

THE PERIODICAL OVERTURE IN 8 PARTS XIV
(OVERTURE TO *DEMETRIO* + CHACONNE)
NICCOLÒ JOMMELLI

Published by Robert Bremner at the Harp and Hautboy, opposite Somerset-House, in the Strand
Issued: 31 May 1766; price 2 shillings
Source: Henry Watson Music Library – Courtesy of Manchester Libraries,
Information and Archives, Manchester City Council: BR580Js41
Instrumentation: 2 violins, viola, basso [with bassoon cues], 2 oboes, 2 horns [orig. in E-flat]
Editors: Barnaby Priest & Alyson McLamore



COMMENTARY

If publisher Robert Bremner (c.1713–1789) had maintained a list of “Greatest Hits” from his *Periodical Overture* series, *Periodical Overture No. 14* by Niccolò Jommelli (1714–1774) might well have been at the top of the tally. Besides enjoying performances for decades, it was published numerous times in keyboard transcriptions. Its second movement also launched an English fad for orchestral chaconnes.¹ Surprisingly, though, this was the only time that Jommelli was represented in Bremner’s twenty-year set.

Jommelli was a particularly well-travelled composer by mid-eighteenth-century standards. He received most of his early training in Naples, and his professional career was launched in that city. However, when he had an opera staged in Bologna in 1741, he began lessons (and a lifelong friendship) with Giovanni Battista (“Padre”) Martini (1706–1784); he was also elected to the city’s Accademia Filarmonica. Subsequent operas took him to various other Italian cities, and he also served as music director for one of the Venetian orphanages, where his portfolio of sacred music expanded considerably. He then moved to Rome, continuing to write sacred works as well as accepting commissions for operas elsewhere.² He also mentored the Mannheim musician Christian Cannabich (1731–1798), composer of *Periodical Overtures Nos. 10* and *52*.³ As Jommelli’s fame grew, he was pursued by courts ranging from Lisbon to Mannheim, but he accepted the role of Ober-Kapellmeister in Stuttgart in 1754. Similar to Richard Wagner a century later, he was invested in blending all aspects of his theatrical works into a unified whole. Since the Duke Carl Eugen’s “special passion” was opera rather than the symphony, Jommelli broke new ground in his treatment of the orchestra as a dramatic force in the operas he wrote for the Duke.⁴ One observer called Jommelli’s orchestral effects “overwhelming.”⁵



¹ Simon McVeigh, *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 139.

² Marita P. McClymonds, Paul Cauthen, Wolfgang Hochstein, and Mauricio Dottori, “Niccolò Jommelli,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), Vol. 13: 178–180.

³ Jean K. Wolf, “Christian Cannabich,” in *The Eighteenth-Century Symphony*, ed. Mary Sue Morrow and Bathia Churgin, Vol. I of *The Symphonic Repertoire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 363.

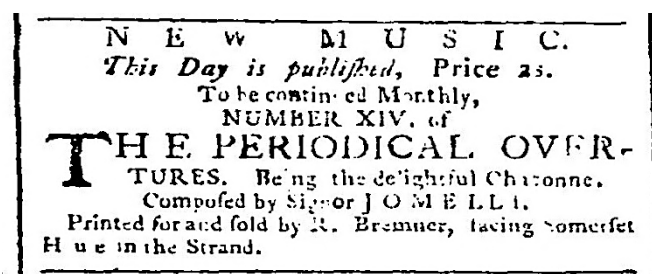
⁴ Sterling E. Murray, “The Symphony in South Germany,” in *The Eighteenth-Century Symphony*, ed. Mary Sue Morrow and Bathia Churgin, Vol. I of *The Symphonic Repertoire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 301–2.

⁵ McClymonds et al., “Niccolò Jommelli,” 180.

