

# THE PERIODICAL OVERTURE IN 8 PARTS XXI

NICCOLÒ PICCINNI (PICCINI)

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

Issued: before 8 December 1767; price 2 shillings

Source: Henry Watson Music Library – Courtesy of Manchester Libraries,

Information and Archives, Manchester City Council: BR580Po33

Instrumentation: 2 violins, viola, basso, 2 oboes, 2 horns [originally in F]

Editors: Barnaby Priest & Alyson McLamore



## COMMENTARY

After the roaring success of *Periodical Overture No. 20*, it is no wonder that Robert Bremner (c.1713–1789) wanted to continue publishing works by Niccolò Piccinni (Piccini) (1728–1800). In fact, Bremner's subsequent three issues were all by Piccinni, the first time in the series that Bremner had ever published four pieces in a row by the same composer. In addition, the latter two prints—*Periodical Overtures No. 22* and *No. 23*—were again drawn from operas by Piccinni, as had been the case with *Periodical Overture No. 20*. However, in contrast to Bremner's prominent acknowledgement of *La buona figliuola* on the title page of the twentieth *Periodical Overture*, he did not identify the theatrical origins of *Nos. 22* or *23*. The same lack of acknowledgment had been true for his first two issues by Johann Christian Bach (*Nos. 1* and *15*); it seems that Bremner did not alert purchasers to an operatic connection unless the work had been recently (or was currently) staged in London. It is very likely, therefore, that the F major symphony that comprises *Periodical Overture No. 21* was also taken from an opera, but it has not been possible to identify its theatrical source. Although numerous archives have digitized large amounts of their holdings, and the *Répertoire International des Sources Musicales* often includes melodic incipits within its catalogue entries, some twenty operatic works by Piccinni that premiered prior to 1767 are currently lost or are not readily accessible. Still, it is also possible that Piccinni composed the F major symphony as an independent work, although no manuscript parts are known to exist, nor did he ever publish other free-standing symphonies during his long career.



Piccinni's life as a theatrical composer had begun in Naples, where he had gone for training. His reputation was initially built on *buffa* operas, but the hit production of *Zenobia*, in 1756, proved his skill with *seria* topics as well. His reputation soon spread, and commissions began arriving from Rome. *La buona figliuola* was his second production for that city, and one commentator reported that it took Piccinni only eighteen days to compose.<sup>1</sup> It sparked a storm of enthusiasm, and the run in Rome lasted two years. Piccinni's name began to be known internationally, since productions were soon staged in all of Europe's leading capitals. In fact, *La buona figliuola* became the most popular *opera buffa* of the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Anticipation for the London premiere of the opera built for several years, and it debuted at last in 1766, with Italian and English productions

<sup>1</sup> Dennis Libby, Julian Rushton, and Mary Hunter, "(Vito) Niccolò [Nicola] (Marcello Antonio Giacomo) Piccinni [Piccini]," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), Vol. 19: 708.

<sup>2</sup> MGG Online, s.v. "Niccolò Piccinni," by Elisabeth Schmierer, accessed 27 October 2024; William C. Holmes, "Pamela Transformed," *The Musical Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (October 1952), 587.

opening eight days apart.<sup>3</sup> Bremner scored a publishing coup in 1767 by issuing the first score to the Italian version of *La buona figliuola*, followed by his publication of its *sinfonia* as *Periodical Overture No. 20* in early September 1767.<sup>4</sup> The next two *Periodical Overtures* by Piccinni appeared later that same year, with the fourth following early in 1768.<sup>5</sup>

Piccinni's operatic career had continued to thrive in Italy after *La buona figliuola*'s Roman premiere. He sent works to Rome for the Carnival season almost every year until 1773, even as he wrote thirty other operas for Naples and other European cities. He was lured to Paris in 1776 by a promised pension, in addition to the income from his operas and aristocratic support. His arrival in France then sparked the famous "war" between the "Gluckists" (supporters of Christoph Willibald Gluck) and the "Piccinnists." The French Revolution brought Piccinni's annual French pension to an end, so he returned to Naples—but although he initially received a warm welcome, the subsequent marriage of one of his daughters to a Frenchman meant that Piccinni found himself under house arrest in 1794. He was allowed to return to France in 1798, but his pension was no longer paid in full, and by the time Bonaparte awarded him a new post at the Conservatoire, Piccinni's health had failed; he died in 1800.<sup>6</sup>

There is some uncertainty about the dating of *Periodical Overture No. 21*. In his seminal study of the series, David Wyn Jones cites a 24 September 1767 advertisement in *The Public Advertiser*.<sup>7</sup> However, that

**N E W M U S I C.**

*This Day were published,*

**T**HE favourite Songs in the Opera Tri-  
gane, Price 2s. 6d.

Six Solos for the Violoncello, by Chiabiano and P.  
antania, 5s.

