

The secular solo cantatas of Thomas A. Arne (1710-78)

Paul Rice

Memorial University of Newfoundland

This paper is one part of an on-going, larger study of the secular solo cantata in eighteenth-century England. The study will comprise three parts: 1) the compilation of an annotated catalogue of cantatas and cantata-like works, 2) a stylistic study of selected composers, and 3) the preparation of selected examples from this repertoire for publication and, hopefully, recordings.¹

In 1969, Malcolm Boyd wrote that the study of English cantatas "has so far been virtually ignored by English musical historians. It is a pity, since the cantata can tell us much about contemporary attitudes to the Italian style, and there are several works worthy of notice" (1969, 85). Boyd's observations are just, and it is strange that such an attractive body of musical repertoire has been so little explored. Certainly, misinformation such as Richard Jakoby's statement that "the cantata did not do particularly well in England" may have contributed to this neglect (1968, [iv]). Even Boyd, himself, may have dampened research interest in the field when he wrote that the period of English cantata composition after 1750 was a period of decline.² The next major study of English vocal music to include the genre of cantata came in J. R. Goodall's Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Oxford) from 1979, "English Chamber Cantata and Through-Composed Solo Song: 1660-c1785."³ While Goodall's work is truly worthy, its scope is so broad that there remains much yet unexplored.

The secular cantatas of Thomas Arne

Thomas Arne was one of the most talented musicians and composers to emerge in eighteenth-century England. Although intended by his father for a career in law, Arne applied himself to the study of music, and he quickly emerged as one of England's most promising lyric composers. As a Catholic, Arne would not have enjoyed opportunities as either a church or court musician in Anglican England, with the result that his subsequent career was largely spent in the theatre, both in London and in Dublin (Young 1988, [iii]). In addition to comic opera, Arne composed incidental music, masques, pastoral works, and two operas composed in the Italian style, a total of some 100 works. In 1745, Jonathan Tyers contracted Arne to compose vocal music for the concerts at the Vauxhall Gardens. Since there were few places where secular, English vocal music of artistic merit was performed in a public setting, Tyers' decision was both novel and important for the

future development of English song.

The concerts at Vauxhall were of the highest standards, and the orchestra that was formed there each summer boasted the best performers from London and elsewhere. Both continental and native-born composers were represented on the programmes, and Haydn's symphonies were featured at Vauxhall several years before Haydn, himself, visited England (McGairl 1986, 612). If the initial vocal offerings at Vauxhall consisted of strophic ballads, the audiences there soon came to expect a greater level of sophistication. This was to have a profound effect upon the cantata genre within ten years of its introduction at the Vauxhall concerts. For Arne, the association proved to be one of the most significant in his career.⁴ In addition to the majority of the cantatas listed below, Arne's output for the public pleasure gardens in London included some 200 songs. Not surprisingly, Arne's first published cantata, *The Lovesick Invocation*, stems from the first year of his association with the Vauxhall Gardens.⁵

The importance of Arne's vocal music has been recognized by scholars such as Percy Young, who writes that "as a song-writer, whose style links those of G. F. Handel and J.C. Bach, Arne is of considerable significance" (1988, [iii]). Unfortunately, academic recognition of Arne's importance had not translated into increased modern performance of his vocal music, likely because there are few performing editions of his music available.⁶ The loss is distinctly ours, for Arne had a "God-gifted genius for melody," to quote John Stafford Smith, Arne's contemporary.⁷ Additionally, Arne's skill in the areas of formal construction, harmony and instrumentation further contribute to the success of his vocal works.

Up to the period of the 1720s, the English solo cantata was a chamber work that was modelled upon its Italian counterpart. Given the popularity of Italian opera in London at this time, it is hardly surprising that there was market for other types of Italianate genres, and the transplanted genre of cantata fared well, especially given the interest in home music-making. Amongst the earliest works to achieve wide-spread acceptance were those by J.C. Pepusch and J.E. Galliard. There was no set format to these early works, although many consisted of a pair of alternating recitatives and arias (airs), which related a continuous dramatic narrative. The airs were often brief, and contained only moderate vocal demands in the area of coloratura, if any at all. A few native-born composers began to investigate the form in the period up to the mid-1730s, to be followed in the next decade by Boyce, Arne, Green and Stanley.

