

THE PERIODICAL OVERTURE IN 8 PARTS XXII (OVERTURE TO *LE CONTADINE BIZZARRE*) NICCOLÒ PICCINI (PICCINI)

Published by Robert Bremner at the Harp and Hautboy, opposite Somerset-House, in the Strand
Issued: 22 December 1767; price 2 shillings
Source: Henry Watson Music Library – Courtesy of Manchester Libraries,
Information and Archives, Manchester City Council: BR580Po34
Instrumentation: 2 violins, viola, basso, 2 oboes, 2 horns [originally in G]
Editors: Barnaby Priest & Alyson McLamore



COMMENTARY

By late December 1767—less than four months after publishing the triumphant *Periodical Overture No. 20* by Niccolò Piccinni (Piccini) (1728–1800)—Robert Bremner (c.1713–1789) had published two more works by Piccinni, with another to follow the next year.¹ This was the first time in the series that Bremner had showcased the same composer four times in a row. The initial overture had been drawn from Piccinni's *La buona figliuola*, an *opera buffa* that had enjoyed an enthusiastic British reception. Although it is not known for sure if the second *Periodical Overture* by Piccinni was again taken from an opera, a surviving manuscript score verifies that the third work, *Periodical Overture No. 22*, had originally served as the *sinfonia* to *Le contadine bizzarre* (1763).²

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.³ 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.⁴

Piccinni's operatic career had continued to thrive in Italy after *La buona figliuola*'s Roman premiere. He sent works to Rome for Carnival season almost every year until 1773, even as he wrote thirty other operas for Naples and various 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



¹ *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.

² Biblioteca del Conservatorio di musica S. Pietro a Majella (I-Nc): Rari Corn. 2.3-4.

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

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 1800.⁵

There seems to be some uncertainty about the origins of *Le contadine bizzarre*. Both *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* list two possible debuts: one in Rome in February 1763 at the Teatro Capranica, and the other in the autumn in Venice at the Teatro San Samuele.⁶ In the Italian Wikipedia entry for “Niccolò Piccinni,” however, only the Venetian premiere is listed.⁷ On the other hand, in the *Annals of Opera, 1597–1940*, Alfred Loewenberg assigns the *opera buffa* to the Roman theater only, and attributes his information to the Italian historian Giuseppe Pavan.⁸ Curiously, a surviving manuscript score for *Le contadina bizzarre*, held by the Biblioteca del Conservatorio di musica San Pietro a Majella, contains the annotation “Rappresentata a Roma l'anno 1761”—two years earlier than either of the commonly cited premiere dates.⁹

Meanwhile, in Great Britain, anticipation for the London premiere of *La buona figliuola* built for several years, and it debuted at last in 1766, with Italian and English productions opening eight days apart.¹⁰ Bremner

scored a publishing coup in 1767 by issuing *La buona figliuola*'s first printed score. This was followed by his publication of its *sinfonia* as *Periodical Overture No. 20* in early September 1767.¹¹ However, unlike *Periodical Overture No. 20*, which was issued in response to the British premiere of its associated *opera buffa*, Bremner's third Piccinni symphony—*Periodical Overture No. 22*—was published almost two years before the 7 November 1769 stage production of *Le contadini bizzarre* (the title used in England). Therefore, the opera was as yet unfamiliar to the British public in 1767, which probably explains why there is no mention of *Le contadine bizzarre* in Bremner's printed parts or in his advertising.

<p>N E W M U S I C. This Day is published, price 2s. 6d. A THIRD NUMBER of THE SONGS in the Opera LA SCHIAVA. By P I C C I N N I. Printed and sold by R. Bremner, facing Somerset-house, in the Strand. Of whom may be had, just published, No. VI. of the Harmonist's Magazine. — The favourite Songs in the Opera Tigrane. — La Buona Figliuola. — No. XXII. of the Periodical Overtures, by Piccinni.</p>

there is no mention of *Le contadine bizzarre* in Bremner's printed parts or in his advertising.

In addition to the four-overture mini-series in Bremner's *Periodical Overture* output, appreciation of Piccinni's music lasted a long time. Scholar Jenny Burchell's documentation of a 1 July 1785 performance by the Edinburgh Musical Society demonstrates that *Periodical Overture No. 22* was still being performed eighteen years after its publication.¹² Even in the nineteenth century, Piccinni's compositional approach continued to be admired. In 1826, a correspondent using the pseudonym “Senex” wrote to *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* in response to a previous issue's article “The Great Symphonists.” Senex grouped Piccinni with a number of mid-eighteenth-century composers whom he felt had been unjustly ignored. Senex recalled an old aphorism that the typical three-movement structure of their works was targeted at different segments of the audience: “The first movement was always calculated for the meridian of the *pit*, the second for the more refined audience of the *boxes*, and the third for the *gallery* auditors.”¹³

Senex's description is a very apt overview of *Periodical Overture No. 22*'s architecture. The work is scored for the ubiquitous eight-part ensemble of two violins, viola, basso, two oboes, and two horns, and it conforms to a typical fast-slow-fast tempo plan. The first movement, “Allegro spiritoso,” launches the G major symphony with a brisk upward thirty-second note anacrusis that continues with an ascending arpeggiation in common time. Almost immediately, Piccinni plays with dramatic dynamic contrasts while the upper strings play scalar patterns above resolute “drum 8ths.” After a modulation to the dominant D major, the scoring drops

⁵ Libby, Rushton, and Hunter, “(Vito) Niccolò [Nicola] (Marcello Antonio Giacomo) Piccinni [Piccini],” 708–709; MGG Online, s.v. “Niccolò Piccinni,” by Elisabeth Schmierer.

