady] Edgcumbe almost downed on her scraggy knees to me this morning to let M[onsieur] de Guignes, Mad Diaden, & Count Bruhl hear 'em."¹⁶ The aristocrats, cosmopolitans, and diplomats assembled in his house were eager, even to the point of begging, says Burney, for the exotic, extravagant music of Müthel.

The groveling of the host's betters, inspired by the *Duetto*, led Burney to give rare vent to his resentment of the well-to-do amateurs who would subscribe to his *General History* and to whom he taught the harpsichord for the lion's share of his income: "If I wanted anything of them how they'd hang an [*sic*] ere they'd let me enter *their* doors, much more ere enter mine. Yet we must submit to the world's humours, when they produce nothing but Vanity,—if one can keep off the *Vexation*,—of Spirit. ..." ¹⁷ This pique contrasted starkly with how Burney was perceived by some of his social superiors. One of his most important patrons Hester Thrale—whose own salon regularly included Samuel Johnson, David Garrick, and Joshua Reynolds, as well as Burney—thought him obsequious, pointedly

¹⁴ Charles Burney to Thomas Twining, 15[–16?] November 1775, in *The Letters of Dr Charles Burney*, vol. 1, 1751–1784, ed. Alvaro Ribeiro (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 191.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Burney to Twining, late November 1775, in *The Letters of Dr. Charles Burney*, 1:191–92. Roger Lonsdale characterizes the letter as one of "unusual bitterness." Lonsdale, *Dr. Charles Burney: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 169.

noting in her own journal that as a “Quality dangler, he lost that Independent Spirit & lofty manner without which no man can please me—but in Burney I pardon the want on’t.”¹⁸ On Burney’s home turf—where social discourse was less constrained than at Thrale’s Streatham gatherings—the complexity of his situation came closer to the surface, at least once the guests had left: the sublime musical oration of the temperamental musician of Riga, presented in the polite company gathered in Isaac Newton’s former house (into which the Burneys had moved only the year before), kindled by its very success a paradoxical outburst of animosity from the famously good-humored, sometimes sycophantic, musical taste-maker.

Two weeks later, at the end of November, Burney again referred to the piece, informing Twining that his son-in-law had himself composed a duet, but one “less *recherché* than that of Müthel, consequently, easier to comprehend.”¹⁹ This was the same line of thought to be read in the encomium at the close of the diaries: the work was beyond the powers of most performers and listeners, but thankfully a family member was up to the task of producing something more amiable, more suitable for the less intrepid musical adventurers filling the Burney drawing room. Even amidst the Müthel *Duetto*’s series of triumphs, the piece was summoning thoughts of difficulty, class tension, and diversion from necessary literary labors.

Some nine months before Burney penned the pair of letters referring to the Müthel, the addressee Twining had himself been present at what appears to have been the London premiere of the piece, as described in Fanny Burney’s diaries. Fanny’s diaries contain marvelous vignettes that bring the Burneys’ house concerts to exuberant life²⁰ and reveal just how big a hit the Müthel actually was in 1775. Fanny produces whole chunks of precisely reported dialogue, deftly placing the characters in the Burneys’ house between entryway, dining room, library, her father’s study, and the drawing room where the music was made. The situations and personalities are as vivid as—indeed closely related to—many of those in

¹⁸ Hester Thrale, *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale (later Mrs. Piozzi), 1776–1809*, ed. Katharine Balderston (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942), 1:368–72. See also Gillen D’Arcy Wood, *Romanticism and Musical Culture in Britain, 1770–1840: Virtue and Virtuosity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 69–70. For an insightful analysis of Burney’s more well-known talent for ingratiating himself with others, see Ellen Lockhart, “Burney the Flatterer,” paper presented at “Charles Burney, Musical Travel, and the Invention of Music History,” conference held at Cornell University, March 12–14, 2010.

¹⁹ Burney to Twining, late November 1775, in *The Letters of Charles Burney*, 1:193–94.

²⁰ This is in large part thanks to Fanny’s glittering talent for dialog, the fruits of which can also be seen in her early novels. Wood, *Romanticism and Musical Culture in Britain*, 69–71.

her hugely popular first novel, *Evelina*, which would appear in 1778 and vault her to literary fame once her initially hidden identity was revealed.

Fanny describes the *Duetto*'s debut in effusive terms: "Music was then announced, & lasted almost without intermission till Ten o'Clock. Nobody played but Mr. [Charles Rousseau] Burney, except that Hetty accompanied him in 2 Harpsichord Duets, one very pretty, by Mr. Burney himself, & another of most exquisite Composition, by Müthel."²¹ "Accompanied" might not seem the right adjective, even if it accurately describes the gendered hierarchy seemingly inherent in the relationship of husband-and-wife keyboardists; while Hetty was given the marginally less demanding second part of the Müthel duet, the twenty-five minute work afforded her abundant solo opportunities.²² The audience was captivated: "Mr. Twining was enraptured; Mrs. Strange listened with silent wonder & pleasure; & Mr. Bruce was Composed into perfect good humour." Then himself enjoying much celebrity, James Bruce was the famed explorer of the origins of the Blue Nile. We could perhaps imagine Charles Burney reusing, for the benefit of Bruce and others, his description of the Müthel as unknown territory to be conquered.

When the piece was trotted out again some two months later on Sunday May 21st it was heard by an even more illustrious group of "volk": Barons, Knights of the Realm, and other grandees. After various light operatic fare by the fashionable Sacchini came "the *great Gun* of the Concert, namely a Harpsichord Duet [the Müthel] between Mr. Burney & my sister."²³ Fanny's praise represents both the family's view and that of the refined company: "It is the Noblest Composition that was ever made," she effuses. The performers were also stupendous, encouraging even the phlegmatic and taciturn to rave with enthusiasm: "They came off with flying Colours—Nothing could exceed the general applause. Mr. Harris was in *extacy*; Sr. James Lake who is silent & shy, broke forth into the warmest expressions of delight—Lady Lake, more prone to be pleased, was quite in raptures—the charming Baroness repeatedly declared she had never

²¹ These quotations are taken from Fanny Burney's journal entry of March 10, 1775, describing the concert of the previous Sunday (March 5th). See *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, ed. Lars Troide, vol. 2, 1768–1773 (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 87–91; the Müthel duet is mentioned on page 88.