Arne's cantatas from the 1740s build upon the foundations established by earlier composers who had earlier composed chamber cantatas for home consumption.⁸ Similar to their efforts, Arne's initial efforts in the genre feature rather restricted ranges, usually no larger than a melodic twelfth, and impose few, if any, demands of coloratura flexibility. Typical of much of the English vocal music of the era, the tessitura can be high; however, the settings are frequently syllabic in nature and often conclude with an air cast in a dance rhythm, such as the jig. While both Julian Herbage (1951-52, 90) and Stephen Farish (1962, 20) comment on their perception that Arne was torn between the expectations of writing for public tastes and his own artistic desires when he composed songs for the Vauxhall Gardens, I find no evidence of his "writing down" to his Vauxhall audiences in his early cantatas. They are a happy synthesis of the popular and more formal idioms.

Certainly, as a theatre composer of long standing, Arne was well used to having to reconcile such differences. Rather, the association with Vauxhall became a convenient way of advertising the sale of his music for use at home.

Of the cantatas of this period, the most popular was *Cymon and Iphigenia*, from around 1750.⁹ This work was heard at both the Vauxhall Gardens and at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, and its popularity resulted in its being published at least fourteen times during the eighteenth century. The cantata consists of six sections cast in alternating recitatives and airs. The opening recitative is of particular interest for it has several changes of metre, and includes a flute to illustrate Cymon's whistling. The final air, "Love's a pure, a sacred Fire," is cast in triple time, and demonstrates Arne's gift for infectious melody. As Stephen Farish has noted, the success of Arne's works in this period would seem to be due to melodies that are highly "vocal" in nature (often based on conjunct melodic movement), and his "remarkable sensitivity to the poetry" (1962, 95).

Six cantatas for a voice and instruments

Arne's *Six Cantatas For a Voice and Instruments* were published in 1755 by Walsh in full score, rather than in the much cheaper keyboard format. This likely indicates the level of popularity that both the genre of cantata and Arne's music now enjoyed in London.¹⁰ The generic title does not indicate that these works are linked by the use of pastoral allusions and direct textual references from one cantata to another. While the narrative is not completely continuous, the various stories follow logically. Accordingly, these cantatas should be considered as a cycle. While all of the texts have pretensions to classical themes, all appear to be from the eighteenth century.¹¹ The sentiments of these texts are decidedly dionysian, and they appear to be suited to a male singer (tenor range). Wine, lighthearted merrymaking and lovemaking are not only celebrated, but are prescribed. Wine, in particular, becomes a recurring motive, and is seen to cure Ariadne's lamenting in the fourth cantata, *Bacchus and Ariadne* in very short order. Here, Arne may have been tipping his cap to his employer, Jonathan Tyers, the proprietor of the Vauxhall Gardens. Wine and food were available to the patrons of the gardens, and any encouragement to partake of refreshment was likely appreciated by Tyers.

The publication of these works in full score reveals Arne's mastery in matters of orchestration, and his concern for the co-ordination of instrumental timbres with poetic ideas. Accordingly, each cantata is scored differently, with the scoring often reflecting specific textual images. The fifth cantata, *The Morning*, is scored for "German flute or small flute," strings and *basso continuo*. The flute is used to imitate bird song, especially the first air, "The Lark his warbling matin sings." The carefree pastoral images evoked in the final cantata, *Delia*, are amply served by the scoring for strings and *basso continuo*, while the wider range of emotions found in *Bacchus and Ariadne*, benefits from a fuller texture of 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 horns, bassoons as a doubling instrument, strings and *basso continuo*. Nor is the bassoon only treated as a doubling instrument in these works--there are notated parts for two bassoons in the opening of the second cantata, *Lydia*, where they

are used in the introduction preceding the opening recitative, "Beneath this sad and silent Gloom."

Arne demonstrates his awareness of current musical styles in these works. He does not make use of the older *da capo* form in the airs, preferring to investigate a variety of forms, including binary, through composed and even something akin to a rudimentary sonata form in the final air of the first cantata (Goodall 1989, 225-26). The *galant* musical style predominates here, and Arne also makes considerable use of the "Scotch snap" (short-long rhythm) which was popular in the music of mid-eighteenth-century Britain.

All of the cantatas in this cycle are written for high voice and, taken as a whole, the cycle encompasses a two-octave range of b^1 - B^2 . The melodic style is often florid, and there are numerous instances of coloratura passage work, some up to ten measures in length. In Arne's day, finding a tenor voice with the requisite flexibility for this music was likely less difficult than it would be today, and it is likely that, if these works do gain a greater foothold in the modern repertoire, it will be with soprano soloists. Indeed, this very emphasis upon coloratura singing in the *Six Cantatas for a Voice and Instruments* illustrates that Arne recognized that his Vauxhall audiences expected far more vocal showmanship in longer works such as cantatas. This shift in his vocal style has traditionally been ascribed to the period of the 1760s on the authority of Charles Burney. I would suggest that it began with these works from 1755, and that it became particularly apparent in the next decade.

