Chapter 9

Women and the Piano

At Sydney Cove, music constituted an indispensable part of the fledgling colony’s creative activity; English cultural values had been transplanted onto antipodean soil, and music was an intrinsic part of these values.

In late eighteenth-century England, music was commonly linked with women. A woman who skillfully made music demonstrated that she had enjoyed favourable economic circumstances, as well as the leisure time within which to practice her art.¹ Three years after Worgan’s piano arrived at Sydney Cove with the First Fleet, the instrument came into the possession of Elizabeth Macarthur—one of the colony’s most socially distinguished women. Within a decade of acquiring Worgan’s piano, Elizabeth had both money and time enough to practice and develop her pianistic skills.

That the next chapter in the life of Worgan’s piano includes the intelligent, well-educated Elizabeth Macarthur is not as peculiar as it may at first seem. During the late eighteenth century, the rapidly developing piano was immutably linked not only with women, but also with notions of good taste. Good taste was regarded as a consequence of the ‘cultivation of the intellectual and aesthetic faculties’.² Finely honed taste helped to

... defend aesthetic discernment from the swamping of luxury ... any good student could learn it, but only years of practice and cultivation could ensure a proper level of judiciousness. The mastery of taste depended on a proper education, good company, leisure, travel and wealth ...

The rise of the language of taste was especially significant for female assertiveness ... a reputation for taste, sometimes tinged with enlightenment, and shared with a husband or a coterie, was much more flattering to the cosmopolitan pretensions of ladies than old-fashioned huswifery. After all, it was far more exciting to design the curtains than to make and clean them.³

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Women with conspicuous good taste usually had myriad talents to exhibit, not the least of which was playing the piano. For example, in the eighth chapter of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Charles Bingley describes the skills a woman must possess if she is to be regarded as ‘accomplished’:

A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved.⁴

One could reasonably say that being able to play the piano was a skill that occupied pride of place in Bingley’s list of female accomplishments.

A woman could obtain a ‘thorough knowledge of music’ within the context of learning to play the piano. Furthermore, it was common practice for a young lady to accompany herself at the keyboard as she tastefully sang.

The central premise of … social behaviour [exemplifying good taste] was that the body was an instrument of pleasure. Interaction was conceived as a process of seduction—not necessarily a pursuit of overt sexual expression, but rather an exchange in which individuals sought to engage and delight each other with an artfully conducted repertoire of pleasing poses, gestures, expressions, and conversation. The goal was to … gratify the aesthetic and social sensibilities of others, while at the same time demonstrating reciprocal pleasure in response to similar efforts on their part … It meant pleasing others, and being pleased by them, without seeming to be pleased with oneself. Moreover, this cycle of mutual pleasing was to be conducted in a way that seemed utterly natural, as if agreeable [actions] … were innate rather than learned … The best way to suggest … social privilege was to seduce, and be seduced, with an acute self-awareness masquerading as selfless ease.⁵

No wonder young women spent so many hours attempting to perfect their pianistic skills. The piano was an active protagonist ‘in an elaborate game of cultivated sociability. The instrument facilitated a process of alluring self-presentation and elegant communication that was central to the formation of’ a socially acceptable identity.⁶

That a lady’s ability to play a keyboard instrument rendered her marriageable is revealed in an advertisement published in *The Times* of Thursday, 7 February 1793:

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⁵ Koda and Bolton, *Dangerous Liaisons*, p. 17.
⁶ Ibid., p. 15.
A card

Addressed to those among the female sex, whose desires are neither romantic nor extravagant, who stand in need and wish for such an opportunity as is now offered.

A single gentleman who is blest with an independence, adequate to every real comfort in life, and having none to provide for, prefers permanent friendship and protection to a lady possessing the following requisites: age not exceeding 35, person well shaped, teeth sound and regular, good voice, a stranger to the hackneyed tricks of the town: good temper, constancy, a social disposition, engaging manners, a turn to economy, and a knowledge by experience of domestic concerns, a taste for simplicity and elegance in dress, spruce in her person, and attentive to neatness in others; free from incumbrance, affectation and unpleasant habits: a pleasing countenance, if the face should neither be beautiful nor pretty—musical talents, vocal and instrumental—and she who may be the greatest proficient on the pianoforte or harpsichord … if in other respects equal, will claim the preference.7

Playing the piano was not only a private, individual activity. It was also easily integrated into family and community life. Not only was the piano able to cross the boundaries that existed between amateur and professional, but it also functioned ‘as a medium through which social spheres that stood in opposition to each other could nonetheless nourish each other’.8 Significantly, for example, the piano was able to transcend boundaries of gender: although it was thought of primarily as a woman’s instrument from the point of view of amateur music-making, its primary professional exponents were men. Women made up a good proportion of the piano-related market, be it for instruments or music. By the end of the eighteenth century many women were competent keyboard players, so much so that an anonymous writer in … European Magazine wrote that ‘what were once called difficulties … are now subdued at every boarding-school by young ladies hardly in their teens’9 … Conduct books of the time describe pianistic ability as being a desirable feminine accomplishment, but music as a profession for men was not to be encouraged, as it was to yield prosperity ‘in proportion to the difficulties to be surmounted’10.11

Many late eighteenth-century keyboard works composed for the Continental and English markets manifested ‘difficulties’ that were ‘subdued at every boarding-school by young ladies hardly in their teens’. In 1796 Johann Ferdinand von Schönfeld (1750–1821), speaking of Vienna and Prague, observed that ‘today’s composers mostly go in for obstacles and demand from students a power that is often difficult for the master’.