²² Yet the idea that the second part was nonetheless subservient—though still beyond the means of most, especially amateurs—does seem to show the influence of Charles Burney's description at the close of the *Present State* quoted above.

²³ This and all subsequent quotations from Fanny Burney's account of this concert are taken from a letter of around the 22nd to the 25th of May 1775 from her to Samuel Crisp. See *Early Journals and Letters*, 2:128–37.

been at so agreeable a Concert before; & many said They had never *heard music* till then.” Fanny concludes, “It is not possible for Instrumental music to be more *finished*.” The evening had begun, according to Fanny’s account, “with Mr. Burney playing a Concerto of Schobert, & one of my Father’s & a great deal of Extemporary Preluding.” The Baroness von Deide [*sic*],²⁴ a talented amateur played after many “entreaties” from Burney and others; she was urged to go on, but then yielded to Hetty, who played a piece by Eckard, another composer on Burney’s list of German masters of the “present age” that included Müthel. This repertoire of contemporary virtuosos (Schobert had died in 1767) reflected Burney’s wide-ranging collecting and his championing of continental keyboard music; but again, these pieces could also be heard as an advertisement for his literary efforts, a sort of enacted apotheosis of his tours and one that was likely to engender thoughts of the forthcoming history on which Burney was so busy.

As performed by the husband-and-wife pair, the Müthel duet’s renown grew into the next autumn when polite society had returned to “town” (i.e., London) from their country estates. The concert of November 12th described by Burney in one of the above-cited letters to Thomas Twining was, according to Fanny, “occasioned by the desire . . . to have Prince Orloff of Russia hear Mr. Burney & my sister in a Duet before he left England.”²⁵ As Fanny notes, Lady Edgcumbe had relentlessly talked up to her friends and guests the Müthel duet that had so fired her enthusiasm. Its eventual performance was “kept till his Highness arrived,” wrote Fanny,²⁶ discreetly failing to mention that Orlov had earlier that day had dinner at Buckingham Palace. Clearly the Burney salon was a high priority among the musically interested. Prince Grigory Grigorevich Orlov was, like James Bruce, a very tall man: that Sunday evening at the Burney household was one of some masculine height, and jokes about it, too. Fanny for one felt “so *Dwarfish* by his *high Highness*.”²⁷ Twining was reminded also of his own short-

²⁴ Ursula (von Callenberg) Diede. See Peter Sabor, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 136.

²⁵ The quotations regarding the house concert of November 12, 1775 come from two letters by Frances Burney to Samuel Crisp (November 13th and November 21st). See *Early Journals and Letters*, 2:165–92 at 169. Such was the importance of these concerts for Charles Burney and his family that those featuring the Müthel duet are among the few included—by way of extracts taken from Fanny’s journals—in his posthumous memoirs edited by Fanny. See Frances D’Arblay, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, 3 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1832), 2:11–68, esp. 17, 43, 55, 61.

²⁶ Frances Burney to Samuel Crisp (November 13th and November 21st), *Early Journals and Letters*, 2:175.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:181. Burney’s friend Horace Walpole referred to Orlov during his year in London as “the Great or rather the Big.” See Anthony Glenn Cross, “*By the Banks of the Thames*”: *Russians in*

ness. Bruce's appearance at this party too comes moments after the conclusion of the Mützel; the explorer just missed a third hearing of the piece. But he and others were eager to enjoy repeat performances. When the philosopher James Harris arrived, greeting first "the great folks" and only then acknowledging the hosts, Fanny informed him that the Burneys were "all afraid he would be tired of so much of *one thing, for that there was nothing for him again but the Duet*."²⁸ Harris's response expressed the attitude of many in attendance: "That is the very reason I come ... because I was never so much entertained as when I heard it before, and wish to renew the same pleasure."²⁹

In November of 1775, Orlov was concluding a European Grand Tour that had included a sojourn in Italy and meetings with Englishmen also visited by Burney during his trip there.³⁰ After the careful, tricky seating of the aristocratic attendees, Fanny confirms that "The Grand Duet, Mützel, was then played." As at earlier performances, the keyboardists' relationship to one another was an object of titillated interest for the audience: "Added to the applause given to the *music*, every body had something to say, upon the singularity of the performers being man & Wife. Mr. Boone said, to me, 'See what a man & and his Wife can do together, when they live in *Harmony*!'"³¹ As ever during this, Mützel's greatest London year, the response to this last documented performance of the piece was nothing short of rapturous; from Fanny we get the actual dialogue from the mouth of Lady Edgcumbe that her father seems to have condemned in his letter to Twining: "O Dr. Burney,' cried Lady Edgcumbe, 'you have set me *a madding*. I shall never bear any other music.'"³² These are the effusions of the salon, hardly needing any exaggeration from the diarist to take on a comic tone, though it should also be noted that Fanny described Lady Edgcumbe at the same evening as "a very clever, lively, quick, discerning woman... totally free from airs and superiority."³³ In contrast to her father's letters, Fanny's diary evinces no overt

Eighteenth Century Britain (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1980), 240.

²⁸ Frances Burney to Samuel Crisp (November 13th and November 21st), *Early Journals and Letters*, 2:175.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Cross, *Russians in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 240–43.

³¹ Frances Burney to Samuel Crisp (November 13th and November 21st), *Early Journals and Letters*, 2:182.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 2:171.

nor obvious resentment, even if she seems to be having her own brand of fun with the enthusiasms of her superiors.

At this point in the story another Bruce—not the explorer but an important courtier soon to be made first Earl of Ailesbury—informs Prince Orlov that “the performers of the Duet were *mari & femme*.” Fanny observes that “The Prince seemed surprised, & Walking up to Hetty, made her many Compliments; & expressed his wonder that two such Performers should chance to be United: & added ‘Mais, *qu’à produit tant d’Harmonie?*’ [what has so much harmony produced?] Hetty answers: ‘*Rien, mon seigneur, que trois Enfants*’ [nothing but three children].”³⁴ There must have been discussion of this remark amongst the family members after the guests had departed, for Fanny reports that “[Hetty] vows she was *irresistably* led to make this queer answer at the moment, but was sorry afterwards, for the Prince laughed immoderately; & went immediately to Lord Bruce, & repeated *ce que Madame avoit dit*—with many droll comments & observations, such as, that such an *harmonious* secret should be communicated to the foreign academies; that *was* a consequence of Natural philosophy—&c &c.” With the endorsement of Prince Orlov’s flirty repartee the remark appeared ready to embark on a Grand Tour of its own, launched beyond England’s shores along with the big-gun duet that had itself traveled to England from beyond even the reach of Dr. Burney’s own travels.