Later works

The comparison of two Vauxhall works, *Cantata for a Single Voice* ["Fair Celia, Love Pretended"] (1746)¹² and *The Lover's Recantation* (1761)¹³ provides the rare opportunity of assessing Arne's approach to setting essentially the same literary text separated by a period of fifteen years. The aria texts are the same; however, Arne or some anonymous author rewrote the recitatives, essentially paraphrasing the sentiments of the original.¹⁴ The pastoral text itself recounts the story of the shepherd, Damon, who, tired of waiting for Celia to appear for their appointed assignation, vents his anger against all women for the many "Pains they cause. . . [which are] large and hard to bear." Celia does appear, however, and Damon forgives her lateness with the sentiment that "Women wise increase Desiring, By contriving kind Delays." Unfortunately, there is a strain of misogyny in the text which makes it less attractive in our present day.

The comparison of these two musical settings not only illustrates the change in Arne's vocal style, but also what type of singing had become popular with the Vauxhall audiences. The increased sophistication of the audience bass resulted in Arne creating music of far greater complexity which required greater technical accomplishment from his performers. Illustration No. 1 outlines the musical structure of these two cantatas.

"Fair Celia, Love Pretended"

Vocal Range: D¹ - A².

I: Recitative, "Fair Celia, Love pretended," (voice & *basso continuo*), ⁴/₄, D major/e minor, [16 mm.];

II: Air, "To all the Sex Deceitfull," (voice, two unspecified treble lines & *basso continuo*), Allegro non troppo, ⁴/₄, e minor, binary air, [40 mm.];

III: Recitative, "But Celia now repenting her Breach of Assignment," (voice, & *basso continuo*), ⁴/₄, modulatory, ending in a preparation of G major, [10 mm.];

IV: Air, "How engaging, How endearing," (voice, one unspecified treble line & *basso continuo*), Allegro, ⁶/₈, G

The Lover's Recantation

Vocal Range: b¹ - C³.

I: Recitative, "The Kind appointment Cælia made," (voice, strings & *basso continuo*), ⁴/₄; E minor, [16 mm.];

II: Air, "To all the sex deceitful," (voice, 2 ob., strings & *basso continuo*), Allegro, ³/₄; E minor/B minor/E minor; ternary air (incipient sonata form), [67 mm.];

III: Recitative, "Now Cælia from Mama got loose," (voice, strings & *basso continuo*), ⁴/₄; C major/modulatory/A major, [15 mm.];

IV: Air, "How engaging, How endearing," (voice, 2 flutes, 2 violins, & *basso continuo*), [Moderato], ; A major, binary air, [66 mm.]. Illustration No. 1: The Musical Structure of "Fair Celia, Love Pretended" (1746), and *the Lover's*

Illustration No. 1: The Musical Structure of Fair Celia, Love Pretended (1746), and The Lover's Recantation (1761).

The two works are of similar proportions, with only the first air text ("To all the sex deceitful,") being given a much longer musical setting in the 1761 cantata. Other musical differences are far more striking, however. The range of the 1746 work is not especially wide, and comprises only one and one-half octaves (D¹ - A²). While the tessitura is typically high for works of this period, there is only one brief passage of coloratura writing. Furthermore, the text is largely set in a syllabic manner. By comparison, *The Lover's Recantation* (1761) inhabits a very different musical world. The range of this work is over two octaves (b¹ - C³), and the vocal demands in the area of coloratura passage work, triplet and staccato writing are considerable. Music Example No. 1 illustrates the opening of the first air, "To all the Sex Deceitful," in both versions.

To all the— Sex De- ceit- full, A long and last A- dieu, A

long,— A - long and last— A - dieu.

