RUTH PERRY

Music

Jane Austen played the piano every morning before the rest of the family got up — both for her own pleasure and probably also as an aid to meditation and mental focus. No one has yet fully explored the significance of music to her as a writer, but the use of music in her novels — as with all other aspects of daily life — is hardly casual. In perhaps no other novel is this so true as in Emma, in which music is used in a sophisticated manner to evoke class and gender status and as a pointer to moral character.

For example, when Harriet Smith tells Emma about Mr Martin’s bringing ‘his shepherd’s son into the parlour one night on purpose to sing to her’ — in conjunction with his reading the Agricultural Reports and having so fine a flock of sheep that ‘he had been bid more for his wool than any body in the country’ (p. 27) — Austen is revealing more than simply how enterprising and up-to-date Robert Martin is. Clearly one of the new breed of actively ‘improving’ gentlemen farmers, informed about the latest scientific thinking in fertilisers and care of livestock, he is successful, comfortably off and rising into the gentry. And while periodicals such as the Annals of Agriculture and volumes such as General View of the Agriculture of the County of Surrey: with observations on the means of its improvement (1794) or William Marshall’s Minutes, experiments, observations, and general remarks on agriculture in the southern counties (1799) admonish country gentlemen to care for their labourers and tell them how to build the most durable and sanitary cottages, they do not necessarily encourage them to pay heed to workers’ culture and listen to the old songs their employees and tenants might know. But the publication of Percy’s Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765) and Walter Scott’s Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border (1802–3) had catalysed a very contemporary interest in folk song among urban intellectuals and rural gentry. The long-standing association between rural life and song in classical poetry, a tradition continued in the eighteenth century by James Thomson, Allan Ramsay and Robert Burns, was now revived by these popular books. They made folk song or ‘popular
antiquities' a subject of interest for antiquarians and informed gentlemen farmers, who sought information about balladry as well as new-fangled threshers and the advantages of turnips as winter feed for livestock. Robert Martin would have certainly known of this revived interest in rural folk song, if not from Agricultural Reports, then in Elegant Extracts, which he also read and which has a whole section on 'Songs and Ballads', quoting Percy and referring to the 'beautiful and pathetic simplicity' of the 'fragments of ancient ballads' dispensed through Shakespeare's plays. This section also includes informed remarks on the genre, such as:

Although the English are remarkable for the number and variety of their ancient ballads, and retain perhaps a greater fondness for these old simple rhapsodies of their ancestors than most other nations, they are not the only people who have distinguished themselves by compositions of this kind. The Spaniards have great multitudes of them, many of which are of the highest merit. They call them in their language Romances.

(p. 923)

And, of course, ballads figure as a significant pleasure to the vicar of Wakefield and his family in their humble rural retreat. Their neighbours sing to them 'some soothing ballad, Johnny Armstrong's last good night, or the cruelty of Barbara Allen', and Sir William Thornhill, disguised as a poor gentleman, Mr Burchell, famously sang old ballads to the children and told them stories in one chapter, and in another sang 'The Hermit', a ballad original with Goldsmith, after criticising the incoherent nonsense of modern English poetry. So Robert Martin's bringing in the shepherd's son to sing for Harriet, in conjunction with his literary taste for Elegant Extracts and The Vicar of Wakefield, brands him as a modern rural projector, a man of information and vision, interested not just in the latest agricultural techniques but also in the traditional culture of the rural community in which he finds himself.

Harriet also tells Emma she is 'very fond of singing' and that Mr Martin 'could sing a little himself' (p. 27). As a couple these two echo the shared love of music of Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax, albeit in a lower class register. Mr Martin's and Frank Churchill's singing also signals another musical fact about this novel. With the exception of Willoughby in Sense and Sensibility (and we are given no idea how well he sings there), Emma is the only novel in which the men make music – sing – as well as the women. Frank Churchill has enough of an ear and musical knowledge to sing a harmonising line with Emma when she accompanies herself singing at the Coles' party. He does so twice, demonstrating his familiarity with her songs, those 'little things which are generally acceptable', as well as his ability to harmonise by ear and the accuracy of his pitch. As we later realise, he is very quick at improvising on the spot verbally and in this scene we see him perform skilfully with music in the same impromptu way. He does so, presumably, in order to be able to sing with Jane Fairfax next, to touch tonally as they had done before in Weymouth, making 'sweet sounds' with their 'united voices' (p. 246). But their pleasure in blending voices is cut short when Jane's 'voice grew thick' after the second song (p. 247). Her hoarseness signals her tension in their clandestine situation – her love for Frank, their dissimulation in the midst of their families, together with memories of their earlier discovery of their mutual love of music. Her voice grows 'thick' because her throat is constricted by all these conflicting emotions. There could be no clearer proof of the difficulty of her position, an involuntary betrayal of genuine feeling.