Given the swooning reception that greeted the piece, Burney’s comments in his letter of late November to his friend Twining about the Mützel being beyond the comprehension of his guests seem oddly mean-spirited. From Fanny’s accounts, the musical devotees who gathered in Burney’s house seem unambiguously to have craved more of the *Duetto* as performed by the Burney family, even while the master of the house looked down his own nose at their ability to appreciate it: the complexity of its style allowed this man of lowly origins the rare pleasure of condescension (in the modern, as opposed to the eighteenth-century sense of the word) to those higher up in the social hierarchy. As Burney’s private correspondence indicates, Mützel’s duet represented—and unleashed—a host of competing desires in musical supporters and in the host himself.

After its 1775 glory, a piece that stood as a monument to Burney’s travels and to his international network of contacts, as well as to the talent of his musical family, seems to have been withdrawn from circulation, perhaps with Burney’s encouragement. Even if those who heard the piece, some of them several times, might subsequently have spoken of the duet and its performers in their own,

³⁴ Ibid., 2:183.

often contiguous, social circles from Bath to Naples to St. Petersburg, a scent of private acrimony and ambivalence hung over this landmark work in the family's own history and its relation to a wider, more powerful public. Even during the high point of the *Duetto*'s celebrity, Fanny's radiant account appears shadowed by her father's lurking distemper. From the surviving correspondences and diary entries it would seem plausible to suggest also that Burney was already unsettled by the outsized praise for Müthel he had stamped on the work at the close of his popular *The Present State* diaries, then the calling card of his literary fame.

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Before we consider Burney's later repudiation of Müthel and his duet, it is worth asking what about the piece might so have enraptured the likes of Lady Edgcumbe and others.

First, there was the work's most obvious trait: it was huge, bigger in its way even than Orlov and Bruce were in theirs. Performed with repeats, the opening movement alone takes about twenty minutes at the reasonable *Allegro moderato* specified in the print. If a listener is to enjoy its dimensions, she must resist being bored by its long stretches of brilliance and still longer ones of pathos. This sprawling territory was filled out by a free-ranging style whose origins, like the origins of the print itself, recalled the vastness of the rest of Europe extending east from Berlin and Prague. The Burney salon repertoire was filled with international fare, both players and listeners eager for the idiosyncrasies of C. P. E. Bach and Domenico Scarlatti. Yet, even by these standards, the Müthel duet must have seemed distant, demanding, especially exotic.

Fanny's diaries vividly depict the sometimes risqué conversational gambits generated by the piece. That Müthel's music could encourage such talk and such thoughts is not obvious at first, for the work commands attention not initially as a duet, but as solo display. The pompous opening presented by the first keyboard part (taken by Charles Rousseau Burney at the St. Martin's Street house concerts) evokes the regal—and decidedly masculine—French overture (Example 1). Built on a stock descending bass line deployed by countless eighteenth-century composers across the length and breadth of Europe, the theme is eventually taken up by the second keyboard part in the dominant of B-flat, Hetty entering at last after about a minute of listening along with everyone else to Charles Rousseau Burney's self-aggrandizing exordium (Example 2). Her delivery of this material is decorated by her husband low in the register with flashing runs and whispered commentary. After the initial coupling of the two parts over the opening theme,



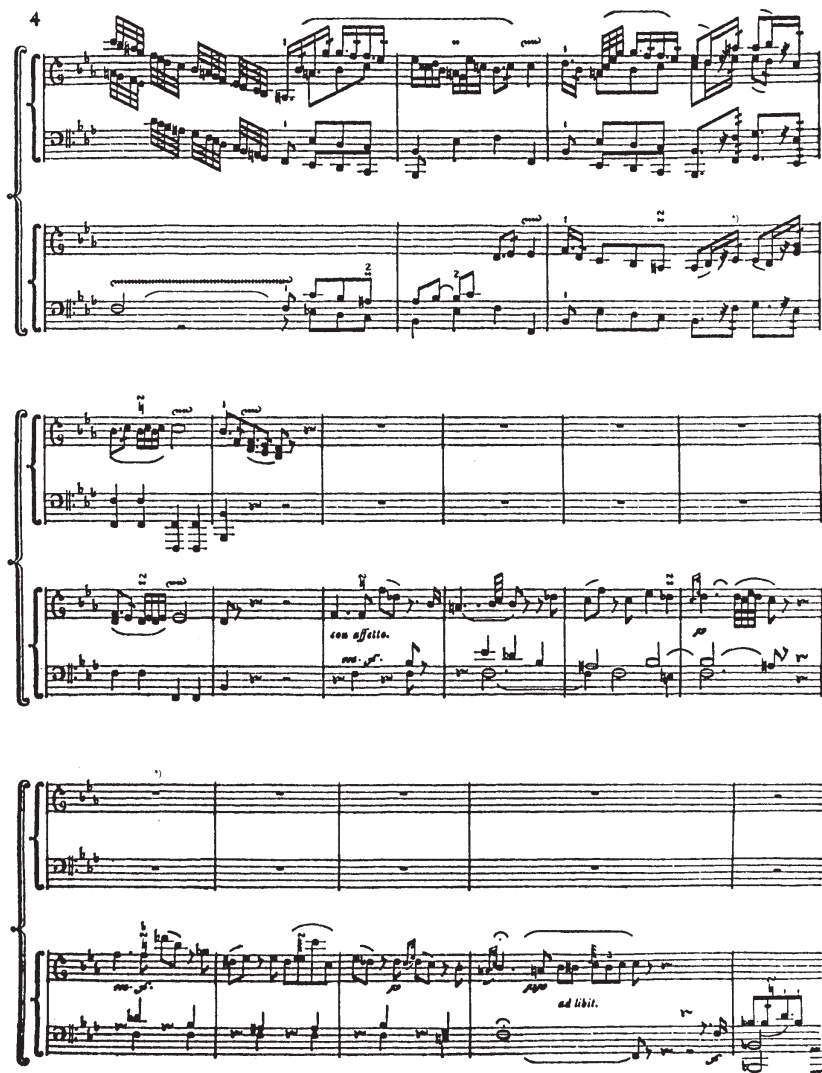
Example 2 Müthel, Duetto, 1st mvt, mm. 14–26.