Late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Viennese music publishers’ catalogues reveal that English keyboard music was available in Vienna, suggesting that the virtuosic works of Clementi, John Baptist Cramer (1771–1858) and Dussek had become fashionable. On Saturday, 2 February 1805, the Zeitung für die elegante Welt [Newspaper for the Elegant World] described the state of affairs: ‘The easier keyboard music of Pleyel, Wanhall, [and] Kozeluch is entirely out of style. Compositions of Clementi, Cramer, Beethoven and Dussek have taken its place.’

In Vienna, Clementi’s music was printed and distributed by three local music publishing houses:

1. Artaria
   a) in 1782, the sonatas Opus 7
   b) in 1783, the sonatas Opus 9
   c) up to 1799, 32 different works.

2. Torricella
   a) in 1783, the sonatas Opus 10.

3. Mollo
   a) in 1802, the sonatas Opus 40
   b) in 1804, the sonatas Opus 41.

In total, seven editions of Cramer’s music were distributed during the 1790s by Artaria, Traeg and Torricella. Inexplicably (when compared with Clementi and Cramer), Dussek’s music is under-represented in Vienna before 1800.

The ‘difficulties … subdued at every boarding-school’ on the Continent ‘by young ladies hardly in their teens’ were also an integral part of musical life in late eighteenth-century London. The rise of the virtuoso woman pianist in England was a cultural phenomenon to be reckoned with.

In late eighteenth-century London, most women who owned a piano referred to themselves as ‘polite’ or ‘genteel’—as distinct from women in the aristocracy. Such women usually had ‘moderate social eminence … combined with an emphasis on outward behaviour’. Sometimes, the financial position of these women changed significantly.

The daughters of wealthy merchants frequently portrayed in conduct books, who might experience some financial volatility, were often explicitly enjoined to learn music only as a supplementary accomplishment, after acquiring useful needlework skills. This specious designation of music as a ‘supplementary’ activity for women of unstable fortune, though often taken at face value by cultural critics, is frequently belied or undercut by the same texts that so designate it.

In 1722, the English dancing master John Essex, in _The Young Ladies Conduct: Or, Rules for Education, under Several Heads_, remarked that music ‘is certainly a very great accomplishment to the ladies; it refines the taste, polishes the mind; and is an entertainment, without other views, that preserves them from the rust of idleness, that most pernicious enemy to virtue’.

In 1753, Jacques du Boscq (d. 1660) states that music dismissed ‘troublesome and irregular thoughts’: ‘there is no one so void of common sense but must own, that without some of these choice qualifications—that is, music, history and philosophy—’tho’ women may be of an excellent disposition, yet they often find it embarrass’d with troublesome and irregular thoughts’. Du Boscq also suggests that music banishes sloth while it disciplines the body in the perceptible habits of a polite appearance. According to most late eighteenth-century conduct books, music is not a labor, but a pleasurable activity which quantifies the precise degree to which labor is absent in the lives of its practitioners, since those women with greater leisure are in greater need of moral discipline. The display of a genteel woman’s musical training might therefore be considered equally appropriate to public and private occasions, since it enacts an audible and visual confirmation of the stability of class hierarchies—an important aspect of social harmony.

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18 Essex, _The Young Ladies Conduct_. Quoted in Koda and Bolton, _Dangerous Liaisons_, p. 45.
The importance of women in the acceptance and use of the piano can hardly be exaggerated.

Keyboard instruments had been their special province in the home since Elizabethan times … and in the [late eighteenth] … century many a famous composer relied for the greater part of his income on teaching the piano to young ladies. This association … made it easier for female pianists … to [perform within the context of] the professional world than for women who played [non-keyboard] … instruments.

… The intensity of feeling which some women, in particular, invested in their piano playing is brought out in many [contemporaneous] novels and poems.21

Learning the Piano

For aristocratic and wealthy women, there were (typically) four distinct phases in relation to learning the piano.

1) Private Lessons Given at Home throughout Childhood

A governess would initially give lessons (a governess took on the responsibility for educating a family’s children in order that the mother might have more time at her disposal, as befitted a genteel lady).22 When the young student had mastered the rudiments of piano playing, a professional musician ‘of quality’ was employed to visit the student’s home to give lessons. ‘In London, extended visits by musicians are a clear sign of a good personal relationship’ with the employing family, ‘while deep in the country, an overnight stay by the music teacher was often a necessity’.23 ‘The success of a teacher was, in part, defined by the number of aristocratic pupils that they instructed.’24 For some musicians, providing private piano lessons to students from aristocratic and wealthy families was a successful means for accumulating wealth. When he returned to London in 1784 after a long piano performance tour on the continent, Muzio Clementi took up teaching and claimed to have given lessons 16

hours per day. By the turn of the century, he had amassed a fortune of some £15,000—capital to finance his entry into music publishing and later piano manufacturing, which increased his wealth even more.\(^{25}\)

By 1790, in London, a select group of musicians was regarded as being the finest and most socially acceptable piano teachers. Clementi was amongst them. His status is confirmed, for example, by the Reverend Dr John Trustler (1735–1820). In his *The London Adviser and Guide …*, Trustler recommends the following:

*A list of ladies’ teachers, the most capital in London.*

Dr. Arnold, (Singing and Piano-forte), No. 480, Strand.

… M. Mazzanti, (Italian Singing and Piano-forte) Adam-street, Portman-square.

