

# THE PERIODICAL OVERTURE IN 8 PARTS XXV

## THOMAS ALEXANDER ERSKINE (THE EARL OF KELLY)

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

Issued: 10 June 1769; price 2 shillings

Source: Henry Watson Music Library – Courtesy of Manchester Libraries,  
Information and Archives, Manchester City Council: BR580Er56

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

Editors: Barnaby Priest & Alyson McLamore



### COMMENTARY

After a longish gap—perhaps of more than a year—Robert Bremner (c.1713–1789) resumed publication of the *Periodical Overtures* by issuing *No. 25* on 10 June 1769. The composer was Thomas Alexander Erskine (1732–1781), the sixth Earl of Kelly, and this was the third time that Bremner had featured a composition by his long-time Scottish colleague. Interestingly, the very first work by Erskine to appear in the series (*Periodical Overture No. 13*) had also been issued after a long hiatus; perhaps Bremner felt that offering a work by a British citizen, instead of one of the many foreign composers who had contributed the majority of the overtures, might “kick-start” the renewed series with more energy. In any event, with the release of *Periodical Overture No. 25*, Bremner’s “Opera Quinta” was underway.

Erskine and Bremner had first collaborated in Scotland, before Bremner had left Edinburgh for London. During the 1745 Rebellion, Erskine’s father had sided with Bonnie Prince Charlie and ended up in prison. Therefore, it may have been for political reasons that in 1752, at age twenty, Erskine had embarked on a Grand Tour.<sup>1</sup> He had “subverted convention” by staying in Mannheim (and probably Paris) for almost four years, studying violin and composition with Johann Stamitz (1717–1757), leader of the celebrated Mannheim orchestra.<sup>2</sup> Erskine returned to Kellie Castle, his family home in Fife, in 1756. Over the next several years, Erskine applied his mastery of Mannheim techniques to a set of six symphonies—his Opus 1—which Bremner published in 1761.<sup>3</sup> Many of the continental effects were new to the British, to the extent that Bremner felt it necessary to explain what slashes through the stems meant: “N.B. A Minim or Crotchet once cut signifies Quavers, and twice cut semiquavers.”<sup>4</sup>

The Edinburgh Musical Society was quick to programme Erskine’s Op. 1 symphonies, and even fans of the older Baroque approach to composition grudgingly acknowledged that Erskine’s Mannheim style “pleases by its spirit and a wild luxuriancy, which make an agreeable variety in a concert” and that his music



<sup>1</sup> Roger Fiske, *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 288.

<sup>2</sup> 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), 630.

<sup>3</sup> David Johnson, “Kelly [Kellie], 6th Earl of [Erskine, Thomas Alexander],” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), Vol. 13: 464.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Earl of Kelly, *Six Overtures In Eight Parts and a Thorough Bass for the Harpsichord, Opera Prima* (London: Robert Bremner, n.d.), 1.

had “seduced the public ear.”<sup>5</sup> It is tempting to speculate that it was due to the popular reception of the Mannheim approach that Bremner had included so many works by Erskine’s teacher Stamitz among the first twelve *Periodical Overtures*. Bremner had also reissued Erskine’s Opus 1 after moving to London, suggesting that they had been a profitable publication in Scotland. The fact that Bremner had previously included a second work by “Lord Kelly” within “Opera Terza” of the *Periodical Overtures* (as No. 17) implies that the first issue by Erskine—*Periodical Overture No. 13*—had enjoyed good sales as well.

<p><b>N E W M U S I C.</b>  <i>This Day is published,</i>  <b>Number XXV. of</b></p> <p><b>T</b>HE <i>Periodical Overtures</i> ; composed by  the Right Hon. the Earl of Kelly, Price 2s.  Six Quartettos, by C. F. Abel, Price 10s. 6d.  Printed and sold by R. Bremner, facing Somerset-  House, in the Strand.</p>
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As is true for all of Erskine’s orchestral works, the Bremner publication is the only known contemporary issue of this D major symphony. The Edinburgh Musical Society played it ten times over a fifteen-year span, with the first performance taking place only six months after it was published.<sup>6</sup> Since Erskine held the deputy governorship of the Edinburgh

Musical Society, the frequent performances are not surprising.<sup>7</sup> Still, the records show that the symphony continued to be played multiple times after Erskine’s death.<sup>8</sup> Its numerous reappearances support the contemporary view that Erskine’s music merited “vast applause” and that it was “an outstanding attraction for upper-class visitors to Edinburgh.”<sup>9</sup>

Unlike the other three symphonies by Erskine that appeared in the series, purchasers of *Periodical Overture No. 25* received the advertised eight-part scoring—with no extra woodwind parts. The symphony also reflected many of the Mannheim traits that Erskine had helped introduce to the British public. The three-movement work opens with a common-time “Allegro assai” in ternary form. The first **A** section is peppered with oscillating sixteenth notes and it proceeds through a rising stepwise sequence. It is supported initially by “drum 8ths” and, later, measured tremolos. It is possible to see the influence of Erskine’s teacher Stamitz in the central **B** section (m. 37), which showcases the oboes playing an arpeggiated theme saturated with the short-long rhythms that were even then called “Scots [now Scotch] snaps.”<sup>10</sup> A particularly dramatic passage begins at measure 53, which uses an extended Mannheim crescendo and a long stretch of minor mode to lead back to the return of **A** in measure 86.