ecstatic thirty-second note back-and-forth between the parts ensues—more passionate effusion than perky dialog (Example 3). Finally, Hetty gets her own solo of a new, pathetic melody, marked *con affetto*. This passage, which comes across almost as a confession of closely guarded thoughts, fades into a pleading pianissimo before returning to the opening theme, now pushed towards exuberance by a rushing right-hand flourish from the first keyboard—Charles Rousseau taking



Example 3 Müthel, Duetto, 1st mvt., mm. 30–37.

control again (Example 4). One might be inclined to hear this give-and-take, this dynamic of coquetry, command, and mutual rapture, as paralleling the sometimes subversive wit of the salon or, if you were to ask Hetty and Orlov, as giving musical form to loving caresses. Burney performances, both in music and in conversation, could be at times flirtatious, at other times ardently sensual. That Hetty herself



Example 4 Müthel, Duetto, 1st mvt., mm. 38–51.

joked about the amorous results—three children in five years of marriage with her duet partner—of musical and sexual collaboration confirms that the piece as performed by the pair of young Burneys gave off an erotic charge. Gender roles too were at play, the woman not always merely (stereotypically) submissive, but capable of unguarded utterance both at the keyboard and away from it. Judging

from Fanny's account, the piece's ebullient reception had much to do with the performers and their relationship to each other, the music presenting a risky sensuousness absent from the other duets on offer.

Although there are many intimate musical encounters in the piece between the two instruments—aural versions of the deliciously awkward touching of hands Burney himself described in the preface to his set of duets for two players at one instrument³⁵—the feel of the *Duetto* is more often spacious, even grandiose, the bass moving predominantly in striding half-notes, covering ground explored more minutely by the right hand parts. Yet the arabesques, feints, gasps, and whispers of the melody that is at the top of the texture—and highest in Burney's own aesthetic hierarchy—are also marked by their hesitations and unpredictability, even their unwillingness to move forward and instead indulge in the emotion-saturated present. This tension, too, must have thrilled the Burney audiences: the music pursuing a baroque irregularity that drew the label "*recherche*" from the host himself, but also providing a platform for the revelation of feeling. When the pace quickens it does so with arching runs answering back and forth between the parts; these sweeping, euphoric sequences of sevenths culminate in vigorous dotted rhythms that recall the opening motive as they drive towards a long cadential locution in decorated parallel sixths between the parts, the last word going to Charles Rousseau. The joint *forte* that closes each half of the first movement is answered both times by a *piano* echo from Hetty; this makes for a suave, one could even say "traditionally feminine," balancing of the "manly" dotted rhythms delivered solo by Charles Rousseau Burney at the beginning and half-way point of the gigantic sonata form (Example 5). The piece is about grandeur and distance, but also intense closeness and interiority.

This landscape is shot through with the shifting patterns of light and shade so beloved by Charles Burney and presumably by those to whom he preached his aesthetic views on music.³⁶ Each of the *Duetto's* three movements' assured opening mottos gives way to mournful soliloquies, stormy outbursts, aggrieved complaints, and stentorian octaves. There is little opportunity for detached, amused listening. The music does not simply pass by as gallant decoration, but demands attention to its restive emotions and flashes of elevated wit. It is oratorical, but also vividly conversational. As presented by the married couple,

³⁵ For Burney's remarks on the touching of hands of two people at one keyboard (a genre he claims to be the first to publish), see the "Preface" to his *Four Sonatas or Duets for two Performers at One Piano Forte* (London: Bremner, 1777).

³⁶ See for example, Charles Burney, *Present State of Music in Germany*, 1:91.



Example 5 Müthel, Duetto, 1st mvt., mm. 61–70.

the extreme range of effects inspired in turn extremes of enthusiasm from the listeners and watchers in the Burney library.

The duet's size, sensuality, and unpredictability of mood demanded major technical accomplishment from each partner as well as precise ensemble playing that further stoked fascination with the couple and its music-making. The Burneys had attained a level of musical achievement that their aristocratic patrons, even those who often played at the Burney salon, never would nor could; no piece provided a better medium for expressing this truth than the *Duetto*. Although the title page of the Riga print (Figure 2) appealed to all current domestic keyboard instruments (harpsichord, fortepiano, and clavichord) and thus the widest possible market, Müthel seems self-consciously to have raised the standards of keyboard performance to levels mostly unreachable by amateurs. The composer was renowned for his powers of persuasion at the clavichord,³⁷ an instrument

³⁷ Erwin Kemmler, *Johann Gottfried Müthel (1728–1788) und das nordostdeutsche Musikleben seiner*

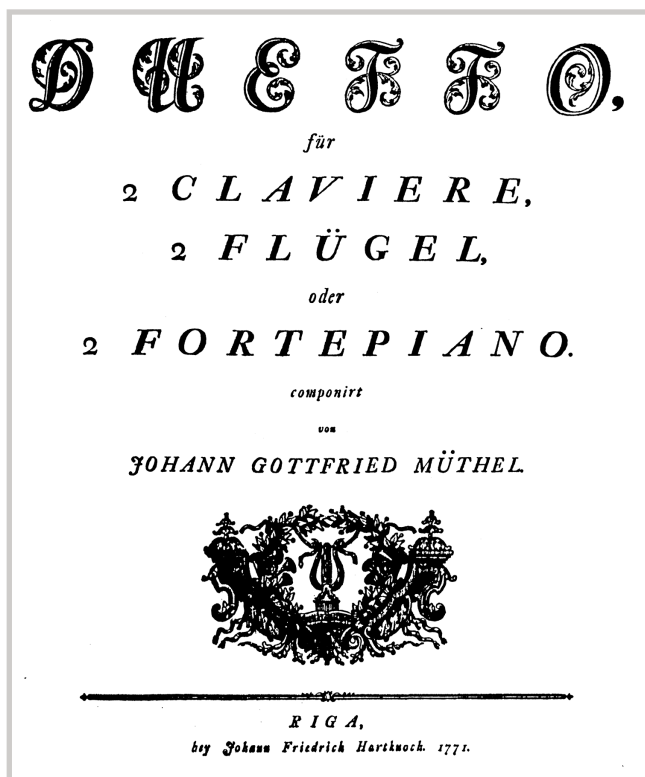


Figure 2 Mützel, Duetto (Riga, 1771), title page.