Mr. Storace, (Singing and Piano-forte) No. 23, How-land-street.

Mr. Clementi, (Piano-forte).

Mr. Corre, (Singing and Piano-forte) Dean-street, Soho.

Mr. Hook, (Piano-forte) Charlotte-street, Bedford-sq.

Miss Legoux, (Piano-forte) No. 52, Poland-street.\(^{26}\)

Clementi was so famous that Trustler did not need to include the maestro’s address.

Within the domestic context of the piano lesson given by a visiting professional musician, the governess would act as chaperon. During the periods between each lesson, the governess was responsible for supervising the student’s practise.

In a letter dated September 1803, Miss Margaret Fowke (1758–1836) of the Anglo-Indian Fowke family, writing to her brother Francis (1755–1819),\(^{27}\) lists what were commonly understood as being the rudiments of piano playing: ‘the fingering (or rather thumbing) of all the keys major and minor, the manner of fingering broken chords and other common passages; to know by heart the flats and sharps belonging to each key major and minor, and some little … general

\(^{25}\) Scherer, *Quarter Notes and Bank Notes*, p. 64.

\(^{26}\) J. Trustler, *The London Adviser and Guide: Containing Every Instruction and Information Useful and Necessary to Persons Living in London and Coming to Reside There; In Order to Enable them to Enjoy Security and Tranquility, and Conduct their Domestic Affairs with Prudence and Economy. Together with an Abstract of all Those Laws which Regard their Protection against the Frauds, Impositions, Insults and Accidents to which they are There Liable … Useful also to Foreigners.* Note, this Work Treats Fully of Every Thing on the Above Subjects that Can be Thought of, 2nd edn (London: Literary-Press, 1790), p. 210.

In other words, Margaret Fowke, a very fine pianist, regarded the knowledge and application of fingering within the following contexts as the essential and foundational elements of piano playing: 1) scalic passagework; 2) broken chords; and 3) arpeggios—as well as an understanding of key signatures and basic harmony.

In a letter dated September 1783, Margaret Fowke writing to her father, Joseph (1716–1800), reveals just how boring the supervision of piano practise must often have been for a governess. Writing of her guardian, Mrs Kitchen, Margaret states: ‘She has often watched over my practice for half an hour … and seemed to have found a reward for this tedious employment when I rattled off my piece with some ease.’

On Monday, 21 May 1804, Margaret Fowke wrote to her daughter Elizabeth (1793–?), giving specific instructions concerning how she was to practise:

Be very attentive to your music. Practise constantly, and never play the whole piece, till you have attacked the difficult passages. Be equally attentive to your very short lessons [that is, pieces], which surely should be performed with the greatest precision and alacrity, by a girl in her 11th year.

In 1799, the educator, writer, moralist, ardent evangelist and social reformer Hannah More describes the following practice regimen:

Suppose your pupil to begin at six years of age, and to continue at the average of four hours a-day only, Sunday excepted, and thirteen days allowed for travelling annually, till she is eighteen, the state stands thus: 300 days multiplied by four, the number of hours amount to 1200; that number multiplied by twelve, which is the number of years, amounts to 14,400 hours!

Hannah More goes so far as to state that the quantified hours of practice, as ‘a general calculation … will perhaps be found to be far from exaggerated’.

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28 British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, Ormathwaite MS D546/27.
29 Joseph Fowke was ‘a middle-ranking official in the service of the East India Company, [and] was distantly connected to the Clive family’. Woodfield, The Calcutta Piano Trade in the Late Eighteenth Century, p. 8, fn. 15.
30 British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, Fowke MS E4, 462.
33 Ibid., p. 80, fn.
(The pith of More’s story lies in the fact that the ‘pupil’ who devoted 14 400 hours to slaving over scales and arpeggios at the piano eventually married a man who disliked music.)

In her *Practical Education*, the novelist Maria Edgeworth,

in an imagined conversation ... addresses herself to a fashionable lady:

‘Would not you, as a good mother, consent to have your daughter turned into an automaton for eight hours in every day for fifteen years, for the promise of hearing her, at the end of that time, pronounced the first private performer at the most fashionable and the most crowded concert in London?’

‘I would give anything to have my daughter play better than anyone in England. What a distinction! She might get into the first circles in London! She would want neither beauty nor fortune to recommend her! She would be a match for any man who had a taste for music.’

Evidence suggests that a minimum of 10 000 hours of practice is required to achieve a level of mastery associated with being a ‘world-class’ professional pianist.

The evidence ... in favor of the view that practice makes perfect ... comes from research on how much training the experts or high achievement people actually do ... experts in music require lengthy periods of instruction and practice in order to acquire the skills necessary to truly excel. In several studies, the very best conservatory students were found to have practiced the most, sometimes twice as much as those who weren’t judged as good.

It was simply expected that young ladies would spend hours practising the piano. In Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, Lady Catherine, speaking to Mr Darcy of his sister Georgiana, remarks that ‘she cannot expect to excel, if she does not practice a great deal’.

A letter written in April 1786 by the 15-year-old Maria Josepha Holroyd (1771–1863) to ‘Serena’ reveals, representatively, the prominence of music in the daily life of many female students of keyboard instruments:

36 See D. J. Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music: Understanding a Human Obsession* (London: Atlantic Books, 2008), Ch. 7.
37 Ibid., Ch. 7, p. 196.
I get up at 8, I walk from 9 to 10; we then breakfast; about 11, I play on the harpsichord or I draw. 1, I translate, and 2, walk out again, 3, I generally read, and 4, we go to dine, after dinner we play at backgammon; we drink tea at 7, and I work or play on the piano till 10, when we have our little bit of supper and, 11, we go to bed.39

This amounts to four or five hours a day spent in front of a keyboard instrument; practising was a way of life.