That Harriet enjoys singing can also be seen from the fact that Elizabeth Martin returns to her in a parcel two songs that Harriet had lent her to copy (p. 52). It is possible that these were just the lyrics to songs, but more probably they were song sheets, words and music, for simple accompanied singing such as circulated widely at the turn of the century. It is possible that Harriet could sight-sing, for at Mrs Goddard's school, girls could obtain 'a reasonable quantity of accomplishments', including, apparently, being able to sing from sheet music. Not everyone could afford a piano – this was an accomplishment for wealthier women – but the voice, that most basic of human instruments, was available to any reasonably talented young woman.

Harriet obviously does not know how to play the piano, nor can she distinguish between the complexity and quality of Emma's performances and Jane's. After the Coles' party, she comes over to Hartfield just when Emma is practising vigorously, regretting 'unfeignedly and unequivocally' her youthful lack of discipline and the 'inferiority of her own playing and singing'. Harriet interrupts her resolve practice session literally as well as symbolically, and ignorantly praises Emma's performance by repeating others' praise of Emma's taste. Of Jane Fairfax's playing she remarks naively 'I saw she had execution, but I did not know she had any taste.' Emma assures her that Jane's playing is far superior to her own: 'My playing is no more like her's, than a lamp is like sunshine', she tells her simple friend (p. 250).

Harriet sings but does not play; Emma and Jane play and sing; and Mrs Weston, raised by her marriage into a mature, supportive role rather than that of marriageable self-presentation, plays country dances so that others can dance. Thus class, gender and marital status all contribute to women's relation to music – and this holds for Austen's other novels as well. Marriageable young women perform in company if they can; and those
considered too old for the marriage market play country dances for the younger set to dance to. One of the heart-breaking scenes in *Persuasion* is just such a relegation of Anne Elliot, prematurely, to the post of playing for others to dance and flirt, while she still loves the suitor of her youth. It must be interjected here that the ‘irresistible’ waltz played by Mrs Weston at the Cole’s party was danced in England in long line sets like other country dances in this period, with Frank and Emma at the top, and not as a couple dance the way it was done in Europe – or how a couple might waltz today (p. 248). Frank is an excellent partner, another sign of his musical gifts, and Emma enjoys dancing with him very much. In that, ‘she need not blush to compare herself with Jane Fairfax’ (p. 266). Some married women, such as Lady Middleton in *Sense and Sensibility* and Mrs Elton in *Emma*, ‘give up’ their music altogether upon marriage because they are unwilling to put themselves out for others and because, we suspect, they never really enjoyed it despite their protestations to the contrary. Further proof of this indifference to music in the case of Lady Middleton is the scene in which she asks Marian to play a piece that she has just finished playing. Thus, music can reveal pretensions to culture as well as being expressive of real depth of feeling (this is also true of Mary Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*). One learns without surprise that although Jane Austen followed a regular and disciplined practice regime, she never – according to her niece – performed for company.

Aunt Jane began her day with music – for which I conclude she had a natural taste as she thus kept it up – tho’ she had no one to teach; was never induced (as I have heard) to play in company; and none of her family cared much for it. I suppose that she might not trouble them, she chose her practising time before breakfast – when she could have the room to herself – She practised regularly every morning – She played very pretty tunes, I thought – and I liked to stand by and listen to them ... At 9 o’clock she made breakfast – that was her part of the household work.