whose pedagogical and expressive value Burney also praised.³⁸ The performances of the duet at Burney's London residence in 1775 used two harpsichords (though one of these might have been the combination instrument built by their friend John Joseph Merlin, also present at many of these gatherings);³⁹ even though the harpsichord was incapable of delivering the clavichord-specific effects of *Bebung* (vibrato) and the many graduations of dynamics called for so frequently in Mützel's score, Hetty and Charles Rousseau clearly achieved new heights of expressivity not previously heard on the London scene.

The complexity of the ornaments, the difficulties of coordinating the keyboards, and welter of unexpected rhythmic figures were, like Riga, far beyond

Zeit (Marburg: Lahn, 1970), 102–6.

³⁸ Burney, *Present State of Music in France and Italy*, 2nd ed., 90–91.

³⁹ Scholes, *The Great Doctor Burney*, 2:202–3.

the reach of the refined ladies who took lessons with the *pater familias*, Charles Burney. Instead the *Duetto* brought the Baltic to them, the work's lofty discourse offered up by the Burneys for consumption in the heart of London, to an audience comprised of many who supported the family financially by studying the keyboard with Burney and subscribing to his *Tours* and the *History*. In terms of the musical economy of the Burney household, it can hardly be a coincidence that the composer whom Burney himself trumpeted as one of the greatest of the age should also celebrate his greatest success in the London concerts of 1775. This popularity generated value for the Burney enterprise, encouraging interest in his travels and the upcoming *History*. Even taking into account the fungible tastes of the listeners and the arbitrary dictates of fashion, this duet was unexampled music—strange, compelling, bizarre, and big; repeat performances of it captivated the rich and powerful, yet paradoxically, it would seem, their elated reactions elicited more resentment than pride from Burney himself, confirming that he was beholden to his social superiors. The *Duetto*'s evocation of distance paradoxically brought into relief his own confinement.

* * *

In the fall of 1775, just a year before the appearance of the first volume of the *General History*, the Burneys were living and playing large, the Müthel duet a vital, if also ambiguous contributor to the family's society profile. The 1780s, that decade when Burney took on the leadership and chronicling of the massive Handel commemorations and when the final installments of the *History* appeared, were also marked by his failure to gain the secure court appointment he had long desired. Burney continued to teach as many as fifty-seven private lessons a week, conveyed to his wealthy students' residences in the carriage that he saw as an important symbol of his social standing. His biographer Roger Lonsdale describes carefully and sympathetically the financial difficulties that beset Burney in the 1780s and his often reluctant reliance on wealthy patrons.⁴⁰ With his children out of the house in St. Martin's Street, except for daughters Fanny and then Sarah who would look after him in turn, Burney moved to more modest apartments at the Chelsea Hospital where he served as organist, these lodgings having been secured with the help of his friend Edmund Burke.⁴¹ Burney gave up his carriage—most likely forced to do so by the state of his finances—

⁴⁰ Lonsdale, *Charles Burney*, 292–97.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 295–96.

a blow to his prestige and image of himself.⁴² The move to Chelsea by decade's end was a literal withdrawal from the center of musical life in London. For at least a decade after his move, he continued to teach and write, completing his *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Abate Metastasio* in 1796.

The start of the new century brought with it the last great literary undertaking of his old age: the drafting of dozens of articles for Rees's *Cyclopædia*. For this project Burney drew frequently on previously written material, revising much of it, but also producing many of the entries anew. While he felt proud to be part of this monument of the British Enlightenment, Burney was also driven by money; he was later criticized for receiving a sum of £1,000 for his contributions, though given the amount of time he spent on the project, this hardly seems excessive.⁴³ Burney's *Memoirs* were prepared posthumously by Fanny (by then Madame D'Arblay), who bowdlerized and cut them down to nearly nothing from the masses of autobiographical materials she had received (and later destroyed) from her father. In this account, Burney's beloved daughter tries, perhaps too hard, to cast his late-life efforts as a selfless commitment to learning and as a counter to the melancholy of his later years when he was so often, she claimed, visited by mortal reflections: his work on the *Cyclopædia*, she writes, "was marked by such extraordinary intellectual exertion as may almost be called unparalleled, when considered as springing from volition, not necessity; and from efforts the most virtuously philosophical, to while away enervating sadness."⁴⁴ Fanny had been away in France during the years that Burney worked on the *Cyclopædia* articles.

Whether staying busy helped his moods or not, Burney labored unrelentingly, with few holidays between 1801 and 1805, complaining frequently that he feared he would not finish the project before his own death. At the start of 1803, after a year-and-a-half of work, he was only up to the Gs: later that year he gave up his private teaching in order to devote himself fully to the *Cyclopædia*, complaining that "in the shackles with w[hich] I have manacled myself, I have no time for

⁴² Rather poignantly, in his article on William Savage, a London singing master of the middle of the eighteenth century, Burney wrote: "He was the first English music-master who kept his carriage ... [yet] he outlived fashion so much, as to walk on foot during the last years of his life." Burney, "Savage," in Abraham Rees, *Cyclopædia*, vol. 31 (London: Longman et al., 1819), unpaginated. The date in this citation and those below represents the year when the whole *Cyclopædia* was published, though, as is indicated in the body of this essay, individual volumes were issued before the entire set was completed. See also Scholes, *The Great Doctor Burney*, 2:57.

⁴³ Kerry S. Grant, *Dr. Burney as Critic and Historian of Music* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983). For a spirited defense of the propriety of Burney's remuneration for his work on the *Cyclopædia*, see Scholes, *The Great Doctor Burney*, 2:186.