Maria Holroyd mentions that her daily practice involved both a harpsichord and a piano. During the late eighteenth century, for families who owned both types of instrument, the role of the harpsichord was probably purely that of a practice instrument. Having possibly been part of the family's furniture for some years, the harpsichord may have been relegated to an upstairs room, the more modern and fashionable piano taking pride of place in the drawing room downstairs.

Even though ‘the benefits of repetition and practice to the inculcation of principles of order, virtue, religion, and self-discipline, were widely lauded, the degree of accomplishment and rational engagement with the elements of music … was not as uniformly defined’.40 As might be expected, standards of performance ranged from the virtuosic to the incompetent.

For example, during a voyage to India in 1764, Robert Clive, First Baron Clive (1725–74), was forced to endure the daily practice regime of a talentless (and yet fearsomely determined) female would-be harpsichord player, who incessantly practised ‘two hum drum tunes for four hours every day without the least variation or improvement’.41 It appears that if this aspiring ‘musician’ had hoped to develop a level of accomplishment at the harpsichord that might render her marriageable, her unmarried status was destined (it would seem) to remain unaltered; Clive described her as ‘a woman of a most diabolical disposition; ignorant, ill tempered, and selfish to the highest degree [who] seem’d possess’d of every disagreeable quality which ever belong’d to the female sex without being mistress of one virtue (chastity excepted) to throw into the opposite scale’.42

Unfortunately, not all young women were well taught. The anonymous writer of *Euterpe; Or, Remarks on the Use and Abuse of Music, as a Part of Modern Education* despairingly laments:

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42 Ibid., p. 5. Woodfield sources the quotations from: British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, Clive MSS, G37, Box 15/1. See ibid., p. 6, fn. 10.
[T]he younger part of the female sex, who discover the least propensity for music, or shew any marks of having a good ear, should certainly learn music … to amuse their own family … to relieve the anxieties and cares of life, to inspire cheerfulness, and elevate the mind to a sense and love of order,—virtue,—and religion … But, alas! how far these ends are answered by the modern mode of learning modern music, let those declare who have seen and heard.43

In 1791, the musician, songwriter, actor, dramatist and novelist Charles Dibdin relates with horror how ‘The regular progression of rules … are totally neglected, and Miss, the very first day, sits down to play abstruse passages out of Haydn and Pleyel … Passages, and not music then, are what young ladies are now taught.’44 Later he refers to ‘a lady of fashion’ who ‘in short … could play arpegeos and consecutive octaves, with the right hand by wholesale, but not one single favourite air;—she could not even count the time of it’.45

The organist and composer Richard John Samuel Stevens remembered that, in 1793, he attended a domestic concert at the concert room of ‘Mr. Blencowe … an intolerable miser, tho’ a well-educated man; and of considerable landed property’.46 The standard of playing at ‘this most eccentric meeting’47 subdued the impenitent visitor,48 and left much to be desired:

[A] short fat girl, mounted the music stool, to entertain us with a harpsichord lesson; and Mr. Peter Denys … was to accompany her on the violin … I believe that this lesson lasted nearly twenty minutes. Little Fatty could not play in time; her face, naked elbows and neck, were soon as red as a boiled lobster: while Denys (who is an admirable performer on the violin) was pale with vexation and disgust … and the young lady, whose legs were so very short … was obliged to put them upon the stand of the harpsichord to rest them during her performance.49

‘Little Fatty’s’ musical inadequacies may well have been the result of deficient teaching (combined also, it appears, with a lack of talent).

46 Argent, Recollections of R. J. S. Stevens, p. 92.
47 Ibid., p. 93.
49 Ibid., p. 93.
The vacuity of ‘Little Fatty’s’ flawed music making was more commonly encountered within performative contexts than many would have wished. One critic, for example, contemptuously writes:

Only the very fewest have even the slightest idea that true musical cultivation contributes essentially to the ennoblement of the inward being and is capable of drawing the spirit cleansingly out of everything common; most drag the queen, born to rule and govern on one of the most splendid thrones in the realm of the spiritual, down with their unconsecrated hands into the filth of their own sinful lives, and force her, stripped of her heavenly beauty and made up like a common strumpet, to dance around them and so draw the eyes of the curious rabble upon them.50

2) Intermittent Periods of Intensive Application

The second phase, for a woman, of learning the piano comprised intermittent periods of intensive application designed to develop the proficiency necessary both for social acceptance and (eventually) for the rituals associated with courtship. (This phase of study was sometimes undertaken away from home.)