Auster represents Highbury as a typically musical town, not unusual in its domestic attainments. Early in the second volume, Mr Knightley remarks on the pleasant previous evening in which Emma and Miss Fairfax ‘gave us some very good music. I do not know a more luxurious state’, he added, ‘than sitting at one’s ease to be entertained a whole evening by two such young women: sometimes with music and sometimes with conversation’ (p. 182). When Frank Churchill arrives, in his opening exchange with Emma he asks ‘Is it a musical society?’ (p. 206). When the newly engaged Mr Elton returns to town, ‘to triumph in his happy prospects’, we are told that all that was left to know about his betrothed was ‘her Christian name’ and ‘whose music she principally played’ (p. 194). That is, a woman’s identity was partly established by such information. Indeed, Mrs Elton had been assured by her new husband that he was bringing her to a town in which music was played regularly. She tells Emma what a ‘satisfaction, comfort, and delight’ it is to her to learn what a musical society she has come to (p. 298). The Coles buy a grand piano for their girls to learn on, long before they can actually play. And Mrs Cole remarks on ‘how many houses there are’ in Highbury ‘where fine instruments are absolutely thrown away’, in the sense that no one now plays on them (p. 233). In another scene, Mrs Weston, who plays exceptionally well, ‘kind-hearted and musical’, asks Jane Fairfax about the tone, touch and pedal of her new pianoforte (p. 237). Thus, music-making is threaded through daily life in this novel; and Highbury society depends on it to a considerable extent for entertainment and solace.

Reactions to Jane Fairfax’s musicality are therefore instructive – Jane, who plays and sings more than she speaks in this novel. Emma recognises Jane’s excellence as a musician. She never attempts to ‘conceal from herself’ that Jane’s vocal and instrumental performances are ‘infinitely superior to her own’ (p. 245). These superior abilities also render Emma competitive and spiteful, because she ‘saw in her the really accomplished young woman, which she wanted to be thought herself’ (p. 178) as Mr Knightley had once told her. ‘She was not much deceived as to her own skill either as an artist or a musician, but she was not unwilling to have others deceived, or sorry to know her reputation for accomplishment often higher than it deserved’ (p. 46). Emma regards Jane Fairfax as her peer, a woman of her age whose situation makes her an object of pity but whose cultivated talent makes her an object of envy. But her refinement is undeniable and her human value self-evident. Mr Knightley, clear-sighted as usual, unequivocally appreciates Jane’s skill and taste. According to Mrs Weston, he is a great admirer of her playing and her singing. ‘I have heard him say that he could listen to her for ever!’ she tells Emma (p. 244). He views her as a worthy young woman, to be protected and included as a valued member of their community.

For Mrs Elton, Jane’s superiority serves only to augment her own importance. Her superior musical gifts confer status on the condescending arriviste who recognises them. They allow crude Mrs Elton to act the patron: ‘she plays extremely well. I know enough of music to speak decidedly on that point’ she remarks (p. 304). She would do something for Jane. She would have her often to her house, ‘introduce her’ and ‘have musical parties to draw out her talents’ (p. 306). In Mrs Elton’s venal mind, Jane Fairfax’s uncertain prospects and dependency reduce her to a commodity, permitting her arrogant use of Miss Fairfax’s first name, a liberty taken by no one who was not a relative, a liberty which irritates Frank Churchill when he hears it. Mrs Elton weighs and assesses the market value of her client’s musical
assets when she advises: 'Your musical knowledge alone would entitle you
to name your own terms, have as many rooms as you like, and mix in the
family as much as you chose - that is - I do not know - if you knew the
harp, you might do all that, I am very sure; but you sing as well as play; -
yes, I really believe you might, even without the harp, stipulate for what you
chose' (p. 326). The harp tended to be the instrument of wealthier women,
which is how it enters Mrs Elton's calculation as she urges Jane to barter her
musical capacities for material advantage.7

Ignorant Harriet, who hates Italian singing because 'there is no under-
standing a word of it', is more aware of Jane's material misfortune than her
artistic excellence. Callously she remarks, 'if she does play so very well, you
know, it is no more than she is obliged to do, because she will have to teach'
(p. 230). As Patrick Piggott long ago observed:

From this we may collect that Harriet feels herself in a position to look down
on Jane Fairfax - that though she is herself no more than 'the natural daughter
of somebody' - she can, merely because of the liberal allowance made to her
by her unknown father, feel superior to a young woman who is as far above
her in intellect and accomplishment as she is by birth.6