⁴⁴ D'Arblay, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, 3:302.

amusement.”⁴⁵ In spite of the onerousness of the task, Lonsdale characterizes these articles as being for the most part retrospective and filled with “affectionate recollections” written in a “relaxed and good humoured tone.”⁴⁶ Burney’s active involvement in the project essentially came to an end after 1808.⁴⁷

The legacies of all but one of the composers on Burney’s list of keyboard greats that comes at the end of the diaries remain unblemished in the *Cyclopædia*. Scarlatti, for example, is praised by Burney as “the most illustrious, original, fanciful, and powerful performer on the harpsichord in Europe during the early part of the last century.”⁴⁸ C. P. E. Bach’s status also endures: “long regarded as the greatest composer and performer on keyed instruments of his time.”⁴⁹ Burney shores up Handel’s position as the greatest musical figure of the age, even if the adulation expressed by Burney had over the years of his boosterism sometimes been required of him on account of political forces and obedience to patronage.

Two other composers on the list whose music—not coincidentally, I suggested earlier—was also heard in the Burney salon at the time of the Mützel duet’s unveiling, are treated with the generous regard described by Lonsdale. The German keyboardist active in Paris, Johann Schobert, had already been dead for five years by the time Burney mentioned him at the close of the diaries. Clearly working from memory and previously written material, Burney describes Schobert’s accidental death (from poisonous mushrooms picked on the outskirts of Paris), then proceeds to praise his music: “His written compositions ... are charming and abounding with beautiful melodies. His works (1780) are still in the hands of those who cultivate the harpsichord and piano forte.”⁵⁰ The parenthetical date admits that the view expressed is the one that obtained a quarter-century prior to the writing of the article. An update is not deemed necessary. As for Johann Eckard, another German active in Paris, he got little notice in Burney’s *History*;⁵¹ but his reputation remains buoyant in the *Cyclopædia*, though his fame less so.

⁴⁵ Burney to Ralph Griffiths, October 12, 1802, quoted in Lonsdale, *Charles Burney*, 417.

⁴⁶ Lonsdale, *Charles Burney*, 430.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 429.

⁴⁸ Burney, “Scarlatti, Domenico,” in Rees, *Cyclopædia*, vol. 31, unpaginated.

⁴⁹ Burney, “Bach, Charles Philip Emanuel,” in Rees, *Cyclopædia*, vol. 33, unpaginated.

⁵⁰ Burney, “Schobert, —,” in Rees, *Cyclopædia*, vol. 31, unpaginated. See also, Burney, *A General History of Music*, 4:597. The music of Mützel was much valued in Paris around 1770 in the circle of Burney’s correspondent, Denis Diderot. See Kemmler, *Johann Gottfried Mützel (1728–1788)*, 103–4.

⁵¹ Burney, *A General History of Music*, 4:598.

Burney characterizes him as “a harpsichord-player of great abilities, though little known, except in private, by connoisseurs.”⁵²

The exception to these positive views on German keyboard players of the previous century, all but one of them (Eckard) deceased by the time Burney began work on the *Cyclopædia* articles, is Müthel. Burney allots him two columns—twice as much space as is given the articles on Eckard and Schobert.⁵³ Burney begins his article on Müthel by reprising the passage on him from the *Present State*, augmenting this material with biographical details taken from the lengthy footnote added by Johann Joachim Bode to the German translation of the diaries.⁵⁴ These re-purposed chunks of prose are cordoned off from the new matter with some lines from Metastasio, one of Burney’s great literary and musical heroes held to be a paragon of naturalness and clarity. As translated by Burney, these poetic sentiments presage a drastic critical reversal on his part:

Nor do the strains, though sweet,
At present so excel,
As those which blame defeat,
And have no parallel.

Indeed, the picture darkens further when Burney then confesses that in 1772, the year he published his praise of Müthel as representing the pinnacle of contemporary continental keyboard music, he had “seen few works of Vanhal or Haydn, and none of Mozart.”⁵⁵ The latter two names had by the time of the *Cyclopædia* long since pushed Müthel off the summit: “we admired the taste, invention, high finishing, complication, and equality of grace and melody.” But on returning to Müthel—at this point in the article Burney is concerned specifically with his keyboard concertos—for the first time in three decades and “deliberately examining them we find the great laws laid down by Rousseau, and generally adopted, infringed: the want of symmetry and phraseology in the number of bars, and

⁵² Burney, “Eckard, —,” in Rees, *Cyclopædia*, vol. 12, unpaginated.

⁵³ I think it’s worth noting that the mere fact of the inclusion of these names, and the length of the article on Müthel, speak to the importance they had played in keyboard culture, at least as Burney viewed it from his rooms in the Chelsea Hospital.

⁵⁴ Charles Burney, *Tagebuch einer musikalischen Reise*, trans. C. D. Ebeling and J. J. C. Bode, 3 vols. (Hamburg, 1772–73), 3:268–71.

⁵⁵ Burney, “Müthel, Johann Godfried,” in Rees, *Cyclopædia*, vol. 24, unpaginated. It was perhaps as an “oddity” that the German-born English piano virtuoso, Johann Baptist Cramer acquired Burney’s copy of the Müthel duet when, as stipulated in his will, Burney’s huge library was auctioned off in 1814, the year of his death. See *Catalogue of the Music Library of Charles Burney* (London, 1814; repr. Amsterdam: Knuf, 1973), 30. The sale of 1047 lots lasted seven days.

unity of melody.” Rousseau, whom Burney met on his 1770 trip, was a hero of the family, even to the point of bequeathing his name to one of them: in his view simplicity, naturalness, and supremacy of melody were vital. The complexity of Mützel’s music was now heard to destroy coherence and prevent persuasiveness. Clarity had always been one of the most important criteria in Burney’s aesthetics, but by the first decade of the nineteenth century it was ascendant: his article on “*chiarezza*” is one of the longest of his contributions to the *Cyclopædia*. The lavish difficulty and bold unpredictability of Mützel were now not simply complex, but destructive to musical communication and feeling. Burney even goes on to enumerate the former paragon’s demerits: “His closes are now become antique. His graces are misapplied. Shakes and trills on the first and last notes of a bar have been long banished.” The lack of coherent phrase-making is then pilloried, seeming to Burney like reading “Milton’s blank verse without stops.”