Number XXI. of the Periodical Overtures, by Piccinni.  
Price 2s.

Printed and sold by R. Bremner, facing Somerset  
House, in the Strand. Of whom may be had, last  
published, for Concerts,

Abel's Six Overtures, Op. VII. 15s.  
Avison's twelve Quartetts, Op. IX. 1l. 1s.  
Martini of Milan's three grand Solo Concertos, 10s. 6d.  
Zannetti's six Quintetts, Op. II. 10s. 6d.  
Periodical Overtures, three Sets each, 12s.

issue of the newspaper does not seem to contain any advertising at all by Bremner. Moreover, in an advertisement published three days earlier—on 21 September—Bremner lists the previous symphony, *No. 20*, as "just published," with no mention of an upcoming *No. 21*.<sup>8</sup> It seems unlikely that Bremner would have issued two overtures in the same month, so it is more probable that the second symphony by Piccinni was introduced in October, November, or very early December. It is true that the first advertisement to mention *Periodical Overture No. 21*—which was published in the 8 December–10 December issue of *The St. James's Chronicle*; or, *The British Evening-Post*—lists the overture (with other works) under the stock heading "New Music.

This Day were published. . . ."<sup>9</sup> However, Bremner's third symphony by Piccinni was announced only two weeks later—on 22 December—so it is possibly the case that Bremner had released *No. 21* quite a bit earlier than 8 December and had not bothered to revise the language of the advertisement.

Although *Periodical Overture No. 21* seems to have achieved only a tiny fraction of the popularity of its immediate predecessor, it did demonstrate a certain amount of staying power. Scholar Jenny Burchell has documented two performances that took place in concerts of the Edinburgh Musical Society in 1783, sixteen years after the symphony was published: one occurred on 2 May and the second on 16 June. Two years later, it was presented again, during a 24 June performance.<sup>10</sup>

The structural similarities between *Periodical Overture No. 21* and the subsequent two Piccinni works, which both are known to have come from operas, are additional arguments for *No. 21* having had a theatrical origin as well. It is in three movements, with the first marked as "Allegro spiritoso," the identical tempo marking that is used for the opening in all four of Piccinni's works in the *Periodical Overture* series. This F major work is structured as a sonata form without repeats, although it is "Haydnesque" in its re-use of the common-time,

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Loewenberg, comp., *Annals of Opera 1597–1940*, 3rd ed. (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978), 124.

<sup>4</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 7 September 1767, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *St. James's Chronicle; or, The British Evening-Post*, 8 December—10 December 1767, p. 2; *The Public Advertiser*, 22 December 1767, p. 1; *The Public Advertiser*, 9 March 1768, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Libby, Rushton, and Hunter, "(Vito) Niccolò [Nicola] (Marcello Antonio Giacomo) Piccinni [Piccini]," 708–709; MGG Online, s.v. "Niccolò Piccinni," by Elisabeth Schmierer.

<sup>7</sup> David Wyn Jones, "Robert Bremner and *The Periodical Overture*," *Soundings* 7 (1978): 74.

<sup>8</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 21 September 1767, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *The St. James's Chronicle; or, The British Evening-Post*, 8 December—10 December 1767, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> 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), 337, 344.

upward-zigzag first theme in the second tonal area of C major (m. 27). During the theme's first appearance (m. 1), it is supported by a murky bass (m. 7) and then "drum 8ths" (m. 12). The bridge between the two harmonic areas, starting in measure 16, is peppered with *subito* contrasts between *piano* and *forte*, and the same is true for the development, which starts in measure 36 after three quick hammer blows mark the end of the exposition. Here, though, the contrasts are even greater, shifting suddenly between *pianissimo* and *fortissimo*. The opening theme returns at measure 46 and is reiterated at measure 62, driving to a final set of hammer blows in measure 70.