One of the problems associated with bringing a male piano teacher into the home at this stage was that it introduced potential sexual dangers. Male piano teachers were secretly feared, being ‘unofficially’ regarded as not quite gentlemen; the education that they offered ‘frequently extended beyond the musical to the sensual’.51

This fear extended to musicians in general. In 1762, the composer and music critic John Potter (fl. 1754–1804), who composed songs for the Vauxhall pleasure gardens,52 commented on the prevalent contempt for musicians: ‘The elegant art of music, when consider’d as an occupation, is by some thought to have little dignity.’53 Potter gives reasons for the prevailing attitude:

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51 Ibid.
The contempt thrown on music, arises from two objections: The one, representing it as not being in general so profitable and reputable as many other professions, as having for its object nothing better than pleasure and entertainment. The other, that it not only requires a particular genius to excel in it, but also a great deal of time to make any progress, and by this means hinders and disqualifies a person for anything else.\textsuperscript{54}

Disdain for those musicians whose love of music outweighed financial concerns was the reason for the low social status of musicians. In 1791, Gebhardt Friedrich August Wendeborn (1742–1811), a German Lutheran clergyman living in London, observed the general feeling:

No wonder … if the greatest part of the English, whose \textit{summum bonum} is money, are tasteless in the arts, and treat them with neglect, or even look upon them with a kind of disdain; no wonder if a tradesman or merchant, favoured by liberty, regards the accumulation of money above all, and considers a man of talents and learning, or an artist endowed with excellent genius, as beings far below him.\textsuperscript{55}

The English phobia concerning music as a male professional domain continued well into the twentieth century. For example, Wilfrid Blunt, senior drawing master at Eton College, in his autobiography, \textit{Slow on the Feather}, conveys his surprise that at Eton during the 1930s and 1940s (and despite an ethos at Eton that was biased against the arts) painting was regarded as being less dangerous than music:

I find it strange that, in general, music seems to be more suspect than the visual arts; for at least there are no nudes in the symphonies of Beethoven. An old Etonian, unknown to me personally and well before my time, wrote to me … ‘In one of my reports, m’tutor wrote—’’All his many shortcomings must, I suppose, be attributed to his musical temperament’’; and Lord Harewood, who when at Eton helped me with my gramophone concerts at the Drawing Schools, likes to quote the remark made by his uncle (the Duke of Windsor): ‘It’s very odd about George and music. You know, his parents were quite normal.’\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., pp. 65–6.


A familiar theme presented in eighteenth-century libertine literature is that the piano lesson provided a context for sexual transgression. In Choderlos de Laclos’ (1741–1803) *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, for example, the music lesson provides the callow Chevalier Danceny with an opportunity to seduce the innocent, weak-willed, convent-educated ‘rosebud’ Cécile Volanges. In 1754, a satirical article in the *Connoisseur* announced the invention of a ‘female thermometer’ for measuring ‘the exact temperature of a lady’s passions.’ The device, created by Mr. Ayscough of Ludgate Hill, consisted of a glass tube filled with a mixture of distilled extracts of lady’s love, maidenhair, and ‘wax of virgin-bees.’ It could supposedly detect the full range of feminine response, from ‘inviolable modesty’ to ‘abandoned impudence,’ and was remarkably accurate, claimed the author, when used at the theatre and the opera.

That ‘Mr Ayscough’ conceived such a device reveals the pervasiveness of concerns about the dangers of private music lessons—dangers ‘against which the only defense was parental vigilance’.

The actions of some piano teachers did not help to alter the general perception that not only music teachers, but also all musicians had little social value, suspect morality and not much respectability. As much visual art from the period reveals, behaviour by piano teachers that exceeds the bounds of propriety seems to be typical. Many piano teachers married one of their piano students—Muzio Clementi, Jan Ladislav Dussek, Nicolas-Joseph Hüllmandel, Daniel Steibelt (1765–1823) and Johann Schroeter being a few of the more famous.

English professional musicians were much more likely to marry wealthy or titled persons than to be descended from them. Documentation reveals that in no recorded instance was marriage the only source of upward social mobility for professional musicians. From 1750 to 1850, all the musicians who married aristocrats had achieved substantial financial and professional success prior to their marriages. Aristocrats do not seem to have formed such alliances with poor or even moderately successful musicians. Such marriages almost always entailed the discontinuation of professional musical employment.

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57 See Koda and Bolton, *Dangerous Liaisons*, p. 45.
58 Isacoff, *A Natural History of the Piano*, p. 53.
59 Ibid., p. 53.
60 Dussek was extremely handsome. He ‘was known as ‘le beau Dussek’ [the beautiful Dussek], and ... introduced the fashion of pianists playing sideways to the audience because he wished his listeners to enjoy the beauty of his profile’. Wainwright, *Broadwood by Appointment*, pp. 74–5.
The case of Johann Schroeter’s marriage to his English piano student Rebecca Scott (1751–1826) provides a colourful and representative example. Schroeter came to London from Germany, first appearing in concert in London in 1773. Charles Burney remarked that ‘Schroeter may be said to have been the first who brought into England the true art of playing [the pianoforte]’. Another observer described Schroeter’s playing as follows: ‘His touch was extremely light and graceful so that, just to watch him play, became a pleasure in itself … His presentation of adagio movements was unparalleled except perhaps by Abel on the gamba.’

Schroeter eloped with Rebecca Scott, the daughter of a rich merchant. Rebecca was a typical, wealthy, ‘middle-class’ woman; she was rich, pampered and an heiress to a fortune. Understandably, her family was devastated when she eloped with her piano teacher.

The family tried to stop the wedding, Rebecca’s mother and brother taking her to court in order to ensure that she would never receive her huge dowry.

After the wedding, Schroeter surrendered all rights to his wife’s property in exchange for a yearly allowance of £500. This was done on condition that Schroeter cease his career as a public piano virtuoso, thereby saving the family from the ignominy of having a professional musician as one of its members.

Eventually, Schroeter was appointed as the ‘Master of the Queen’s Musick’. This meant that subsequently Rebecca achieved a level of respectability that her stuffy family was forced to acknowledge.

