

# Vocal Music in Eighteenth-century Bath from the Pens of Thomas Linley Senior (1733-95) and Junior (1756-78)

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Although the music of the two Thomas Linleys, father and son, is little known today, they were amongst the best-known English composers of their time. Their rise to fame during the 18<sup>th</sup> century is all the more remarkable given that their careers were established in Bath, as opposed to London, the musical capital of Britain. John Sainsbury (1825) wrote glowing accounts of both musicians in his *A Dictionary of Musicians From the Earliest Times*, with that written about the elder Linley being particularly illuminating:

As a singing-master and composer, Linley possessed a taste and style peculiarly his own, but still modelled on the principles of that pure English school, which, however overshadowed at present by the foreign structure that has been opposed to it, can never be totally eclipsed while there are any feelings of nature and good sense remaining among us. (II, p. 66)

Both Linleys composed concert vocal music for the Bath concerts, as well as writing for the theatres of London. Their music is often strikingly different in style from that which was heard at the concerts of the pleasure gardens of London.<sup>1</sup> The present paper will attempt to present an overview of this repertoire, and illustrate its stylistic qualities.

The Linley family was one of the several musical dynasties which helped to shape the musical life of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. For over twenty years in Bath, the elder Linley (1733-95) led the varied career of composer, harpsichordist, concert director and singing teacher, at the same time composing for numerous stage works which were presented in London.<sup>2</sup> The concert series which he led in Bath was highly successful, and it often featured the many and varied musical talents of eight of the twelve children born to Linley and his wife, Mary Johnson.<sup>3</sup>

The unique social situations that informed life in Georgian Bath appear to have had a deep effect on the music that was composed by both Linleys. Bath was far more than just a spa town with some remarkable Roman architecture. It was a complete social experience for those who spent time in the city. Bryan Little (1992) has remarked that "almost everyone who mattered in Georgian England sooner or later, for medical or social reasons, came to Bath" (p. 305). While it had been an important medieval cathedral city, Bath declined in later years. A physical transformation of the town was begun in 1725 under the direction of John Wood which resulted in some of the best examples of the Palladian style (Little, 1992). Elaborate codes of behaviour were designed by Beau Nash, the Master of Ceremonies for the city, who quite ruthlessly imposed these codes on all who came to Bath, be they of noble or common birth. Bath was not only fashionable, but it was a centre for artistic activity, as well. Writers such as Pope, Fielding and Smollett were frequent visitors, and the painters Gainsborough and Thomas Barker took up residence there. Composers and musicians of note were also associated with the city, and the names of Thomas Chilcot, William Croft, J.C. Smith, the two Linleys, William Herschel and Venazio Rauzzini figure prominently in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Linley's concerts were an important aspect of the cultural life of the city, although they were likely on a more intimate scale than those in London because of the smaller population base. Timothy Roberts (1994) has remarked that "the vocal chamber music that Linley composed for such occasions inhabits the same rarefied world as Gainsborough's quasi-pastoral society portraits" (p. 5). Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Bath retained its aura of rarefied sophistication, where the concept of "taste" was given lip service even by those who did not actually possess it (Humphreys, 1992). Linley appears not to have felt any need to write down to the Bath audiences, or to make use of unnecessary musical gestures (such as extravagant passages of *coloratura* singing) to maintain attention. Certainly, the conditions

of his concerts were considerably different than those faced by Arne at the Vauxhall Gardens where the outdoor audience ate, drank, conversed and promenaded during the concert. Furthermore, Linley did not have to face the competition of regular Italian opera performances in Bath.

In addition to the concert vocal music which was heard in the concerts at Bath, the elder Linley arranged the scores for 21 stage works which were given in London at the Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres, composing as much new music as was required. In addition, he contributed individual songs to 11 other stage works. Unfortunately, he published little during his lifetime, and it was left to his widow to issue two volumes of music by her late husband and son at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. *The Posthumous Vocal Works of Mr. Linley and Mr. T. Linley* remains a primary source for much of the music by these two composers. Unfortunately, only 13 of the works are attributed to the elder Linley and ten to the younger, leaving a 25 works without attribution. Matters have remained confused ever since.<sup>4</sup> Scholars such as Michael Pilkington and Gwilym Beechey have attempted to determine authorship in this source based on stylistic traits; however, there are enough similarities between the music of father and son to preclude achieving complete agreement. That said, the published collection is the best source by which to assess the vocal works that were presented at the Bath concert series. Unfortunately, there is no modern edition of the collection.