Clearly defensive regarding his about-face, Burney seeks to explain the reversal as the intervening establishment of Newtonian axioms rather than as a surrender to prevailing tastes: “we have discovered what will now be called defects [in Mützel’s keyboard music] from laws posterior to the time when Mützel’s compositions were printed.” This is an old man going through intellectual contortions, Burney’s pen far more limber than his increasingly beset and aged body: “After having ranked Mützel so high thirty-four years ago, it is necessary that we should assign reasons for the warmth of our eulogy. If judged by laws which did not exist in 1772, or at least were not established throughout Europe, the censure might doubtless admit of some extenuation.” The exact tallying of the years indicates how gingerly Burney is proceeding, eager for the covering fire he hopes chronology can provide. He then cites musicians of a previous generation, Corelli and Handel, who abided by the eternal dictates of “grace, the principal feature in music.” The “classic” composers cannot be displaced from the canon, but the erratic Mützel must be. The deferral to “laws” and lapsing time deftly downplays his own missionary zeal in bringing Mützel to London prominence and extinguishes any lingering glow from the house concerts of 1775 remembered by even a few of the *Cyclopædia* readers, including Fanny.

To this point in the article, Burney’s specific stylistic objections are directed at Mützel’s two keyboard concertos published in the 1760s; at the close of the entry, however, Burney turns to the *Duetto*, promising to “examine it with equal rigour.” The result is only slightly more forgiving: he concedes that, “there are [in the piece] effects produced by harmony and modulation,” but then immediately condemns these for being “occasionally quite independent of melody.” In defense of his own reappraisal, Burney would like to diagnose the work’s significant problems, but

claims, “we cannot afford plates for examples of what we now object to in him; and these remarks are added to his article here to account for our unqualified praise at one period of refinement in the art of music, and confessing him not free from censure at another.” The once-prized duet has become a historical oddity, a bizarre antique, though “still a curious composition, manifesting a powerful hand, great fertility of invention, and a taste and refinement unknown, at the time to all Europe, except to the Bach school.” This conciliatory gesture is not so much meant to save the piece, as to rescue Burney’s reputation, exculpating him from his prior promotion of Mützel, whose music is a delectation for North German Bachists isolated from the rest of Europe. While there is an implicit suggestion in the article of Burney’s own role in disseminating knowledge of this style, explicit is his distancing from the “*great Gun*,” the work Fanny claimed her father had once thought “the noblest composition of its kind in the world”;⁵⁶ the duet had now become a “curious composition”—even a troublesome one.

If we calculate the time span of the critical flip-flop referred to by Burney, the year the article was written would be 1806, that is, after he claimed to have completed his work for Rees; but other sources suggest that he continued to emend and augment some of this material even until 1810.⁵⁷ Indeed it is possible that Burney’s reassessment of Mützel was added in extremely late and seen by him as a necessary adjustment to the composer’s legacy, and perhaps more importantly to his own views as a critic. The prose is not, as Lonsdale suggests of most of the Rees articles, generous, but rather tortured in repudiations, even while clad in the calm tones of detached historical judgment and scientific truth.

* * *

I cannot help but ask why Burney felt compelled to turn on Mützel in a public reference work. Why did the old man see fit to criticize a long-dead composer and draw attention to his own changing attitudes, especially when he had once been such a vigorous defender not just of the composer but of the very forces of musical change he now seemed intent on gainsaying in this one instance? In the second volume of his *History*, Burney had quipped that “a treatise on good taste in dress, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, would now be as useful to a tailor

⁵⁶ D’Arblay, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, 2:17.

⁵⁷ Lorna J. Clark, ed., *The Letters of Sarah Harriet Burney* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 92, 120–22.

or milliner, as the rules of taste in Music, forty years ago, to a modern musician.”⁵⁸ Yet this is precisely what Burney did in reverse to Müthel. By contrast, none of Müthel’s keyboard contemporaries were judged by the tastes of the first decade of the nineteenth century. It won’t do simply to brush aside the extensive newer material added to the Müthel article as belonging of the type of digression so frequently encountered in Burney’s contributions to the *Cyclopædia*; his was an eccentric and often disorganized style that makes his Rees entries generally charming, sometimes irritating, and occasionally baffling. Clearly, however, a dictionary is an odd place to defend one’s prior critical judgments, and to lash out at a long-dead composer.

Often contemplating his own mortality as he cast his view back across so much of the music he had literally discovered and brought back to England, Burney could not but have thought of the vibrant musical life of his family in their great house, and the central position Müthel’s *Duetto* had held there for a season at a rich and busy phase in his life. Müthel stood not only for an old style, but also for an old way of life for Burney, and perhaps, too, for its failure; from Chelsea he could be forgiven for looking back at what he had had, and what he had lost. His private annotations and diaries of this period and further markings made in the context of the *Cyclopædia* project were unfortunately destroyed by Fanny when she assembled her version of his memoirs. Still, it is worth considering the possibility that the Müthel represented for Burney much more than simply a change in musical style, but also stood for his life-long effort to promote himself through music.

In 1801, as Burney had embarked on the *Cyclopædia* project, his beloved Fanny left for the Continent; she hoped to be back within the year, but did not return to England for a decade. Burney’s youngest daughter Sarah, also a novelist, became his sometime carer and amanuensis, and her letters from Chelsea are full of accounts of her father’s grumps and melancholy. These reach a nadir in December of 1813, a few months after the Müthel article appeared in the twenty-fourth volume of the *Cyclopædia*. In a letter to her half-brother Charles, Jr., Sarah writes that, “I want you to come and cheer him up a little. You have more novelty to talk to him about than I have, and would not so easily be silenced. He says he hates to be spoken to—but that is a fib: he only hates it when the speaker has nothing amusing to talk about. That is a good deal my case at present ... Come

⁵⁸ Burney, *A General History of Music*, 2:992. For more on the Burneys and taste see Gillen D’Arcy Wood, *Romanticism and Musical Culture in Britain*, 63–65.