To be fair, some male piano teachers were not the only ones who attempted to lead their female students astray. On occasion, the tables were turned. For example, Joseph Haydn told his biographer, Georg August Griesinger (1769–1845), that:

[W]hen he was sitting once at the [harpsichord] … and the beautiful Countess Morzin was bending over him to see the notes, her neckerchief came undone [an unlikely accident]. ‘It was the first time I had [seen] such a sight; it embarrassed me, my playing faltered, my fingers stopped on the keys. “What is it, Haydn, what are you doing?” cried the Countess. Full of respect, I answered, “But, your grace, who would not [lose his composure in such a situation]?”’

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Despite the potentially lubricious perils of private piano lessons, ‘all authorities agreed that musical training for young women was indispensable’.\(^{65}\) If, as part of the second phase of learning the piano, a young woman undertook intensive study away from home, this may have taken place in Europe, where there were many renowned teachers. The *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*\(^{66}\) reported that the cost of musical tuition was much lower on the Continent than in England.\(^{67}\)

The ‘opinion every where prevalent in England, [is] that it is essential to pianists … to visit foreign countries, receive foreign instruction, and earn a character in foreign lands, and in Italy especially, before their countrymen can be expected to see and apprettiate and applaud their merit’.\(^{68}\)

During the late eighteenth century, however, very few women musicians studied abroad. European study had the disadvantage of providing a context within which it was impossible to establish contacts within professional circles in London. Such contacts were essential for women musicians, for whom performance ‘opportunities were scarce if they wanted to avoid the [potential] social stigma of the stage’.\(^{69}\)

3) Being Perceived as an ‘Accomplished’ Player

The third phase, for a woman, in relation to learning the piano was, at the time of marriage, enjoying the social value and status of being perceived as an ‘accomplished’ or ‘finished’ player. ‘The piano and the pianist became the focal points in the drawing-room: not to own a piano became socially remiss and not to be able to perform upon one, for a young girl, a mark of lack of breeding.’\(^{70}\)

4) A Protracted Decline

The fourth phase, for a woman, in relation to learning the piano involved a protracted decline, after marriage, resulting from a focus on maternal duties.

The fourfold pattern of rise and decline, ‘peaking’ during young adulthood, was created by the knowledge that marriage prospects may be hampered by any lack of pianistic accomplishment. That learning to play the piano was motivated by marriageability, rather than by purely musical aspirations, must often have

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\(^{65}\) Isacoff, *A Natural History of the Piano*, p. 53.


\(^{68}\) Ibid., p. 406.

\(^{69}\) McVeigh, *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn*, p. 185.

\(^{70}\) Hyde, *New-Found Voices*, p. 31.
been a source of frustration to sensitive piano teachers. For example, in 1829, Thomas Danvers Worgan, the eldest of the two sons of Dr John Worgan and his second wife, Eleanor, wrote:

If those who turn their eyes towards the profession are unable to discover the intellectual dignity of the art in its teachers, the reason of this is on the surface. Music languishes and degenerates under the misgovernment of unintellectual fashion. The exclusive demand for practical tuition is imperious and irresistible. Musical education is wholly effeminate, and the teacher of music sinks into the manufacture of female ornament.71

In 1798, in their tract on progressive methodologies of education, Practical Education, Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth make it quite clear that the ongoing development of pianistic skills immediately ceases after marriage:

Out of the prodigious number of young women who learn music … how many are there, who … after they have the choice of their own amusements, continue … for the pure pleasure of the occupation? As soon as a young lady is married, does she not frequently discover, that ‘she really has not leisure to cultivate talents which take up so much time.’ Does she not complain of the labour of practising four or five hours a day to keep up her musical character? What motive has she for perseverance; she has, perhaps, already tired of playing to all her acquaintance. She may really take pleasure in hearing good music; but her own performance will not then please her ear so much as that of many others. She will prefer the more indolent pleasure of hearing the best music that can be heard for money at public concerts. She will then of course leave off playing, but continue very fond of music. How often is the labour of years thus lost for ever!72

That musical pursuits ceased after marriage in favour of domestic responsibilities is also revealed, for example, by Eleanor Parke Custis Lewis (1779–1852), the adopted daughter of George Washington. As a child during the 1790s, Eleanor spent many hours each day practising the harpsichord. Approximately two decades later, in a letter dated Friday, 14 July 1817, written to her childhood friend Elizabeth Bordley Gibson (1777–1863), Eleanor expressed her hope that the soon-to-be-married Elizabeth would ‘not give up music & painting, for pickling, preserving, & puddings although I have done so in great measure’.73

There can be no doubt that in a less restrictive society, many women, after marriage, may ‘have continued to play to considerable acclaim for many years’.\textsuperscript{74} There does not appear to have been any distain directed towards young ladies who became keyboard virtuosi. The context within which they performed, however, was a crucial factor in society’s acceptance of such virtuosi.