Such attitudes were not uncommon in Jane Austen's time. The ability
to play the piano brilliantly was not valued as the sign of artistic sensibil-
or spiritual superiority but rather as an artisanal skill. The music mas-
ter's social status was equivocal, however much his manners and education
might declare him to be a gentleman. This was partly because having to do
anything for a living was considered déclassé; it was one thing to play music
as an unpaid, leisureed amateur but quite another to do it professionally for
remuneration. It also reflected a social judgement about music as an ultima-
tely frivolous art, and the ability to play as a menial rather than an exalted
endeavour. Charles Burney and his family were all anxious about the social
standing that was conferred upon them by his being a musician, however
successful. And Hester Thrale, in taking the cultivated Italian Gabriel Piozzi
as her second husband after the death of Henry Thrale - a brewer! - was
thought to have married far beneath her because Piozzi was a musician and
a music teacher. Thus, in making music the visible sign of Jane Fairfax's cul-
tivation, sensitivity and highly wrought consciousness, Austen was doing
something new. She was valuing music as art, as the outward manifestation of a
largeness of soul - a combination of talent, deep feeling, serious applica-
tion and intellectual acuity - rather than simply proof of obedience to
custom, a modicum of discipline and a feminine desire to please.

As for Frank Churchill, who is in love with Jane Fairfax and proud of
her brilliant playing, he cannot resist bringing it up on his second meeting

with Emma. 'Did you ever hear the young lady we were speaking of, play?'
he asks. 'She appeared to me to play ... with considerable taste, but I know
nothing of the matter myself. - I am excessively fond of music, but without
the smallest skill or right of judging of anybody's performance' (pp. 216-17)
he says disingenuously. Then he tells her about how Mr Dixon, 'a very
musical man', although engaged to another woman, 'would yet never ask
that other woman to sit down to the instrument, if the lady in question
could sit down instead - never seemed to like to hear one if he could hear the
other' (p. 217). This, he argues, was proof of Jane's exceptional talent; but
Emma, naively unwilling to grant music its real importance, misinterprets it
as a secret bond between Jane and Mr Dixon.

And the very next day, Frank is off to London, ostensibly to get his hair
cut, but really to order a pianoforte for his beloved from Broadwood's, the
finest piano-maker in England. Haydn played a Broadwood; Beethoven pre-
ferred a Broadwood piano to all others and had his shipped across Europe.
Steibelt, Dussek, Hummel and Cramer - London's virtuosi pianists in this
period - all played Broadwoods. Broadwood himself was a Scottish joiner
and cabinet-maker who came to London in 1761 and worked with Burkhardt
Tschudi (partially anglicised to Burkat Shudi), a harpsichord-maker. He
married Shudi's daughter, became his partner, and before long took over the
business. In 1783 he patented a new square piano, with improved dampers
and 'loud' and 'soft' pedals, and continued to improve the instrument, with
advice from his friend Muzio Clementi. By 1793 he had stopped making
harpsichords altogether and by the early nineteenth century was producing
1,000 of these 'pianos anglais' annually, for the expanding middle-class
market.7

The piano which causes such a sensation when it arrives at Mrs Bates's
house is a large square pianoforte - 'a very elegant looking instrument' as
reported by Mrs Cole (p. 232). It probably had five or five and a half octaves,
and would have cost at least £26, exclusive of shipping and music.8 Jane
Austen herself, when anticipating the family's move to Chawton, wrote to
her sister Cassandra about the probable cost of one: 'Yes, yes, we will have
a Pianoforte, as good a one as can be got for thirty Guineas - & I will prac-
tice country dances, that we may have some amusement for our nephews &
nieces, when we have the pleasure of their company' (Letters, p. 168).

