

THE PERIODICAL OVERTURE IN 8 PARTS II

FRANCESCO PASQUALE RICCI

Published by Robert Bremner at the Harp and Hautboy, opposite Somerset-House, in the Strand

Issued: 1 August 1763; price 2 shillings

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COMMENTARY

We do not know how Robert Bremner (c.1713–1789) obtained the overture in E-flat by Francesco Pasquale Ricci (1732–1817) that would be the second issue of the *Periodical Overtures*. In 1763, Ricci had not yet begun the international travels that would extend his fame beyond his native Italy, nor had he composed the *Dies irae* setting that would bring him renown in 1773. However, Johann Christian Bach (1735–1782)—composer of Bremner’s inaugural overture—may have played a role. Both men—three years apart in age—had enjoyed the patronage of Count Agostino Litta (1728–1781) in Milan.¹ Moreover, while in Milan, Ricci directed a musical academy that brought amateurs and professionals together for performances.² It is possible that the symphony in E-flat that Bremner published had been composed by Ricci for the academy’s concerts. It is interesting to speculate that Bach could have brought a manuscript copy to England and had offered it to Bremner during their discussions about his own composition that would launch the series. Or, perhaps he simply pointed Bremner to his old Milanese colleague as a promising source for a suitable composition. Of course, Bach may have had no involvement whatsoever, and thus, as is the case with all the *Periodical Overture* publications, the pathway between publisher and composer remains unknown.



Regardless of how Bremner obtained *Periodical Overture No. 2*, it was one of Ricci’s earliest publications, if not the very first. Rather than following the path of his prosperous merchant family, Ricci’s career had started in the service of the church: after ordination as a priest in 1758, “Abbate” Ricci was hired by the Como Cathedral the following year to be the *maestro di cappella* and organist.³ The cathedral granted him leave in 1764, however, and he traveled widely for many years, journeying to Austria, France, Germany, England, Switzerland, and especially the Netherlands.⁴ He appeared in numerous concerts in The Hague between 1766 and 1780, and most of his published music was issued there or in Amsterdam. Although he had

¹ Ronald R. Kidd, “Ricci, Francesco Pasquale,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), Vol. 21: 319.

² Harriet St. Clair Jones, “Francesco Pasquale Ricci—An Enlightened Music Master,” *Francesco Pasquale Ricci*, 2024, <https://fpricci.com/essays/francesco-pasquale-ricci>.

³ Oscar Tajetti, “Francesco Pasquale Ricci: A Portrait,” transl. David S. Talbot, booklet for *Francesco Pasquale Ricci (1732–1817): Sacred Works, Vol. 1*, Capriccio Italiano Ensemble, conducted by Daniele Ferrari, Nuova Era 7243, compact disc, p. 12.

⁴ Helen Metzelaar, “‘Mon Cher Ami’: A New Source on Francesco Pasquale Ricci (1732–1817), His Music Career and His Dutch Pupils,” *Tijdschrift van de Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis* 60, no. 1/2 (2010): 121–123.

made brief visits to Como during those years, he returned for good in 1780 and left his estate to the city's Ospedale S. Anna, where he died in 1817.

M U S I C.
This Day is published,
Price Two Shillings,
Number II. To be continued Monthly,
THE PERIODICAL OVERTURE, in eight Parts.
Composed by Signor PASQUALI RICCI.
Printed and sold by R. Bremner, at the Harp and Hautboy, opposite to Somerset House in the Strand.
Where may be had, Number I, composed by Sig. Jean Bach.