Sainsbury's comment about English music being "overshadowed" by foreign elements is a reference to the florid style of singing adopted from Italian opera. Many English composers had succumbed to its influence, especially those, like Thomas Arne, whose career was split between composing for the theatre and the London pleasure gardens. This shift in style has traditionally been ascribed to the period of the 1760s on the authority of Charles Burney (1726-1814), although it can already be seen in Arne's *Six Cantatas for a Voice and Instruments* from 1755. By 1761, the process of assimilation was complete, as attested by Arne's cantata, *The Lover's Recantation*.<sup>5</sup> The elder Linley avoided this type of vocal display; however, his music provides other compensations. Linley made use of a more fluid sense of modulation than exhibited by many of his peers,<sup>6</sup> and his melodies remain highly expressive in spite of their seeming simplicity (Beechey & Troost, 2001).

Perhaps the best known of the elder Linley's vocal music is a set of six elegies which were published in 1770.<sup>7</sup> Prefaced with an *Invocation* ("Fly to my aid, O might Love"), the entire set is scored for soprano, tenor and bass voices, with a continuo accompaniment. The texts for these works form a narrative of a young man's love for Emira. The opening *Invocation* is an appeal to Cupid to aid in his conquest. In the second elegy, the young lover hangs his lyre in a poplar tree so that "vernal airs play wanton in the leaves" (*Elegy II*, "Ye sportive loves, that round me wait"). The course of love is rarely smooth, and Emira ultimately abandons her lover, leaving him to lament his estate in the final two elegies.

These examples of elegant chamber music evoked much positive critical response. Sainsbury (1825) stated that "it would be difficult to place any compositions of the same description in competition with them, for originality of conception, elegance and tenderness" (II, p. 67). They were also much respected by Charles Burney, whose evaluation of British composers of the period was not always so positive. Certainly, they are rather far removed from the majority of glees and catches that remained popular at this time in England. Linley's *Elegies* demonstrate great variety, both in style and structure, with madrigal-like sections alternating with recitative, binary airs and contrapuntal sections. The second half of *Elegy I* becomes akin to a concerto for three voices over an active continuo accompaniment (Roberts 1994). Once again, the marriage of text and music is remarkable, a product of Linley's fluid and varied musical responses. Linley occasionally makes use of brief passages of *coloratura* as a means of enlivening a texture or adding emphasis to a textual point; however, florid singing never dominates.

One of the works of contested authorship in the collection published by Linley's widow is the cantata, *Awake my Lyre*. I believe this work to be from the pen of the elder Linley, an opinion based on the extremely fluid response to the text; however, Michael Pilkington in the Stainer & Bell collection of works by the two Linleys attributes it tentatively to the son. The accompaniment of the work is unusual in that the score contains a *cembalo obbligato*

line in addition to a separate, unfigured bass line. The instrumental figuration at the opening of the work is meant to evoke the harp, and the only recording of the work makes use of this instrument.<sup>8</sup> Once again, Linley's melodies are to serve the needs of the text while remaining attractive in their own right.

Linley did not change his style when writing for the London theatres. The song, "Still the lark finds repose" from *The Spanish Rivals* (1784)<sup>9</sup> serves to illustrate Sainsbury's comments about the "pure English school." There is little that is decorative or extraneous in Linley's melodies yet, supported by the composer's strong harmonic sense, the changing moods of the texts are easily expressed. He took special care with his theatrical music to understand the motivations of the characters. In a letter to David Garrick (28 September 1775), Linley states quite firmly that "no Musician can set a Song properly unless he understands the Character and knows the Performer who is to exhibit it" (as cited in Hoskins 1990, p. 292).