Despite Jommelli's remarkable achievements in Stuttgart over a fifteen-year period, court intrigues made his position increasingly unsteady. When he took a trip to Italy in the hope that the southern climate would help his ailing wife, rivals in Stuttgart managed to get him cut off from his position and pension (and he was even refused copies of his repertory). He soon lost his wife as well. Still, Jommelli made efforts to rebuild his career in Italy, even though his own health was failing. Not every new work was successful, but others were enthusiastically received. After he was carried off by a second stroke, Naples honored him with a grand public funeral.⁶

Although the Mannheim school of composers garnered the most fame for their use of dynamic variety, the large-scale "Mannheim crescendo" seems actually to have been first implemented by Jommelli. One observer, Johann Friedrich Reichardt, reported, "They say that when Jommelli first introduced [the crescendo] in Rome, the listeners gradually rose from their seats during the crescendo, and only at the diminuendo noted that it had taken their breaths away," and he added, "I myself have experienced this phenomenon in Mannheim."⁷ Jommelli explored other innovations that also had widespread impact, including the increased use of independent wind and string parts.⁸

In addition to Jommelli's operatic achievements, his reputation was growing in England, thanks to his sacred work *Le passione* that had been performed several times in London, starting in 1764.⁹ Therefore, it must have been something of a coup for Bremner to obtain a symphonic work from him to include in the British series. To create his contribution, Jommelli combined two pre-existing components: a transposed version of the first movement of his *sinfonia* for the opera *Demetrio*, coupled with a chaconne that is identified as "Op. V, No. 13" in the Conservatorio di Napoli library.¹⁰ Michael Kelly (1762–1826)—a singer/composer who studied with



Mozart for a time—reported that this "chacoone" had been used for operatic dance music in Stuttgart.¹¹ The conservatory manuscript itself is undated, and there is also controversy concerning the dating of the opera. Its libretto lists the premiere as taking place in Parma in the spring of 1749, and that information is reproduced in most standard reference works.¹² Nevertheless, Helmut Hell cites a 15 September 1750 letter from the librettist Metastasio to the castrato

Farinelli, commenting that Jommelli had just received the *Demetrio* libretto and was currently at work on composing the score. Hell also believes the letter implies that Jommelli was composing the opera for Madrid (where Farinelli was employed).¹³ A scholarly consensus has not been reached, but it is clear that Bremner announced the publication of the composite version on 31 May 1766. The advertisement gave special billing to the second movement, which he described as "the delightful Chaconne."¹⁴

There is plenty of proof that audiences indeed found the "symphony with chaconne" delightful. Scholar Jenny Burchell has tabulated sixteen documented performances by the Edinburgh Musical Society between the years 1768 and 1786, as well as ten performances in Oxford occurring between 1788 and 1799, along with a 1793 performance in Bath.¹⁵ In 1785, a Moravian community was founded in Fairfield, England, and Jommelli's

⁶ McClymonds et al., "Niccolò Jommelli," 181.

⁷ Eugene K. Wolf, *The Symphonies of Johann Stamitz: A Study in the Formation of the Classic Style* (Utrecht: Bohn, Scheltema & Holkema, 1981), 335.

⁸ Marita Petzoldt McClymonds, "The Italian Opera Sinfonia 1720 to 1800," in *The Eighteenth-Century Symphony*, ed. Mary Sue Morrow and Bathia Churgin, Vol. I of *The Symphonic Repertoire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 119.

⁹ McVeigh, *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn*, 150.

¹⁰ Dinko Fabris, commentary for "Niccolò Jommelli: Ciaccona op. 5 n. 13," *Veni Creator Spiritus*, Cappella de' Turchini, conducted by Antonio Florio, Tesori di Napoli Vol. 9, transl. Avril Bardoni, Opus 111 OPS 30-254, 10.

¹¹ Aubrey S. Garlington, Jr., "'Gothic' Literature and Dramatic Music in England, 1781–1802," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1962): 56.

¹² McClymonds et al., "Niccolò Jommelli," 182.

¹³ Helmut Hell, *Die Neapolitanische Opernsinfonie in der ersten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts: N. Porpora—L. Vinci—G. B. Pergolesi—L. Leo—N. Jommelli*, Münchner Veröffentlichungen zur Musikgeschichte, Vol. 19 (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1971), 594.

¹⁴ *The Public Advertiser*, 31 May 1766, p. 1.

¹⁵ 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), 309–374 passim.