Like Bach's overture before it, Ricci's first contribution to the *Periodical Overtures* was distributed widely and enjoyed good staying power. The Edinburgh Musical Society performed it on 8 July 1768, 27 April 1770, 5 July 1771, 25 June 1779, and 3 August 1781.⁵ It was played in the American colonies when it was the closing number of a Boston concert on 17 May 1771.⁶ Fourteen years later, when the Fairfield community of Moravians was founded in England, Ricci's *Periodical Overture No. 2* appeared in their music holdings.⁷ When Samuel

Babb published a keyboard reduction "for the piano forte or harpsichord" later in the century, he titled it "The favorite Periodical Overture."⁸

Like most mid-eighteenth-century symphonies, *Periodical Overture No. 2* is a three-movement, fast-slow-fast structure. The work opens in E-flat, moves to the relative minor in the second movement, and returns to E-flat for the finale. A surviving manuscript of Ricci's composition, held in the National Library of the Czech Republic, contains two trumpet parts rather than horns, but it also lacks the central "Andante" movement, so it is unknown if Bremner altered the instrumentation of Ricci's original score or worked from a different version of the symphony altogether.⁹

The first movement, "Vivace assai," displays many of the elements that made the still-new genre of the symphony so exciting for listeners. Structured as a sonata form without repeated sections, its energy is apparent from the start, as steady "drum 8ths" in common time propel the orchestra forward through shifting harmonies, as shown by the figured bass. Rapid contrasts between *piano* and *forte* create roller-coaster-like effects, while extended crescendos and measured tremolos also build drama. The first theme is filled with slurred pairs of neighboring notes, while the second theme (m. 30) is much more staccato.

The brief C minor "Andante" seems almost mysterious at first: it is set in simple triple meter, reduces the ensemble to strings alone, and opens at a *piano* dynamic level. Like the first movement, however, it leaps suddenly to *forte* multiple times; it also offers back-to-back contrasts between motifs that use either staccato or legato articulations.

Unlike many early symphonies, the finale is not gigue-like but is instead a "Minuetto Grazioso," retaining the triple meter of the "Andante" but returning to the E-flat major tonality of the first movement and restoring the horns and oboes to the ensemble. The first oboe is featured in several short passages, perhaps reflecting Ricci's awareness of the new scoring trends originating in Mannheim. Despite the "minuet" designation, the architecture is a sonata form, with the treble and bass instruments pulling in opposite directions in the first theme. The second theme (m. 17) brings back other elements of the "Vivace assai," such as the drum 8ths and measured tremolos, and its irregular phrase lengths further contradict the "dance" expectations of the movement's title. Ricci seems to have been fully aware that he was creating music for the pleasure of a still-new social phenomenon: that of concert-goers.

EDITORIAL METHODS

Transposing instruments: Transposing instruments are written in conventional modern format indicating original key—parts in original keys are available [e.g., Horn I in F (orig. in D)].

Slurs and ties: Editorial slurs are indicated using dotted lines; editorial ties are indicated by brackets.

⁵ Jenny Burchell, *Polite or Commercial Concerts?: Concert Management and Orchestral Repertoire in Edinburgh, Bath, Oxford, Manchester, and Newcastle, 1730–1799*, Outstanding Dissertations in Music from British Universities, ed. by John Caldwell (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 309, 316, 319, 327, 332.

⁶ O. G. Sonneck, *Early Concert-Life in America (1731–1800)* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1907), 262.

⁷ Karl Kroeger, "An Unknown Collection of Eighteenth-Century Instrumental Music," *Fontes Artis Musicae* 35, no. 4 (October–December 1988): 277, 280.

⁸ <https://rism.online/sources/990054640>.

⁹ <https://rism.online/sources/550040744>.

Triplet/rhythmic grouping indications: In general, modern practice is followed. Occasionally (especially in slow movements), original subdivisions are used. Where groupings are inconsistently realized in the original source material, modern groupings are adopted.

Grace notes and appoggiaturas: These are generally treated as appoggiaturas and are given a value of half the note they precede; in cases where it seems clear that grace notes are intended in the original, a slash is added.

Alternate notes/ossia passages, etc.: When a written note is unplayable, an alternative octave substitution is indicated in smaller font and within brackets.

Accents/articulations/fermatas: There is considerable inconsistency in articulation throughout the set of periodical overtures. Following the Bremner edition, a wedge is used rather than a staccato mark. In some cases, the printed edition uses wedges and staccato markings within a movement (usually the slow central movement). When this is the case, both marks have been used. Where parallel passages indicate the use of articulations, these have been included between brackets.

