## THE SNEYD COLLECTION OF MUSIC

By Thomas B. Pitfield, F.R.M.C.M. A Lecture delivered at University College of North Staffordshire November 23rd, 1955

THEN 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 unpromisinglooking 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.

admittedly long before Cecil Sharpe and Vaughan Williams, but it was a period of low ebb regarding English music anyway. So this cross-section of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is not a very pleasing picture on the whole, at least, regarding English music. The Church Music of the time for instance, whatever response it generated in contemporary congregations, would surely serve only as a mass anaesthetic today.

The chief foreground-figure in our picture is certainly Charlotte Auguste Sneyd, born on the first tick of the century, so to speak, and living to the age of 82. She must have been a person of some character and scholarship, and had many European contacts in the social and musical worlds. But what appears to be most noteworthy about her was her indefatigable persistence as a copyist. To us in these un-leisurely days, it seems that the family's 'midnight oil' bills must have been particularly heavy, for at least three of the sisters were inveterate copyists-if not always quite reliable ones. I note for instance, that Charlotte has copied at least one Italian Canzonetta three times over, and no doubt wishing to have each their private collections, the sisters would copy the same thing over again—not without occasional disagreements; one manuscript book reveals a tune called The 'Darmstadt Night Watchman's Song', another book 'The Vienna Watchman's Morning Song' to the same tune. The one sings about the tenth hour of night and the other about the fifth of morning. Fortunately music pins down neither time nor place, and is above such geographical-astronomical trifles as the discrepancy between one o'clock at night in Darmstadt and five o'clock in the morning in Vienna.

Another of Charlotte's note books has a tune headed "Air sung by the Normans Advancing at the Battle of Hastings"! There are no words to it—which reminds me, but in reverse, of Dr. Scholes' witticism in his discourse on the origins of the carol, where he observes that the inspiring words of the first Christmas carol have been preserved, but not, alas, it's tune. In this instance presumably nobody preserved the words! A habit of the times, I believe, the sisters made rather a practice of observing musical irrelevances:

'March played on Pope Gregory the 16th's entrance to St. Peters before High Mass, 1833.



(which tune is of course identical in outline with the French nursery song: Au claire de la lune)'



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



Charlotte Sneyd. Age 15 From a tiny MS book.



 $\label{eq:Charlotte Sneyd} \mbox{Page from Full Score of "Paraphrase of 137 Psalm" for chorus and full {\bf orc} hestra.}$ 

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, dispair, 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.

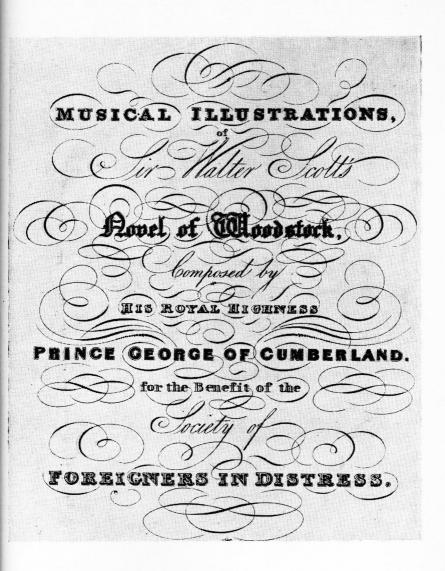
Quite a quantity of Russian folk music emerges, including tunes already known to me, since I have done some work in that field; amongst them a tune given the title 'Russian Waltz'! I have a published arrangement and translation of this tune myself as a Russian Nursery Song, and I have since found versions 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:



It is well known that the Sneyds had monarchial 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:



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



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.

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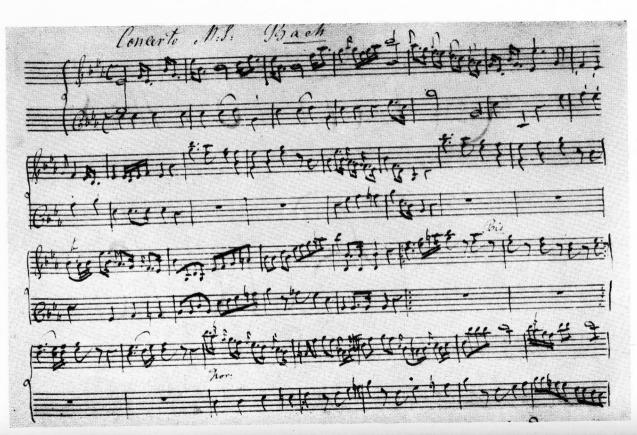
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From copy of harpsichord part of Concerto by J. C. Bach possibly in contemporary hand of William Dance.