Periodical Overture No. 14 was among the works in their music library.¹⁶ Clear into the nineteenth century, various publishers issued keyboard arrangements made by William Smothergell (1751–1836), a “T. Lyon,” or a “W. Watts.” Four-hand versions were also issued, by an uncredited arranger for Preston and again by Watts for Lonsdale. It is very likely that the “overtura” found by Robert Stevenson in the Colegio de Santa Rosa collection in Morelia, Mexico, is also a copy of the *Periodical Overture*.¹⁷ More than thirty years after Bremner first printed the work, Michael Kelly was responsible for assembling the music for a gothic drama titled *The Castle Spectre* (1797). In his *Reminiscences*, he recalled, “For the situation in which the Ghost first appears . . . to her daughter . . . I selected the chacoone [*sic*] of Jommelli, as an accompaniment to the action. This . . . was thought an odd choice of mine for so solemn a scene; but the effect which it produced, warranted the experiment.”¹⁸ Thereafter, published scores cited *The Castle Spectre* on their title pages as an additional marketing effort. The 1798 publication by L. Lavenu made the theatrical reference particularly explicit: *The Favorite Movement, Performed at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, During the appearance of the Ghost, in the Drama, of the Castle Spectre, adapted for the Piano Forte, by T. Lyon*.¹⁹

It is not clear what led Jommelli to select the first movement of the *Demetrio* sinfonia to serve as the “Allegro di Molto” in *Periodical Overture No. 14*, especially since it necessitated a transposition from the operatic overture’s F major to the E-flat major key used in Bremner’s publication. However, it has an effervescent spirit that makes a nice contrast with the subsequent chaconne. The score calls for Bremner’s standard eight parts, including paired oboes and horns, but the basso part contains bassoon cues as well. The movement’s form is a pattern that James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy label a “Type 1 Sonata,” which is sometimes called a sonatina; it is, essentially, a sonata form without development.²⁰ It opens with three hammer blows that return two bars later after busy sixteenth-note flourishes. The second theme (m. 15) features numerous neighbor-motion oscillations. The “Jommelli crescendo”—that would soon be more widely credited to the Mannheim composers—begins in measure 43 during the recapitulation; it acts as the bridge between the first (m. 28) and second (m. 47) themes.

The “celebrated Chaconne,” marked “Andante,” relies on a steady four-measure phrase structure in triple meter rather than strict repetitive melodic or harmonic patterns. Although certain motifs recur from time to time, the movement’s primary interest is in the variety of material offered during the regular phrases, which resemble a slow minuet.²¹ Jommelli showcases the winds at several points, particularly in measures 62, 94, 138, and 154. The accompaniment, too, employs a wide array of different figurations, adding another appealing layer of variety to the texture.

The impact of Bremner’s publication is apparent in the numerous imitations that it spawned. Some retained Jommelli’s two-movement structure, such as François-Hippolyte Barthélemon’s Op. 6, no. 5, William Smothergell’s Op. 5, no. 4, and the overture to Stephen Storace’s *No Song, No Supper* (1790).²² Probably the most popular chaconne-only imitator was Pietro Alessandro Guglielmi, who used that structure in the overture to *Le pazzie d’Orlando* (1771).²³ It is regrettable that Jommelli himself did not live to see the extended influence of his creativity.

¹⁶ Karl Kroeger, “An Unknown Collection of Eighteenth-Century Instrumental Music,” *Fontes Artis Musicae* 35, no. 4 (October–December 1988): 277, 280.

¹⁷ Robert Stevenson, *Renaissance and Baroque Musical Sources in the Americas* (Washington, D.C.: Organization of American States, 1970), 189.

¹⁸ Garlington, “‘Gothic’ Literature and Dramatic Music in England, 1781–1802,” 56.

¹⁹ The British Library, h.721.bb.(2).

²⁰ James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 345–6.

²¹ Simon McVeigh, “The Symphony in Britain,” in *The Eighteenth-Century Symphony*, ed. Mary Sue Morrow and Bathia Churgin, Vol. I of *The Symphonic Repertoire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 647; McVeigh, *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn*, 142.

²² McVeigh, “The Symphony in Britain,” 648.

²³ McVeigh, *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn*, 139.

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.