### Thomas Linley, junior (1756-78)

A son, Thomas Junior, was born to the family in 1756, and his precocious talent soon manifested itself. Like his father before him, the younger Linley was sent to William Boyce in London for training. Linley's talent as a violinist led him to Italy to study with Nardini in Florence (where he met Mozart in 1770). Upon his return to England in 1771, he became a regular performer in the Bath concerts and the concert rooms of the West Country, as well as composing a large number of works, both vocal and instrumental (Beechey 1968). His death in 1778, at the age of 22 years, was a great loss to English music.

The younger Linley contributed to four stage works in London, as well as composing a large-scale ode in honour of Shakespeare.<sup>10</sup> His list of his vocal music further includes an orchestrally-accompanied anthem for the Worcester Festival of 1773, an oratorio, songs, madrigals, elegies and three cantatas for solo soprano and orchestra. Sainsbury (1825) makes the comment that the younger Linley was "inferior to his father in the purity and pathos of his melodies" (II, p. 67); however, the influence of the father on the son remained strong, especially in the area of vocal composition.

The son was not quite so immune to the florid Italian style as was his father, and the three cantatas for soprano and orchestra reveal longer passages of *coloratura* than would be found in the works of his father. Yet he shared much of the same lyric sensibility of his father, as demonstrated in the cantata, *In Yonder Grove* (1773).<sup>11</sup> Given that the younger Linley died at the age of twenty-two years, all of his music could with justification be classified as "early." He may have developed into a greater stage composer had he lived longer. Certainly, the song, "When I was a Dyer," from *The Cady of Bagdad* (1778) displays a good sense of humour in this depiction of someone who used to be sober, but now has discovered the joys of drink.<sup>12</sup> The text of this song is given below. The musical setting of the second half includes indications for hiccupping, and the vocal line is quite out of synchronization with the accompaniment, to humorous effect.

When I was a dyer and wrought at my trade,  
I went early to work and went sober to bed,  
But now that my pockets with sequins are loaded,  
I'll lie till I'm sober and drink till I'm blind.  
They say that this life is but sorrow and care,  
But I'll ne'er be a fool and take more than my share.

### Conclusion

The vocal works of the two Linleys continued a tradition of setting English texts that was in danger of vanishing because of the prominence of foreign musical styles (and Italian opera in particular) during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The influence of the highly specialized social environment of Bath, with its appreciative and sophisticated audience provided an ideal environment for the Linleys to practice and refine their craft of sensitive

text settings. The vocal music of the Linleys has tremendous pedagogical potential today, and will provide much enjoyment for modern-day audiences.

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## Modern Editions of Music

- Songs of the Linleys, for high voice*. Ed. Michael Pilkington. (1979). London: Stainer & Bell Ltd. Contains: "Still the lark finds repose," "When a tender maid," & "No flower that blows" (Linley senior); "Awake my lyre," "The rill," "When I was a dyer," "Flora," & "O mighty judge" (Linley junior).
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- Linley, Thomas (Senior). (n.d.). *Selima and Azor*. Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire: King's Music, [vocal score].
- Linley, Thomas (Senior). (n.d.). *The Spanish Rivals*. Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire: King's Music, [vocal score].

### Discography

*Enchanting Harmonist: A Soirée with the Linleys of Bath*. Invocation, directed by Timothy Roberts, *The English Orpheus* 21. Hyperion CDA66700.

In addition to music by Wm. Jackson, Henry Harrington, W. Earle and Wm. Herschel, this recording includes *Awake my lyre*, the *Invocation* and *Elegies* No. 1, 2, 5 & 6, and "Alas, from the day my poor heart" by the elder Linley, and "To heal the wound a bee had made," by the younger Linley.

Linley, Thomas, Junior. *Darthula, a Cantata; CANTATA*, "Ye nymphs of Albion's beauty blooming Isle;" *CANTATA*, "In yonder Grove whose Cypress spreads its Gloom." Julia Gooding, soprano, The Parley of Instruments Baroque Orchestra, directed by Paul Nicholson. Hyperion CDA 66767.