To all the sex de- ceit- ful a long and last a- dieu a

long—

— a - long a - dieu —

Music Example No. 1, *To all the Sex Deceitful*, mm. 4-8 (1746 version); *To all the Sex Deceitful*, mm. 18-27 (1761 version)

The world of Italian opera is not far away in the 1761 setting, with testing coloratura passages that takes the soloist up to C³. Arne composed this work for his pupil, Charlotte Brent, to whom he entrusted the difficult role of Mandane in his setting of Metastasio's libretto, *Artaserse*, in 1762.¹⁵ As J.R. Goodall has noted, "there is absolutely no doubt that Arne alone was the guiding spirit in the transformation of English vocal music at this time by the absorption of the new continental influence" (Goodall 1989, 232).¹⁶ While Arne's cantata from 1746 would challenge amateur singers, it would not be totally out of their reach. That from 1761 is clearly designed for an operatically-trained voice. Not only was there entertainment value in this kind of vocal writing, it also appealed to those who wished to imitate the tastes of the upper classes, especially those who could afford to attend the exclusive winter concert series and the performances of Italian operas at the King's Theatre. Arne went one step further to ensure success: he undertook to train young singers in the Italian manner. Arne's subsequent cantatas reflect this change in musical style. The cantata, *Love and Resentment*, (1766), another work composed with the voice of Charlotte Brent in mind, contains decidedly Italianate, virtuoso vocal writing. Not only is the vocal range a full two octaves, but the singer is expected to negotiate particularly wide leaps, and to execute staccato notes up to C³.

Mention of one further cantata will serve to demonstrate another change in cantata writing that began to emerge in the last thirty years of the century. Cantatas composed earlier in the century usually consisted of a series of recitatives alternating with songs which were either marked "air" or (infrequently) "aria." The number of such recitatives and airs varied from work to work, although two each was usually the minimum to be found. A narrative element was integral to such works and the poetry was chosen and/or written accordingly—often based on some pastoral tale which investigated a variety of contrasting emotions or situations. As the expectation for vocal virtuosity grew in the second half of the century, there appears to have been less interest in the narrative aspect of the genre. Indeed, many examples of cantatas during the last twenty years of the century consist solely of a single recitative, followed by an aria of great complexity and long proportions. Arne appears to have been influenced in this area in one his late works, and his *Diana*, published in 1774, is an early example of this trend.

Conclusion

The examination of Arne's cantatas not only reveals a storehouse of rewarding music that remains too little known, but it also provides the opportunity of assessing the cultural and musical changes that were experienced in England in the period of 1745-74. The change in the perception of the cantata genre as chamber music for home consumption to that of concert music requiring highly trained singers would appear to be a direct result of the introduction of the genre to the London pleasure gardens. Furthermore, this change demonstrates the rise in the level of virtuosity expected by English audiences from English singers, as well as the influence that continental music styles (and Italian opera in particular) had over composers and audiences alike. Given their considerable melodic

appeal, it can only be hoped that with of modern performing scores, Arne's cantatas will re-enter the repertoire.

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Sound recordings

- Dr. Arne at Vauxhall Gardens, with Emma Kirkby (soprano), Richard Morton (tenor), and the *Parley of Instruments* conducted by Roy Goodman. Hyperion CDA 66237.
- A Vauxhall Gardens Entertainment: Handel Abel, Boyce, Arne, with Emma Kirkby (soprano), and *London Baroque*, directed by Charles Medlam. EMI CDC 7 49799 2.

Endnotes

¹ The financial assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada is gratefully acknowledged.

² Boyd asserted this seemingly because the works of the second half of the eighteenth century were often associated with the London pleasure gardens of Vauxhall, Ranelagh and Marylebone. I see this move away from the realm of intimate chamber music (modelled on the Italian secular cantata traditions) to a more middle-class, orchestrally-accompanied work in a popular idiom as being highly significant. To describe this shift as being representative of musical "decline" is highly subjective and without foundation.

³ The first part of this dissertation was published in 1989 by Garland Publishing, Inc., with the misleading title of *Eighteenth-Century English Secular Cantatas*. The second part of the dissertation, a detailed (albeit rather confusing) catalogue of repertoire, remains unpublished.

⁴ Highfill, Jr., Philip H., Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans. Arne, Thomas A. A *Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in*

London: 1660-1800. See also, [J.] Richard Goodall, *Eighteenth-Century English Secular Cantatas*. (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989), p. 220. At the same time that Tyers contracted Arne, he also hired Cecilia Arne, Thomas Lowe and the elder Reinhold as singers (Farish, 1962, 20).