The central movement moves to the contrasting subdominant key of B-flat major, and it is set in a not-terribly-slow "Andante grazioso"; all three of the other Piccinni symphonies also employ some version of "Andante" in their second movements. All four also reduce the ensemble to strings alone, although this is true for over half of the symphonies in Bremner's series. Within the ternary form, Piccinni's A melody works its way downward gradually. The B theme (m. 20) makes use of numerous suspensions and dramatic dynamic contrasts. When the A theme returns (m. 32), it also features many sudden and dramatic dynamic changes.

Piccinni is again consistent in his use of bouncy, gigue-like, compound-subdivision finales. Three of the four closing movements—including *Periodical Overture No. 21*—are in  $\frac{3}{8}$  time, and two of the other symphonies are marked "Allegro," while one is labeled "Presto." *Periodical Overture No. 21* perhaps straddles the line by calling for "Allegro Presto." Returning to the F major home key, it travels a lively journey through a sonata form, starting with strong, ascending block chords in the upper strings and winds. The second theme (m. 35) features busy rising-and-falling sixteenth notes. The development (m. 44) drops to a hushed *piano* dynamic and reduced scoring of violins and violas only, sustained for eighteen measures. A *subito* return to *forte* and a quick downward scale set the stage for the recapitulation (m. 64) and the reprise of the block chords. Piccinni may also be emulating a little bit of Haydnesque playfulness by tossing in a "false reprise" of the second theme's busy motif in the "wrong" key of C major at measure 90. It reappears in a clear, *forte* F major at measure 101, propelling the overture to its final emphatic triple-stop chords in the violins—again a characteristic shared by all four of the Piccinni *Periodical Overtures*.

## 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, *appoggiatura* are inconsistently notated. These have been standardized. Copyist errors have been corrected in brackets (see notes below), along with errors in accidentals. Rehearsal letters, cues in parts, and bar numbers have been added for convenience.

<b>Mvt. 1</b>	<b>Allegro Spiritoso</b>	
m. 61	Hn 1	1st beat changed to E5 (parallel with Hn 2)
m. 62	Vn 1, Vn 2	appoggiatura B♭5 added to second note (parallel with m. 1)
m. 62	Vn 1, Vn 2	appoggiatura D6 added to sixth note (parallel with m. 1)
m. 69	VA	second note changed to F4 (octave doubling of Basso)
<b>Mvt. 2</b>	<b>Andante Grazioso</b>	
m. 5	Vn 1	first note changed to F♯5 (repetition of note from previous measure)
m. 6	VA	first and second notes changed to D5 (consistency of harmony)
m. 8	Vn 2	rhythm of 1st beat changed to two sixteenth notes (parallel with Vn 1)
m. 13	Vn 1	rhythm of final beat changed (parallel with Vn 2)
m. 27	Vn 2	rhythm of final beat changed (parallel with Vn 1)
m. 37	Vn 1, Vn 2	rhythm changed in second voice on 2nd beat (parallel with m. 41)
m. 37	Vn 1	appoggiatura B♭5 added to final note (unison with Vn 2)
m. 41	Vn 2	rhythm on 2nd beat changed (parallel with Vn 1)
m. 43	Vn 2	F4 added to first note of 2nd beat (parallel with Vn 1)
<b>Mvt. 3</b>	<b>Allegro Presto</b>	
m. 24	Ob 1	2nd beat sixteenth note changed to B♭5 (unison with Vn 1)
m. 27	Vn 2	second voice G\$ extended to dotted quarter note (parallel with m. 25)
m. 74	Ob 2	note changed to quarter note (unison with Ob 1)
m. 76	Hn 1, Hn 2	note changed to quarter note (parallel passage with m. 74)
m. 78	VA	second eighth note changed to D6 (parallel with Basso)

## CATALOGUE REFERENCES

RISM A/I P/PP 2215 [Répertoire International des Sources Musicales;  
<https://rism.online/sources/990049665> ]

LaRue 13260 (P589) [Jan LaRue, *A Catalogue of 18th-Century Symphonies*, Volume I: Thematic Identifier (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988)]

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Piccinni portrait: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Piccinni,\\_Niccol%C3%B2\\_1.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Piccinni,_Niccol%C3%B2_1.JPG) (public domain in its source country on January 1, 1996, and in the United States).

Publication announcement: *The St. James's Chronicle; or, The British Evening-Post*, 8 December—10 December 1767, p. 2 (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/>

