

# THE SNEYD COLLECTION OF MUSIC

*By Thomas B. Pitfield, F.R.M.C.M.*

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WHEN Mr. Raymond Richards asked me if I would examine the contents of five boxes containing music of the last century, it was not until I had explored through the crust of waltzes, and unpromising-looking church music, that I began to get excited; so excited, in fact, that I shelved almost all my own work for about three months in order to comb the collection thoroughly. Only occasional volumes had a contents page, and none an index. Sets of scores had been bound together, and some title-pages were missing. It was difficult to pigeon-hole any one volume, except perhaps Italian Operatic Arias. Being myself a composer and not a professional musicologist, I am not competent to give a learned exposition of all sections of this bewildering and varied collection, but as my own department is folk music, I can deal rather more authoritatively with this than the other sections. There are many interesting historical sidelights shed from these, not least the sad story of English music in decline. The Handel to Mendelssohn period deflated English music almost to the vacuum point. It is significant that while there are, at a low estimate, dozens of European folk tunes, numerous Scottish, and a few Irish and Welsh, English folk tunes and national songs are almost entirely bypassed—with only two or three insignificant exceptions. The time was

The Sneyd Collection of Music forms part of the immense muniments accumulated by the Sneyd family, who lived at Keele, Staffordshire, from medieval times until early in the present century. Keele Hall now forms part of the University College of North Staffordshire; and when the late Ralph Sneyd died the entire papers were made over to Raymond Richards, M.A., F.S.A., F.R.Hist.S., Chairman of the Ancient Monuments Society. This accumulation of material includes Court Rolls dating from the 13th century, important Norman and later Charters, and voluminous correspondence.

The whole of this collection, together with the muniments and other family papers have been deposited on loan with the John Ryland Library, Manchester, and form part of the section known as the Raymond Richards Collection.





Charlotte Sneyd. Age 14  
From a book of exercises in Fugue.

A handwritten musical score for a piece titled "Black Harry". It consists of four staves. The top two staves are a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The bottom two staves are also a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The title "Black Harry" is written in the center of the first staff. The number "23" is written in the top right corner. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings.

Charlotte Sneyd. Age 15  
From a tiny MS book.



Some of her own manuscripts bear notes as to the churches and cathedrals in which they were performed.

But to return to Charlotte as a musician. One of the most delightful things in the collection is a tiny manuscript book of hers (presumably for carrying in the reticule) dated 1815—a girl of 15. It is a model of patient musical calligraphy, and I imagine that some of its contents are her own arrangements or harmonizations—a well-known Mozart aria has a left-hand part that certainly isn't Mozart's. She had obviously studied Fugue too, even at this early age.

She was apparently a pupil of the celebrated Dr. Crotch, infant prodigy and later first Principal of the Royal Academy of Music. She possessed and digested whole his textbook "Elements of Composition" for the scoring of her choral and orchestral works conforms literally to the limits imposed by her tutor. There is a letter from him to his pupil criticising one of her (Charlotte's) more ambitious pieces, which must have been submitted postally to him. The style is cramped, but the set-up shows considerable technical resource within the accepted limitations.

She wrote several plays and dramas with music, herself also the librettist. These were performed in private theatres of the friends within her circle, and it is interesting to speculate what may have happened in this very room more than a hundred years ago.

Her gleanings reveal a taste for humour :

Here lies my wife.

So let her lie.

She is at peace;

And so am I.

A good deal of her folk-music collecting is of the tunes only—in a few cases, I suspect she has added words herself—rather spinsterly hand-upon-heart verses. The following fragment could be hers :

Weep for the love that fate forbids,

Yet loves unhoping on

Tho' every light that once illumed

Our early paths be gone.

Weep for the weary heart condemned

To one long, lonely sigh,

Whose lot has been in this cold world,

To dream, despair, and die!

She is, alas, no model composer of accompaniments. Three formulæ predominate; the Alberti bass, the (what I call) Smallwood left hand, and the 'till ready' of the old Music Hall song.

She must have been a competent exponent of figured bass, for she copied much of her European collection thus.

Quite a quantity of Russian folk music emerges, including tunes already known to me, since I have done some work in that field; amongst them a tune given the title 'Russian Waltz'! I have a published arrangement and translation of this tune myself as a Russian Nursery Song, and I have since found versions variously attributed to both English and German sources. So where a racial flavour is not strong or is non-existent (as in this case), one must beware of being too dogmatic about origins.

One of the folk-music gems of the collection is the following Irish tune:

*Irish Air*

\* *Din m. S.*

It is well known that the Sneyds had monarchical connections. All the five sisters of Charlotte's generation had George III as godfather. He had one of the J. S. Bach sons (J. C. Bach) as music tutor to his children, so here emerges another possible source of some of Charlottes' copious German gleanings. She copied some waltzes by Princess Charlotte, and upon the latter's death in childbirth, Charlotte Sneyd black-edged the pieces. There are other things reminiscent of the Hanovers.

A published piano piece—surely one of the most preposterous ever printed—bears the title:

**MUSICAL ILLUSTRATIONS,**

of

*Sir Walter Scott's*

**Novel of Woodstock,**

*Composed by*

**HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS**

**PRINCE GEORGE OF CUMBERLAND.**

for the Benefit of the

*Society of*

**FOREIGNERS IN DISTRESS.**

With questionable economy of means, he contrives five pages on only two chords—the tonic and dominant.

Another bears the caption: A Tour of the Lakes, and continues

Every Person who has visited the Lakes of Cumberland will call to mind the following Scenery. ]

INTRODUZIONE

Tempo di  
Minuetto

It will be remembered that Mozart as a boy spent 13 months in England. The fashionable rage for the boy prodigy—and the absence of copyright acts—produced a crop of falsely attributed or spurious works, some even published by so august-sounding a body as the Royal Harmonic Institution. An interesting example is that of the Finale of the B flat Piano Sonata composed by Mozart in 1779, which appears here, firstly in a three movement work called *Capriccio* (misspelt) in companionship with the famous Ploughboy tune as second theme in the tonic but all transposed to C and having an Alberti accompaniment. It appears again in the collection masquerading as a “Favourite Air with Variations” but in the correct key—an obvious re-hash of the familiar material. The same Ploughboy tune appears elsewhere, used by Dussek in a Rondo.

*M. Lianto delle Muse* 1

in morte di Lord Byron.

**CANZONE CON CORO.** *P. Rossini*

*Composed and Dedicated to the*

*Hon<sup>ble</sup> Henry F. De Roos.*

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*ANDANTINO*

Rossini Autograph  
(the work first performed, London, June, 1824).

Concerto N. 1. Bach

The image displays a handwritten musical score for harpsichord, titled "Concerto N. 1. Bach". The score is arranged in six systems, each consisting of two staves. The notation is written in a cursive hand, characteristic of the 18th or 19th century. The music features various rhythmic values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. There are some annotations: "bis" above the fifth system and "for." below the sixth system. The paper shows signs of age and wear.

From copy of harpsichord part of Concerto by J. C. Bach  
possibly in contemporary hand of William Dance.