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	Allegro di molto*	
*	Vn 2	tempo indication is <i>Allegro con spirito</i>
m. 2	Vn 1	appoggiatura F5 added before sixteenth note on 2nd beat (parallel with m. 1)
m. 6	VA	final eighth note changed to E \flat 3 (correction of harmony)
m. 6	Basso	final eighth note changed to E \flat 2 (correction of harmony)
m. 7	Ob 1	2nd sixteenth note (and following) changed to A \sharp 5 (unison with Vn 1)
m. 16	Vn 1	appoggiatura G5 added before 2nd beat (parallel with m. 15)
m. 17	Vn 1	appoggiatura C6 added to 2nd beat (unison with Ob 1)
m. 18	Ob 1, Ob 2, Vn 1	appoggiatura C6 added to 2nd & 4th beats (parallel with m. 17)
m. 19	Ob 1, Ob 2, Vn 1	appoggiatura C6 added to 2nd beat (parallel with m. 17)
m. 22, 23	Vn 1, Vn 2	appoggiatura C5 added to 2nd beat (parallel with m. 25 & m. 26)
m. 24	Ob 1, Vn 1, Vn 2	appoggiatura B \flat 4 added to 4th beat (parallel with m. 27)
m. 24	Hn 2	3rd beat changed to quarter note (rhythmic unison with Hn 1)
m. 27	Ob 1, Vn 1	appoggiatura B4 added to 4th beat (unison with Ob 2 and Vn 2)
m. 33, 35	Hn 1	appoggiatura E \flat 5 added to 4th beat (unison with Hn 2)
m. 33	VA	appoggiatura A \flat 4 added to 4th beat (unison with Vn 1)
m. 35	Hn 1	appoggiatura E \flat 5 added to 4th beat (unison with Hn 2)
m. 36	Vn 2	final sixteenth of 2nd beat changed to A \sharp 4 and final sixteenth of 4th beat changed to A \sharp 5 (parallel with Vn 1)
m. 44	Ob 2	final half note changed to four eighth notes (rhythmic unison with Ob 1)
m. 49	Ob 1, Ob 2, Vn 1	appoggiatura E \flat 5 added to 4th beat (unison with Vn 2)
m. 49, 52	Hn 2	3rd beat changed to quarter note (rhythmic unison with Hn 1)
m. 52	Vn 1	appoggiatura E \flat 5 added to 4th beat (unison with Vn 2)
Mvt. 2	Andante (Chaconne)	
m. 13, 14	Vn 1	appoggiatura D5 added to 1st beat (parallel with m. 20)
m. 15	Vn 2	appoggiatura B \flat 4 added to 1st beat (parallel with m. 22)
m. 47	Vn 1	4th beat changed to eighth note + two sixteenth notes (parallel with Vn 2)
m. 55	VA	1st beat final sixteenth note changed to A \sharp 4
m. 80, 84	Ob 1	appoggiatura A \flat 5 added to 1st beat (unison with Vn 1)
m. 80, 84	Vn 2	appoggiatura F5 added to 1st beat (unison with Ob 2)
m. 84	Vn 1	appoggiatura A \flat 5 added to 1st beat (parallel with m. 81)
m. 84	Ob 2	appoggiatura F5 added to 1st beat (parallel with m. 82)
m. 92	Vn 2	appoggiatura C5 added to 2nd beat (unison with Vn 1)
m. 93	Ob 2, Vn 2	final eighth note changed to A \sharp 4 (legacy harmony from m. 92)
m. 109	Ob 1	appoggiatura D5 added to 1st beat (unison with Vn 1)
m. 116	Vn 2	appoggiatura G4 added to 1st beat (parallel passage with m. 112)
m. 140, 144	Ob 1, Ob 2	appoggiatura added to 1st beat (parallel with mm. 64 & 66)

CATALOGUE REFERENCES

RISM J.595 / J.597 [Répertoire International des Sources Musicales;
<https://rism.online/sources/990032652> and <https://rism.online/sources/990032654>]
 LaRue 11766 (J750) [Jan LaRue, *A Catalogue of 18th-Century Symphonies*, Volume I: Thematic Identifier (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988)]

ILLUSTRATIONS

Jommelli portrait: painted by Carlo Amalfi © Sotheby's (reproduced with the kind permission of the owner)
 Publication advertisement: *The Public Advertiser*, 31 May 1766, 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 Jürgen Höflich*: <https://musikmph.de/>