It arrives on Valentine's Day, a fact on which Frank Churchill teasingly
remarks, but which is only evident to those paying close attention to the
novel's calendar. The dating of Emma has been carefully worked out, and
the calendar was, more or less, the author's present. One could argue that
this contemporary calendar contributes to the blurring between narrator
and main character that is so fundamental to the structure of the novel.9
The next step in the development of the project was the translation of the original text into a plain text format. The text was then processed to remove any formatting or layout elements, such as page numbers, headers, and footers. The resulting text was then cleaned to remove any non-essential characters, such as punctuation marks and symbols. The text was then made available in a natural language format, ready for further processing or analysis.
the Irish Bards, recounts the following story he heard from a contemporary harper. Two centuries before, a woman named Elinor Kavanagh had been courted and won by Carroll O’Daly, but the match was broken off and another man chosen to be the husband of the lady. The disappointed lover appeared at the wedding disguised as a singer and musician, and sang the song ‘Eileen Aroon’, which he had composed for the occasion. When she realised who he was, his sudden appearance and the power of the song rekindled Elinor Kavanagh’s love, and they eloped that very night. Thus this melody is associated with disguise, secrecy and thwarted love – an association which continued into the nineteenth century.

But it was John Braham who made this song a national hit under the title ‘Robin Adair’ with a new set of words he sang in London in 1811:

What’s this dull town to me,
Robin’s not near.
What wasn’t I wish’d to see,
What wish’d to hear;
Where all the joy and mirth,
Made this town heaven on earth,
Oh, they’re all fled with thee,
Robin Adair.

What made th’ assembly shine,
Robin Adair.
What made the ball so fine,
Robin was there.
What when the play was o’er
What made my heart so sore.
Oh, it was parting with
Robin Adair.

But now thou’rt cold to me,
Robin Adair,
But now thou’rt cold to me,
Robin Adair.
Yet he I loved so well
Still in my heart shall dwell,
Oh, I can ne’er forget,
Robin Adair.

Braham’s version became wildly popular, and his publisher sold close to 200,000 copies of it that year. It was sung everywhere – in theatres and on the streets – and new versions arranged for the pianoforte were played and sung in countless homes. Jane Austen had some of Braham’s other music, as well as piano virtuoso George Kiallmark’s demanding variations on ‘Robin Adair’ in her own collection of piano music – ‘Robin Adair, a favourite Irish melody with variations for the pianoforte’.14 Her piano teacher, George Chard, must have known Kiallmark, because he was a principal instrumentalist in the Hampshire music festivals organised by Chard in Winchester in 1802 and 1805.21 No one knows for certain who wrote these new words to ‘Robin Adair’, but a story associated with them echoes Walker’s eighteenth-century tale of Elinor Kavanagh and Carroll O’Daly. The lyrics to ‘Robin Adair’ were said to have been written by Lady Caroline Keppel in the 1750s when her family forbade her to marry the penniless surgeon Robin Adair. Her health broke down, and she was sent to Bath, where she wrote these plaintive verses; but as she grew weaker, her family relented, and allowed her to marry her love.22 Thus this tale too emphasises an unequal match and parental disapproval with an eventual happy marriage. There is no way of knowing whether these romantic stories about ‘Eileen Aroon’ or ‘Robin Adair’ were known to Jane Austen when she chose to have Jane Fairfax play this newly fashionable Irish folk tune, and whether the aura of faithful love despite parental obstacles still clung to it. But the song and the earlier story would have been familiar to at least some of her readers, giving Jane’s performance on her Broadwood piano yet another resonance.

In addition to these musical references, much of the novel itself is constructed ‘with the shape and balance of a piece of music’.24 That Austen’s fiction might be orchestrated like music is not a new thought; Robert K. Wallace wrote a whole book with this premise, comparing three of Austen’s novels to three specific piano concertos by Mozart.25 Once one registers Jane Austen’s lifelong and devoted involvement with music, it does seem possible to see analogies to musical exposition in the structuring of her novels.

Part of the musicality of Emma comes from the way many of its chapters are staged like operatic scenes – with first one voice stating its theme and then a second voice joining in harmoniously, and the whole ending blended in a duet. This effect is achieved thanks to the unusual and daring narrative technique of this novel. There is very little omniscient narrative intrusion, a much greater tendency than in Austen’s previous novels to let the characters speak for themselves, to demonstrate who they are by what they say directly without summary or commentary by a narrator. As many critics have noted, there is a greater use of free indirect discourse, flattening the distance between narrator and protagonist. And this closeness between Emma and the narrator is reinforced, as noted earlier, by the fact that the time frame is the same as that during which Austen was writing.