Linley, Thomas, Junior. *A Lyric Ode on the Spirits of Shakespeare*. Lorna Anderson, Julia Gooding, sopranos, Rucgard Wistreich, bass. The Parley of Instruments, directed by Paul Nicholson. *The English Orpheus* 14. Hyperion CDA 66613.

Linley, Thomas, Junior. *A Lyric Ode on the Spirits of Shakespeare*. Helen Parker, Joanne Mazzarri, Julia Gooding, sopranos, William Purefoy, alto, Andrew King, tenor, Roderick Williams, bass; Musicians of the globe, directed by Philip Pickett, Philips 446689-2.

### Endnotes

1. While there were several such places of entertainment in the summer months in London, the principal pleasures gardens were Vauxhall and Ranelagh. For an overview of the importance of the Vauxhall gardens for British-born composers see: Paul F. Rice (2000). *Musical Nationalism and the Vauxhall Gardens*, *Lumen* 19, pp. 69-88.

2. Linley's parents moved to Bath in the late 1740s, at which time the young musician studied with Thomas Chilcott, the organist of the Bath Abbey. Such was his progress that Linley was sent to London to study with William Boyce. Linley returned to Bath in the mid-1750s to begin his career. He moved to London in 1776 when as Sainsbury records, he "left Bath to reside with his family in London, in consequence of becoming joint patentee with his son-in-law, Mr. Sheridan, of Drury-lane theatre" (1825, II, p. 66).

3. The singing talents of the daughters Elizabeth Ann and Mary did much to enhance Linley's reputation as a singing teacher. Linley may well have been as strict a taskmaster when it came to teaching voice as Arne was reported to have been. Timothy Roberts (1994) cites a letter from Mary to her sister Elizabeth in which she describes one of her father's lessons as a "fiery ordeal" (p. 6).

4. Beechey (1978) gives the full listing of these volumes, as well as Mary Linley's preface. Beechey is able to further identify several other pieces which also can be found (with attributions) in the British Library manuscript RM 22.g.18. The authorship of the songs found in the stage works is usually not in dispute.

5. See Rice, P. F. (2000). The solo secular cantatas of Thomas A. Arne. In B. A. Roberts & A. Rose (Eds.), *Sharing the Voices: The Phenomenon of Singing* (pp. 196-205). St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland. Music examples from *The Lover's Recantation* are given there. The work has been recorded by Emma Kirkby, with Roy Goodman conducting The Parley of Instruments, on Hyperion CDA 66237.

6. Roger Fiske has also commented upon this aspect of Linley's music, stating that "Linley was one of the very few English composers interested in adventurous and freely-modulating development sections, and there is a good example in the first movement of *The Royal Merchant* overture" (1986 p. 348).

7. Linley's works appear to have been inspired by an earlier set (ca. 1760) of *Elegies* composed by William Jackson of Exeter, who often visited Bath where his music was sometimes performed by the Linleys in their concerts (Roberts 1994). The "Invocation" and *Elegies* No. 1, 2, 5 & 6 have been recorded by Invocation, directed by Timothy Roberts, *The English Orpheus* 21. Hyperion CDA66700.

8. This cantata has been recorded by Invocation, directed by Timothy Roberts, *The English Orpheus* 21. Hyperion CDA66700.

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9. *The Spanish Rivals* (Drury Lane, 1784) was an afterpiece set in Spain. Much of the humour of the work is found in the comic servant character, Peter, from Cumberland, who attends to his master, the Spaniard, Don Narcisso de Medicis. Peter's Cumberland dialect is unfathomable to the Spaniards. Linley managed to include several songs associated with the Cumberland area. See Fiske (1986).

10. Beechey (1968) reports the positive reception of this work. Oddly, given this success, it was performed only once in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, although there are now two modern recordings of the piece.

11. Recorded by Julia Gooding, soprano, The Parley of Instruments Baroque Orchestra, directed by Paul Nicholson. Hyperion CDA 66767.

12. See Pilkington (1979) for a modern edition of the score.