The central movement—a graceful  $\frac{2}{4}$  “Andante” in the dominant key of A major—conforms to the binary-sonata pattern that James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy call a “Type 2 Sonata,” diagrammed as  $||: a/I b/V :||: a/V b/I :||$ .<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, the second theme ends with another string of Scotch snaps (m. 34 and onward), creating a bit of a cyclic connection between the first two movements of this symphony.

Erskine returns to D major for a lively “Presto” finale. Although it employs a sonata-form structure, many of its features are gigue-like, such as the  $\frac{6}{8}$  time, the bouncy melodies, and the regular four-bar phrases. The first theme features the full orchestra rising and falling in a robust *premier coup d’archet* passage, while the second theme reduces the ensemble to just the two violin parts and a *piano* dynamic level. The first violins play a disjunct line in longer note values, supported by a steadily moving series of eighth notes in the second violins. Although Erskine uses the recognizable opening motif from the first theme to launch the development (m. 65), he varies the tone color by featuring the oboes and then the horns—another touch that his teacher Stamitz would have appreciated. As is true in all the “Lord Kelly” selections published by Bremner, *Periodical Overture No. 25* illustrates the “genius for composition” credited to Erskine by Burney.<sup>12</sup> It certainly supports

<sup>5</sup> J. Gregory, *An Enquiry into the State and Faculties of Man*, p. 146, quoted in C. L. Cudworth, “The English Symphonists of the Eighteenth Century,” *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 78 (1951–2): 36.

<sup>6</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), 312, 318, 324, 327, 331, 335, 341, 344.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, “Kelly [Kellie], 6th Earl of [Erskine, Thomas Alexander],” 464.

<sup>8</sup> Burchell, *Polite or Commercial Concerts?*, 341, 344.

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, “Kelly [Kellie], 6th Earl of [Erskine, Thomas Alexander],” 464.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Burney, *A General History of Music From the Earliest Ages to the Present Period (1789)*, Vol. II, ed. by Frank Mercer (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, [1935]), 858.

<sup>11</sup> James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 353–4.

<sup>12</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music From the Earliest Ages to the Present Period (1789)*, 1018.

the British scholar Charles Cudworth's view that "after the middle of the century, the Earl of Kelly was undeniably our most gifted symphonist."<sup>13</sup>

## 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

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<sup>13</sup> Cudworth, "The English Symphonists of the Eighteenth Century," 48.

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**

- m. 49 Ob 2 second note changed to F5 (parallel with Ob 1)  
m. 63 Vn 2 first note changed to G#4 (continuation of harmony from previous measure)  
m. 65 Vn 1 third note changed to G#5 (continuation of harmony)  
m. 75 Vn 2 first note changed to A#3 (continuation of harmony from previous measure)  
m. 77, 79 Basso “6” added to figured bass on 3rd beat (harmony is first inversion)

**Mvt. 2 Andante**

- m. 12 Vn 2 final two notes changed to dotted sixteenth + thirty-second (rhythmic unison with Vn 1)  
m. 55 Vn 2 fifth note changed to E5 (octave doubling with VA)

**Mvt. 3 Presto**

- m. 24 Vn 2 note changed to G#5 (repetition of previous note)  
m. 65 Basso figured bass changed to 6/5 (correction of figured bass)  
m. 68 Ob 2 note lengthened to dotted half note (parallel with Ob 1)  
m. 87 VA note changed to dotted quarter note (rhythmic unison with ensemble)  
m. 133 Vn 1 first note lengthened to dotted quarter note (rhythmic unison with ensemble)  
m. 137 Vn 1 note changed to dotted quarter note (rhythmic unison with ensemble)  
m. 142 VA note changed to dotted quarter note (parallel with m. 137)

## CATALOGUE REFERENCES

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<https://rism.online/sources/990017153>]

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Thematic Index 9 [David Johnson, comp., “Thomas Alexander Erskine, sixth earl of Kelly,” in *Reference Volume: Contents of the Set and Collected Thematic Indexes*, 334–335; final volume in *The Symphony 1720–1840: A Comprehensive Collection of Full Scores in Sixty Volumes*, A Garland Series (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986)]

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Erskine portrait: © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Publication advertisement: *The Public Advertiser*, 10 June 1769, 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/>