⁵ Arne's known cantatas, and cantata-like works include:

- a) *The Lovesick Invocation*, in: *Lyric Harmony* . . . London: W. Smith, [1745], pp. 16-17.
- b) *Cantata for a Single Voice* ("Fair Celia, Love Pretended"), in: *Vocal Melody, an Entire New collection* . . . London: I. Walsh, [1746.], pp. 16-20.
- c) *Chaucer's Recantation*, in: *Vocal Melody, Book II* . . . London: I Walsh, [1748], pp. 38-42.
- d) *Cymon and Iphigenia*. London: Thompson and Sons [?1750], with many subsequent publications.
- e) *Six Cantatas For a Voice and Instruments*. London: J. Walsh, [1755]. [1] *The School of Anacreon*, [2] *Lydia, from Sappho*, [3] *CANTATA III* ("Frolick and Free"), [4] *Bacchus and Ariadne*, [5] *The Morning*, & vi) *Delia*.
- f) *A Favourite Cantata* ("How gentle was my Damon's Air,"), in: *Clio and Euterpe or British Harmony* [Vol. I], London: Henry Roberts, 1758, pp. 146-7.
- g) *Timely Caution*, in: *British Melody* . . . London: I. Walsh, [1760], pp. 8-10.
- h) *The Spring*, in: *British Melody* . . . London: I. Walsh, [1760], pp. 12-20.
- i) *The Lover's Recantation*, in: *The Winter's Amusement* . . . London: Printed for the Author, [1761], pp. 16-20.
- j) *Reffley Spring*. London: C and S. Thompson, [1764.]
- k) *Love and Resentment*, in: *Summer Amusement* . . . [London]: Printed for the Author, [1766.], pp. 27-36.
- l) *Advice to Cloe, a new Cantata*, in: *New Favourite Songs*. [London]: "To be had of the Author" [1768], pp. 8-13.
- m) *AN ODE Upon dedicating a Building to SHAKESPEARE*. London: John Johnston, [1769].
- n) *Diana*, in: *THE VOCAL GROVE* . . . London: Longman, Lukey & Co., 1774.
- o) "A Wretch long tortured with disdain," unpublished; Ms. in British Library: Additional 29370.

⁶ Several of the collections of songs that were published by Arne have been released in facsimile by King's Music, Redcroft, Bank's end, Wyton, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, England. These are useful publications; however, in most cases, their contents require further editing before they can be performed.

⁷ Cited by Young 1988, [iii].

⁸ Farish (1962, 145) refers to in the influence of the popular ballad (hence, a "ballad style") in Arne's songs of the 1740s. This does not appear to have been as great an influence in his early cantatas.

⁹ A full score of the work has not survived; however, a set of manuscript string parts were recently identified at the University of Birmingham Library. These parts are a part of the Shaw-Hellier Collection, and are catalogued as #415-19.

¹⁰ The preparation necessary for this kind of publication may account for why the series was published in three sets of two cantatas each, in the months of April, June and September (Goodall 1989, 233).

¹¹ The third cantata, *Frolick and Free*, is ascribed to Lord Lansdown. None of the texts are examples of great poetry, but they serve their function well as singing texts.

¹² Published in: *Vocal Melody, An Entire New Collection of English Songs and a Cantata* . . . *Sung at Vaux-Hall, Raneleigh, and Marybon-Gardens*. [Book One] London: I. Walsh [1746], pp. 16-20.

¹³ Published by the composer in *The Winter's Amusement. Consisting of Favourite Songs and Cantatas* "Printed for the Author, and sold by him" [1761], pages 16-20, [short score]. A modern, critical edition of the work in full score was undertaken by Percy M. Young (continuo realisation by Siegfried Pritsche) and published by VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik of Leipzig in 1988.

¹⁴ The text in question is ascribed to [William] Congreve in the published score of "Fair Celia, Love Pretended," although no poetic attribution is given in either the published short score for *The Lover's Recantation* or in the unique autograph copy of the work found in the British Library. One must wonder if Arne undertook to write these recitative texts himself. What attracted Arne to return to this text in 1761 is not known, although Goodall (1989, 233) suggests that pressures of time to produce new material for the various

pleasure gardens may have prompted the decision. It is likely that the 1746 setting had gone out of fashion and was long forgotten by 1761. Furthermore, since the narrative voice of the text was not exclusively male, Arne could use the text in a work designed to show off the virtuosity of his pupil Charlotte Brent.

¹⁵ First performed at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, in 1762. The work was set to an English translation of Metastasio's libretto which had already enjoyed numerous musical treatments. "The cast was made up both of English singers and Italian castrati and Arne attempted to compose music in styles which would come most naturally to each" (Anderson, 1992, 288).

¹⁶ Arne's achievements in this area were recognized by Charles Burney, even though Burney was not particularly fond of his former teacher. "Arne had the merit of first adapting many of the best passages of Italy, which all Europe admired, to our own language, and of incorporating them with his own property, and with what was still in favour of former English composers" (Burney, 1776-89, 1015).