An example of one such ‘operatic’ sequence is near the end of volume one, in which the Woodhouses and the Knightleys go to Randalls for dinner on
Christmas Eve and return again in the snow. Beginning with a flurry of reactions to Harriet’s sore throat, chapter thirteen moves on to Mr Elton’s exultant acceptance of a seat in John Knightley’s carriage for the dinner party, to Emma’s bewildered surprise. A duet between John Knightley and Emma follows, on the theme introduced by Mr Elton (his attentiveness to Emma) and as they proceed they are rejoined once more by Mr Elton himself and his elated voice takes over from Emma’s; the chapter ends with a duet between John Knightley and Mr Elton – Elton’s quick and cheerful motif answered by the grumbling counterpoint of John Knightley.

The dinner party itself at Randalls is a noisier affair, with more obvious polyphony. Emma engages with Mrs Weston. They speak of Frank Churchill and the theme they introduce and develop is picked up with variations by the voices of Mr Weston and Isabella. Then chapter fifteen modulates into a different key, as Mr Elton manoeuvres to establish himself as a protector for Emma, and she is too nonplussed by his assumption of intimacy to change the tune. John Knightley breaks in upon them with an alarm about the weather, echoed by every other voice in the scene – similar to the way instruments in an orchestra successively perform a theme, each playing it with a different timbre and intonation. The carriages arrive and Emma finds herself alone with Mr Elton in one of them, and the motif that began the chapter – namely Mr Elton’s romantic intentions towards Emma – is recapitulated and intensified, with full orchestration behind it. Emma replies to Mr Elton’s declaration in clear, decided phrases, the rhythm of her determined denial resembling a march, and their duet continues, building in volume and discord until it ends abruptly in silence for few minutes. Then Mr Elton leaves the carriage at the vicarage door and Emma is conveyed back to Hartfield, in a slow and mournful return to the home key.

Chapter ten, in volume two, is likewise magnificently orchestrated. This is the sequence in which Emma, Harriet, Miss Bates and Mrs Weston return from Ford’s to Mrs Bates’s little house to view the new pianoforte. They come a full ten minutes earlier than Frank Churchill had ‘calculated’, breaking in on the few precious minutes he and Jane Fairfax had stolen together with deaf Mrs Bates drowsing by the fire. Warned of the intrusion by one of Miss Bates’s arias, Frank is sitting at a table working on Mrs Bates’s spectacles as they walk in and Jane Fairfax is standing with her back to them, apparently agitated, although the narrator disingenuously reports ‘[t]he appearance of the little sitting-room as they entered, was tranquillity itself’ (p. 259). Silence is a very musical quality, perhaps more expressive in music than in speech, and it is used here to great effect – like several bars of rest at the beginning of a movement after the conductor has signalled its start.

Music

Frank first breaks the silence, speaking softly to Emma, continuing perhaps the tone of voice in which he had been speaking before the visitors came in. He seats Emma beside him and chooses a baked apple for her. When Jane is ready to play something on the pianoforte, the instrument begins its tune. Frank Churchill adds his voice to it, discussing the surprising gift – its tone and its timing – introducing a harmony with this second theme. He asks for a waltz such as Mrs Weston played the previous evening at the Coles’ party, and the piano modulates into a waltz. But it stops abruptly when Frank alludes to Weymouth and their courtship; Jane blushes, breaks off and introduces a different melody. Frank and Emma engage in a duet about the sheet music that came with the piano while the piano picks up Frank’s theme about the mysterious gift and answers it. While Frank and Emma continue their exposition, Jane’s accompaniment sends covert messages to Frank through her choice of songs, including ‘Robin Adair’, which Frank tells Emma is ‘his’ favourite (p. 262). The piano’s themes first echo and then lead the whispered duet as this trio for voices and piano proceeds. The fact that they are talking about the pianoforte’s qualities and the music that came with it deepens one’s sense of this transposition of a fictional scene into a musical trio for two voices and piano.

Then Mr Knightley rides by, and Miss Bates throws open a window and begins a duet with him, her arpeggios and ornaments contrasting with his undorned declarative phrases. Mr Knightley, self-consciously aware that their exchange is being overheard by the others in the room, comments on it, calling attention to its acoustic quality. Then he and Miss Bates recapitulate the themes that have sounded thus far in harmonising counterpoint – the new pianoforte, the confederacy of Frank and Emma, the Coles’ party, Mrs Weston’s playing and the baked apples that began the scene. Mr Knightley rides off and the ladies take their leave. It is a brilliant sequence, full of dynamic contrasts, the human voices alternating with the notes of the pianoforte and all the characters given plenty of scope for their characteristic arias.