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

⁷ https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niccol%C3%B2_Piccinni.

⁸ Alfred Loewenberg, comp., *Annals of Opera 1597–1940*, 3rd ed. (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978), column 269.

⁹ [https://imslp.org/wiki/Le_contadine_bizzarre_\(Piccinni%2C_Niccol%C3%B2\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Le_contadine_bizzarre_(Piccinni%2C_Niccol%C3%B2)).

¹⁰ Loewenberg, comp., *Annals of Opera 1597–1940*, 124.

¹¹ *The Public Advertiser*, 7 September 1767, p. 1.

¹² 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), 344.

¹³ Senex, “To the Editor,” *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* 8, no. 31 (July 1826): 304.

to solely violins and viola (m. 33), who present a *piano* second theme that also ascends by means of an undulating motif. A *crescendo* at measure 41 drives to the end of the exposition (m. 46). It is followed immediately by a recapitulation in G of the first theme, since the movement's form is a pattern that James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy label a "Type 1 Sonata."¹⁴ This pattern is sometimes called a sonatina; it is, essentially, a sonata form without development. When the second theme reappears (m. 64), it initially returns to D major, but it is soon pulled back to G major and cascades of descending scales then conclude the movement.

Piccinni's "Andante con molto" movement certainly seems well-suited for the "refined" audience because of its shift to the parallel minor, sudden dynamic contrasts, and a scoring that is reduced to strings alone. It, too, is structured as a sonatina, with a first theme filled with rising-and-falling sixteenth-note arches. The second theme (m. 21), in G minor's relative major, B-flat, uses longer-value eighth notes to pull the direction downward. G minor and the first theme reappear in measure 42, while the descending theme takes over in measure 58.

As had been true in Piccinni's *Periodical Overture No. 20*, there is no real break between the end of the slow movement and the *attacca* start of the "Allegro" finale. It restores the harmony to the opening G major, and it again uses the sonatina structure. "Gallery" auditors would have appreciated the gigue-like characteristics of its disjunct opening theme in $\frac{6}{8}$ time. Relentless drum 8ths return in the accompaniment, subsiding only at the arrival of the second theme (m. 22). Here, the winds drop out, the dynamic level is reduced to *piano*, and the violins seem "stuck" on a repetitive three-note group of rising pitches in the dominant D major. At last (m. 26), the upper strings break free to play measured tremolos above resumed drum 8ths. The drive of this section prepares for the recapitulation of the first theme (m. 38). The same scoring and dynamic changes recur for the reprise of the second theme (m. 59), while the vigorous tremolos and drum 8ths (m. 93) produce a compelling final flourish.

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.

¹⁴ 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.

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. Rehearsal letters, cues in parts, and bar numbers have been added for convenience.

Mvt. 1	Allegro Spiritoso	
m. 26, 29	Vn 2	2nd beat rhythm adjusted (alignment with Vn 1)
m. 29	Hn 2	last note changed to E5 (unison with Hn 1)
m. 61	VA	first note changed to C#4 (raised leading tone)
m. 61	Basso	first note changed to C#3 (raised leading tone)
Mvt. 2	Andante con moto	
m. 74	VA	final eighth note changed to F#5 (parallel with Vn 2)
Mvt. 3	Allegro	
m. 1	Vn 2	G5 added to first eighth note on 2nd beat (parallel with m. 2)
m. 3	Vn 1	appoggiatura D7 added to first eighth note of 2nd beat (parallel with Vn 2)
m. 12	Ob 1	appoggiatura B5 added to first eighth note of 2nd beat (parallel with Vn 1)
m. 12	Ob 2	appoggiatura D5 added to first eighth note of 2nd beat (parallel with Vn 2)
m. 38, 39	Vn 2	G5 added to first eighth note on 2nd beat (parallel with m. 1-2)
m. 40, 43	Ob 1	appoggiatura D7 added to first eighth note of 2nd beat (parallel with Vn 2)

CATALOGUE REFERENCES

RISM A/I P/PP 2215 [Répertoire International des Sources Musicales;
<https://rism.online/sources/1001211193>]

LaRue 14563 (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 (public domain in its source country on January 1, 1996, and in the United States).

Publication announcement: *The Public Advertiser*, 22 December 1767, p. 1 (courtesy of the British Library Archives)

Publication announcement: *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 10 February 1768, 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/>