Dynamic markings: In the original edition, the placement of dynamic marks can be inconsistent within the bar and sometimes across the barline. Where the correct placement of the dynamic is clear from the musical phrasing, the dynamics have been repositioned without comment. Where dynamics are less clear, or missing, the editor's dynamics occur within square brackets.

Crescendo / diminuendo markings: "Cresc." and "dim." markings are generally used, but there are rare exceptions to this with the use of hairpins. Where these are editorial, they are enclosed in square brackets. Other markings such as *rinf.* have been retained except where it seems clear that this refers to a crescendo.

Realization of notational shorthand: For spacing reasons, some use of notational short-hand has been used. When this is the case, the first full beat has been written out.

Altered note values: In the sources, there are occasional errors and inconsistencies in note values. Where these occur, the altered note values are given within brackets.

Accidentals: As is standard modern practice, accidentals remain valid until the next barline. This differs from eighteenth-century practice where this convention was not consistently employed. Wherever this is the case, accidentals are added in brackets.

Figured bass: Although the eighteenth-century parts usually position the figured bass numerals above the relevant bass notes, the modern score and parts show them below the basso line.

Missing music: Where music is missing in the original, alternative sources are sought (e.g., when a bar is missing due to a printer's error or when music is unreadable). When eighteenth-century concordances are unobtainable, editorial notes are added in smaller font within brackets.

CRITICAL NOTES

The notation of dynamics and articulation has been standardized throughout. Where these are missing in the original source, they have been reconstructed from parallel passages. These are indicated by the use of dotted slurs and brackets. Where there is inconsistency in the use of staccato articulation marks, the editors have taken decisions based on the collocation of the markings. As is common with music printed in this period, *appoggiature* are inconsistently notated. These have been standardized. Copyist errors have been corrected in brackets (see notes below), along with errors in accidentals. The horn parts have been transposed into F in the score. Metronome marks are a suggestion for performance only. Rehearsal letters, cues in parts, and bar numbers have been added for convenience.

Mvt. 1 Vivace Assai

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|-------|--------|--|
| m. 22 | Oboe 1 | triplets on 1st and 3rd beat changed, parallel with Violin 1 |
| m. 50 | Oboe 2 | initial half note changed to D4, rhythmic unison with Oboe 1 |

Mvt. 3 Minuetto Grazioso

- | | | |
|-------|------------------|---|
| m. 39 | Oboe 1 | 1st beat shortened to quarter note, rhythmic unison with Oboe 2 |
| m. 58 | Oboe 2, Violin 2 | appoggiatura F5 added to 1st beat, parallel with Oboe 1 & Violin 1 |
| m. 62 | Oboe 1 | 1st beat changed to quarter note A5; 2nd beat changed to two A5 eighth notes, parallel with m. 66 |
| m. 66 | Oboe 2 | appoggiatura E-flat5 added to 3rd beat, parallel with m. 62 |
| m. 69 | Oboe 2 | appoggiatura D5 changed to sixteenth note, parallel with Oboe 1 |

CATALOGUE REFERENCES

RISM A/I R/RR 1273 [Répertoire International des Sources Musicales;
<https://rism.online/sources/990054639>]

LaRue 11248 (R491) [Jan LaRue, *A Catalogue of 18th-Century Symphonies*, Volume I: Thematic Identifier (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988)]

ILLUSTRATIONS

Ricci portrait (posthumous): Ospedale S. Anna, Como, Italy (Per gentile concessione di Asst Lariana, proprietaria dell'opera / Courtesy of Asst Lariana, owner of the work; <https://fpricci.com/about-ricci>)
Publication announcement: *The Public Advertiser*, 1 August 1763, p. 1 (courtesy of the British Library Archives)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ESSAY

<https://repertoire-explorer.musikmph.de/en/periodical-overtures-details/>



PERFORMANCE MATERIALS

Please contact *Musikproduktion Höflich, München*: <https://musikmph.de/>