### Performances Given by Women Virtuosi

Salwey asserts that public recitals given outside the home by married women virtuosi were both déclassé and morally suspect, as were the women who gave them. Salwey states that any married woman

> who became an accomplished performer signalled a variety of changes in her relationship to her husband and her place in society. She became \textit{visually} prominent, especially if she performed outside the drawing room, particularly if she gave a public recital, thus upstaging her husband and, implicitly, suggesting to her husband’s friends that she was out of control, leading a life of her own not defined by domestic regulations and responsibilities. A well-bred woman who took music so seriously constituted a threat to social boundaries.\textsuperscript{75}

The concept of virtuoso women pianists being restricted to performing within a domestic context has been for a time an accepted truism of eighteenth-century cultural studies.\textsuperscript{76}

Ritchie, however, presents a contrary view:

> A public performance by a woman [either unmarried or married] was not considered to be a … sign of depravity. Indeed, public performances [given] … by women for civic occasions or charitable institutions could signal compliance with established social and gender ideals and generate social approval for the women engaged in these activities …

In fact, a wide range of music composed and performed by women in the eighteenth century enjoyed cultural prominence, as expressed in the production, publication, and performance of music and lyrics written by women, and in writing about women’s engagement in music. Women’s

\textsuperscript{74} Salwey, ‘Women Pianists in Late Eighteenth-Century London’, p. 290.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 275.

participation in music was not confined to the domestic sphere, but stretched from the stage to the drawing room in a flexible continuum of various performance spaces and repertoire.\textsuperscript{77}

This performative continuum comprised contexts such as

casual family gatherings; impromptu parties amongst friends, visitors, and neighbours; musical societies’ meetings; concerts ['held in private residences, in the company of men and women, and in the company of varying musical skill']\textsuperscript{78} featuring a combination of amateur and professional musicians ['the scale of such … concerts, which one might imagine to include a select handful of the \textit{ton}, was often quite grand'];\textsuperscript{79} so-called private concerts featuring professional musicians and tickets; music festivals or other occasional performances (such as St. Cecelia’s Day celebrations); subscription-only concerts in public venues; ticketed performances in ecclesiastical, recreational, and theatrical spaces; regular religious services; and, finally, the circulation and/or publication of musical compositions, often printed with references to their original performance occasion, for further performance in any of these situations.

Study of these performance occasions shows that [contexts within which women made] … music reached far beyond domestic music-making.\textsuperscript{80}

Mary Morrow presents six categories related to domestic musical life in eighteenth-century Vienna.\textsuperscript{81} Morrow’s categories may also be applied to eighteenth-century English domestic contexts within which women made music. Morrow’s categories are

1. spontaneous social music
2. the more formalised after-dinner entertainment
3. special parties and celebrations including performances of music
4. participatory chamber music
5. gala occasions with elaborate productions
6. musical salons, or regular formal concerts.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., p. 61.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p. 63.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., p. 57.
\textsuperscript{81} Morrow, \textit{Concert Life in Haydn’s Vienna}.
\textsuperscript{82} See Woodfield, \textit{Music of the Raj}, p. 102, fn. 73.
Surprisingly, very little is known about the way in which casual concerts in the home were run, either socially or musically, ‘yet these were the occasions upon which aspiring young [women] musicians … routinely presented their efforts for appraisal’.83

‘The ability to accompany was an important skill for women keyboard players, but their highest goal remained that of appearing as soloist in the fashionable chamber repertoire of accompanied sonatas and concertos.’84

Within the context of the accompanied sonata, women usually led the ensemble (commonly a duo or piano trio) by playing the keyboard part; men played the accompaniment (‘whilst this suggests a late-18th century equivalent of … “100 Things to Do with a Useless Man”’,85 the context would never have been perceived as such). Domestic music making—‘a little dance music after dinner’, an accompanied sonata ‘or a song or two in the family circle—was considered unexceptional and many wealthy tradespeople86 bought pianos and looked for tuition.

Statistics concerning women making music in public during the second half of the eighteenth century reveal an unexpected prominence. Of the ‘622 advertised performances on the piano and harpsichord in London between 1750 and 1800, 210 were by women’87 (some of these women were married, others not). This represents more than one-third of the total public performances,88 and suggests that many English female keyboard instrument players ‘could hold their own with their native male counterparts’.89 (That so many women pianists were involved in public performance not only counters commonly held notions of societal restriction and repression, but also contradicts some contemporary ‘feminists’ manipulation [via] … political correctness to mould culture [and history] to their likeness’.)90

‘During the 1780s, and indeed through to the end of the [eighteenth] century, women pianists played an increasingly significant public role on London’s concert platforms.’91 For example, Elizabeth Weichsel (1765?–1818), Maria F. Parke (b. 1772 or 1773), Jane Mary Guest (1762–1814?), Maria Hester Park

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83 Ibid., p. 102.
84 Ibid., p. 93.
86 Southey et al., The Ingenious Mr Avison, p. 119.
88 See ibid., p. 274, fn. 4.
89 Ibid., p. 273.
(née Reynolds; 1760–1813) and Cecilia Maria Barthélemon (1767–1859) were familiar to the concert-going public, and enjoyed considerable popularity and acclaim.\textsuperscript{92} The admiration and approval of the public attest to the fact that these women were true virtuosi; after all, the public concert ‘was essentially a re-creation of domestic upper-class music making on a larger scale, and that change in scale could easily expose inadequacies of performance that might be overlooked in a salon’.\textsuperscript{93}

An example of a woman virtuoso pianist who consistently performed in public is Jane Mary Guest (ca 1765 – after 1814), daughter of a Bath tailor and a student of Johann Christian Bach. Guest was evidently able to present herself as a young lady of quality, for in 1780 Fanny Burney was invited to hear her play at her own house in Bath: she went on to achieve a more than satisfactory career in London as a solo pianist and teacher of royalty.\textsuperscript{94}

No female pianist who performed in public, however, comes close to achieving the prominence of Elizabeth Weichsel, whose 18 appearances account for more than half of the public piano performances during 1777–78. For the entire second half of the eighteenth century, this number of performances is matched only by Jan Ladislav Dussek.\textsuperscript{95}