Such attempts to render the verbal text in musical terms must obviously be tentative, but may perhaps suggest something of the contribution of music to the architecture of this novel, a novel full of allusions to the musical experience of the period in which it was written. Some commentators have claimed that Austen was not really musical, or that music was merely ‘another social amenity’ to her, because it her letters to Cassandra she did not always write about the concerts she attended or because she complained about their physical inconveniences. But Cassandra was far less interested in music than her sister. Like Elinor and Marianne in Sense and Sensibility or Charlotte and Eloisa Luttrel in ‘Lesley Castle’, the two
Austen sisters did not equally share a love for music. Jane Austen’s own deep musicality is beyond doubt. She played the pianoforte to a technical standard well beyond that of a typical amateur, and she was sharply alert to the experience of music in everyday life around her. In all her fiction, and perhaps in Emma most of all, music is treated as another medium of human expressivity, somewhat more difficult to interpret than words, but ultimately as precise in its meaning. Music is always revelatory – of class and gender status in her characters, of their cultural affections and their artistic sensibilities, of their dedication and discipline. And for the author herself, music offered a structural shapeliness and symmetry that has often been remarked in her productions and that can be found in many of the pieces that she played to herself every morning of her adult life.

NOTES


2 Elegant Extracts: or, Useful and Entertaining Pieces of Poetry, Selected for the Improvement of Young Persons: Being Similar in Design to Elegant Extracts in Prose, 2 vols. (1796). The section on ‘Songs and Ballads’ is in vol. 11, pp. 170-441. The remark on ballads in Shakespeare is on p. 896.


5 Mike Parker points out that in Jane Austen’s novels, the harp is played by ‘privileged and spoilt’ women. See his ‘Tidings of My Harp’ in the issue ‘Jane Austen’s Musical World’, of Jane Austen’s Regency World 44 (March–April 2010), 35-8.

6 Piggott, The Innocent Diversion, p. 97.


8 Michael Cole, Broadwood Square Pianos (Cheltenham: Tatchely Books, 2005), appendix 8, p. 181. See also Robert D. Hume’s essay in this volume.


11 Book of Days, p. 255.


14 McVeigh et al., ‘Cramer’.

15 Both the bound book signed ‘Mrs Henry Austen’ that contains Les Petits Riens and the bound collection of music signed ‘Cass. Elizth. Austen’ are privately held by Richard Jenkyns, a collateral descendant of Jane Austen. I am grateful to Professor Jenkyns for letting me look at these precious music books. Although the latter book bears Jane Austen’s sister’s name, it is well known that Cassandra was not musical, and therefore it is assumed that Cassandra inherited this book of Austen’s music, subsequently had it bound and signed it.


17 I have this information from Samantha Carrasco’s 2013 University of Southampton PhD thesis, ‘The Austen Family Music Books and Hampshire Music Culture, 1770-1820’, p. 17. Many thanks to Dr Carrasco for allowing me to see this work.


19 Much of what follows has been gleaned from this remarkable source by Jürgen Kloss: www.justanothervenue.com/html/ea-list.html (accessed 30 March 2013).

20 This text was called ‘You’re Welcome to Paxton, Robin Adair’ in a collection of songs by William Hunter (Edinburgh, 1764).

21 Kiallmark’s ‘Robin Adair’ is in the bound collection of Austen’s music signed ‘Cass. Elizth. Austen’, privately held by a descendant.


23 This story can be traced to an article by William Pinkerton, in Notes and Queries 3rd series, 5 (18 June 1864), 501-4; repr. Dwight’s Journal of Music 24:10 (6 August 1864), 284-5.


25 Wallace compares Emma to Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 25 (K503), in terms of where it comes in the oeuvre, how it is rated by experts, complexity of counterpoint (irony), density of texture, generous pacing, structural parallels in the movements (volumes) and so on. R. K. Wallace, Jane Austen and Mozart: Classic Equilibrium in Fiction and Music (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983).