Figure 3 Emma Edgecumbe (née Gilbert), Countess of Mount Edgecumbe, probably by James Gillray, 1780. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

and try your own hand.”⁵⁹ The man of wit and society has in his old age turned sour, especially, it must be said, toward his own daughter. I am not positing a direct link between these documents (the *Cyclopædia* and a letter from one of his children to another) from the same year of 1813 by placing them together here. Nor would it count as conscientious scholarship to impute unverifiable motives to Burney in his reassessment of Mützel’s music. By the time the volume had appeared, Burney’s work on the *Cyclopædia* was past, his life’s work in music also. But whatever motivated the reversal contained in the Mützel article, the effect is a stealthy, but no less emphatic rejection of history: of the *Duetto*’s past triumphs; of the critic’s own prior words; and perhaps too of the strivings of Charles Burney himself. If impulses of regret and resentment lay beneath his late-in-life attack

⁵⁹ Sarah Burney, *Letters*, 178. For more on Burney’s gloomy moods in his last years, see Lonsdale, *Burney*, 472–78.

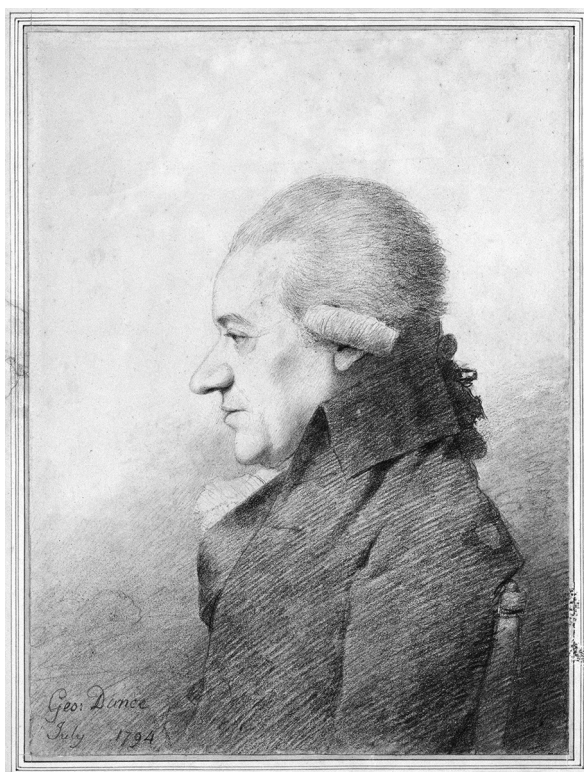


Figure 4 Charles Burney, George Dance, 1794. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

on Mützel, they are delivered in the arid tones of musicological objectivity: the bile of the letter to Twining has been erased in the *Cyclopædia* by the laws of music. However convincing the explanations of his change-of-heart may have been in the public forum of print, they are unconvincing to me when considered in light of what we do know about Burney's relationship with Mützel's music as articulated in the private venues of salon, letter, and diary.

It was the *Duetto* itself that came in for critique, not the people who had adored it. The piece's most ardent devotee, Lady Edgcumbe, died in 1807 around the time Burney was revising his views on the work she had so loved. (For a caricature of Lady Edgcumbe from the period when she frequented the Burney house, see Figure 3; for George Dance's pencil portrait in profile of Burney at the age of sixty-eight, see Figure 4.⁶⁰) To his diary on December 21st of that year Burney

⁶⁰ Many remarked on the fact that, in spite of his persistent health problems, Burney appeared much younger than his actual age. See Lonsdale, *Charles Burney*, 432.

confided: “I have lost my oldest and most partial musical friend, the Countess Dowager of Mount Edgcumbe.”⁶¹ In the tribute, made public by Fanny in the *Memoirs* she edited and largely wrote (and in which, it should be noted, she stresses her father’s connections to royals and aristocrats), he praised Lady Edgcumbe’s generosity to musicians as well as her own musicianship: “She played with great force and precision all the best modern compositions of the times; and in so high and spirited a style, that no other lady, or hardly professor, in England, durst attempt them.”⁶² Shortly before she died, wrote Burney “she honoured me, in as infirm and decayed a state as herself, with a visit; condescendingly clambering up my flight of stairs to nearly the summit of Chelsea Hospital, protesting, with her old and very agreeable liveliness, that the exertion did her nothing but good.”⁶³ Contradicting the claims of that long-ago 1775 letter to Twining, she invited Burney to Tunbridge Wells to take the cure, but he believed himself too unwell to accept the offer.

Yet even for this lovely gesture, and his respectful response, Burney was not of Lady Edgcumbe’s class. He was ultimately that class’s servant and he knew it. When making her invitation she was, he wrote, “almost on her knees, beseeching me”—those same “scraggy knees” scoffed at in the 1775 letter. There was no question but that Burney, now removed to still smaller apartments at the Chelsea Hospital, was the one sliding down the social scale. The word “condescending” that Burney used to describe his patroness mounting the stairs to his rooms meant “agreeable” or “affable” in the eighteenth century.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, in a modern sense Burney’s cleverly oxymoronic phrase—“condescendingly clambered up”—unwittingly captures the class dynamic in play here: as Lady Edgcumbe ascended physically, she descended hierarchically.

I therefore can’t help but think that perhaps the role the duet had played at a critical juncture in Burney’s family life and in his professional career, and ultimately therefore in bolstering his social status, aggravated thoughts about his own failure to be accepted fully by the very people who had once swooned over the duet in his library in St. Martin’s Street, those Müthel enthusiasts whom Burney had privately repudiated back in that signal year of 1775, even if, late in

⁶¹ D’Arblay, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, 375–76. Perhaps because this was a diary entry, Fanny reproduced it in the *Memoirs*; whereas generally she summarized in her own words his attitudes, having scandalously destroyed the primary documents her father left her.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Knapton et al., 1755), 91.

life, it was the piece not the patricians that suffered his scorn. Still, the Mützel endures even after this *volte face* by its importer, not just thanks to the renewed attention paid the piece by historically-minded keyboardists of our own time, but also because of Burney's own critical refractions and retractions. These show us that a single musical work can be big and baffling enough to make the most ambitious musical author of his age want to rewrite history.