Women pianists were rarely outshone by their male counterparts, and when this did occur it can be largely explained by the exclusive use of one of the leading foreign male pianists for a particular concert series. If the leading members of the London Pianoforte School\textsuperscript{96} [that is, Clementi, Dussek, Cramer and Field] are excluded one finds that women pianists are as prominent as the English male pianists.\textsuperscript{97}

During the 1790s, more than one-quarter of the pianists who appeared in public were female, and the technically and conceptually difficult works of Dussek and Cramer featured prominently amongst the repertoire they performed.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{92} See ibid., p. 282.
\textsuperscript{93} ‘The Threat from Within: The Virtuoso’, in Gramit, \textit{Cultivating Music}, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{94} McVeigh, \textit{Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn}, p. 185.
\textsuperscript{95} See ibid., p. 286.
\textsuperscript{96} Nicholas Temperley (‘General Introduction’) informs us that the so-called ‘London Pianoforte School’ consists of 49 composers whose combined careers span almost a century (from 1766 to 1860). Five pianists stand out as being the most important composers of the London Pianoforte School. These are: i) Muzio Clementi; ii) Johann Ladislav Dussek; iii) Johann Christian Bach; iv) Johann Baptist Cramer; and v) John Field. It’s ironic that none of these pianist-composers actually came from London (or, for that matter, from England). Perhaps the only two things that link these five pianists together as a “School” are: i) they all had strong and lasting associations with London; and ii) they all composed piano music for the London market some time during the first hundred years of the piano’s popularity in London.’
\textsuperscript{97} Salwey, ‘Women Pianists in Late Eighteenth-Century London’, p. 289.
\textsuperscript{98} See ibid., p. 286.
One of the first English women pianists of the nineteenth century to make a reputation for herself was Catherine Bisset (1795–1864), who made her London debut in 1811, and subsequently played in Paris. More outstanding, however, was Lucy Andrews (1797–1878) who made her debut with the Philharmonic Orchestra in the same year as [Felix] Mendelssohn [1809–47] made his debut in London [1829], playing the Hummel Concerto in B minor. It was she who introduced Beethoven’s Emperor concerto to England.  

Musical performance contexts gave women virtuoso pianists ‘a strong, clear voice in’ London’s music culture.

Daily, both in England and on the Continent, many women spent hours honing their musical skills to extraordinary levels of technical and interpretative ability. In her autobiography, the Viennese novelist Caroline Pichler (1769–1843) states as much: ‘so many women … occupy themselves … auspiciously in musical performance at the keyboard, at other instruments, or in song.

In some ways, the restrictions placed upon women in relation to the contexts within which they might perform seem to be inconsistent, given the ‘whole ceremonial atmosphere of a classicist civilisation which valued the theatre as a secular ritual’.

In as much as late eighteenth-century [musical] theatre concerned itself with the doings of gentefolk and the nobility, a sophisticated mastery of it could be read as a sign of social superiority in a spectator, or … in a performer. Sensitivity to genteeil behaviour and its codes, to the nuances of a [musical work] … and to the distinctions of … genre were among the abilities that were required.

In late eighteenth-century England, there was a close relationship between ‘high social status, “civility”, and education on the one hand’ and concert-going and music making on the other. ‘[S]tatistics and economic evidence … point in this direction, notably in the case of London.’ The participation of women virtuoso pianists in English cultural life—within both domestic and public contexts—in

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104 Ibid., p. 8.
some cases acted as a stimulant for the development of piano design, and at
times gave rise to experimental musical composition. As one would expect, the
unique personality and abilities of each individual performer either reinforced
traditions of instrument design, piano technique, composition and performance
context or acted as a catalyst for departures from the norm.

In nearly every music treatise published in England during the second half of
the eighteenth century,

social and musical harmony were, if not equated, then strongly related
to one another ... Women's participation in this discourse of how one
might achieve social harmony using musical means produced a range
of responses, from works consonant with societal ideals of charitable,
natural, and national order, to downright dissonance with such ideals.\textsuperscript{105}

The situation for women virtuoso pianists on the Continent was similar to that
found in England. Women virtuoso pianists were an integral part of society's
cultural fabric. Both in England and abroad, however, women composers
were regarded with negativism. Society's attitude towards women composers
is representatively revealed by an announcement published in Carl Friedrich
Cramer's \textit{Magazin der Musik} (1786); the composer Corona Schröter (1751–1802)
writes:

I have had to overcome much hesitation before I seriously made the
decision to publish a collection of short poems that I have provided with
melodies. A certain feeling towards propriety and morality is stamped
upon our sex, which does not allow us to appear alone in public, and
without an escort: Thus, how can I otherwise present this, my musical
work to the public, than with timidity? For the complimentary opinions
and the encouragement of a few persons ... can easily be biased out of
pity. The work of any lady, moreover, will indeed arouse similar pity to
some extent in the eyes of other experts.\textsuperscript{106}

Women virtuoso pianists in England, when weighed against women composers,
fared comparatively well. This was a result of the fact that in the minds of many,
the piano, piano repertoire and piano performance were incontrovertibly linked
with women and notions of good taste.

\textsuperscript{105} Ritchie, \textit{Women Writing Music in Late Eighteenth-Century England}, p. 3.
Julie Candeille: Two Composers Speak Out', in \textit{Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the
Middle Ages to the Present} (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), p. 87.