Women and the Business of Making Glass Music

During the relatively short period from the mid-to-late eighteenth century when glass musical instruments were manufactured and gained popularity, several women made names for themselves in the realm of avant-garde musical performance. The lives of three female glass instrument players: Anne Ford, Marianne Davies, and Marianne Kirchgassner, show how these successful performer-entrepreneurs operated in an age of emerging feminine public identity. Their journeys reveal much about the gender dimensions of the age, the role of music in the modern era, the consumption of it, and their approach to business. The financial opportunities presented to women looking to challenge the limitations of their musical lives in relation to the world of glass music, is a relatively under-studied area of research. It reveals the gumption taken to realize these opportunities, and some of the pitfalls and successes along the way.

To show how the lives of these women interconnected with other aspects of eighteenth century life, this research draws on the transforming world of music concertizing, publishing, expanding markets of listeners, views of working women, and societal fads. Journals, reviews, letters, manuscripts, business accounts, papers, records, and artwork all provide a wealth of resources from which to draw business-related ideas and conclusions to show how gender shaped the economics of music production. In researching how female players of glass instruments stepped out into the light of public performance, it is possible to gain an understanding of how women operated and found agency within an increasingly competitive music-business – a business formerly off-limits to women as performers of solo instruments, but not as singers. A brief look at the broader view of solo performance stemming from the Renaissance relates emerging eighteenth century trends for women to those already established as singers and players of novelty instruments.
The birth of the opera singer was already well underway since the early 1700s, as Handel (backed by the Royal Academy), went to great lengths to bring the most celebrated Italian virtuoso singers to England to perform in his cantatas, operas and English oratorios. Italian Prima Donnas such as Frannescca Cuzzoni (1696-1778), Faustina Bordoni (1697-1781), and Anna Maria Strada (1719-1741) were respected internationally, paid handsomely, and assured great financial success for their employers. Broadside pamphlets and journals discussed the virtues of one diva against another, and sensationalized any controversy to create public personas that perpetuated ticket sales. Pamphleteer and Director of the Royal Academy from 1717-1729, John Arbuthnot wrote of Cuzzoni and Bordoni’s rivalry at the King’s Theater, Haymarket:

“The DEVIL to pay at St. James’s: Or a full and true ACCOUNT of the most horrid and bloody BATTLE between Madam FAUSTINA and Madam CUZZONI,…TWO of a trade seldom or ever agree…But who would have though the Infection should reach the Hay-market and inspire Two Singing Ladies to pull each other’s Coiffs.”

Fanning the scandal, certainly boosted ticket sales as the furor surrounding Cuzzoni’s appearances quadrupled the price of tickets from half to four guineas, and she went on to demand salaries in-excess of 2000 pounds per season. The sensationalized incident which occurred between rival fans, has since been discredited by accounts documenting Faustina and Cuzzoni’s close working relationship.

Our glass instrumentalists with their glass-imitation-human voice music (Anne Ford and Marianne Davies also performed as singers), sought to find similar success by looking to

---

established vocalists in their approaches to networking, publicity, resistance to societal expectation (Cuzzoni notably did not take her husband’s name), finances, and the handling of the sheer force of their talents.\textsuperscript{3} Ford’s success as a vocalist allowed her to successfully publicize her instrumental performances, a publicity that similarly cashed in on controversy in her very public rejection of marriage played out in best-selling pamphlets, by others attempts to sabotage her concerts, and her controversial portrait by Thomas Gainsborough. Marianne Kirchgassner certainly stretched the limits of her performances to match the virtuosic skill of a bravura aria in ways that earned her both recognition and great wealth as an instrumentalist. She and Marianne Davies maintained close relationships with composers and publishers, a practice typified by vocalists, and they similarly pursued the international circuit of music performance – at a time when travel was slow and hazardous, particularly with a glass instrument.

An intriguing backdrop to the ascendant trajectory of glass music and its reverse meteoric downfall is the parallel development of the glass armonica by Benjamin Franklin and other refiners of the instrument which draws in: the scientific revolution; the shifting world of secular music; the musical epicenters of pre-French Revolution Europe; and a vogue for learning amongst Europe’s growing middle class which shaped artistic, scientific, and philosophical work to appeal to the masses. “Back to nature” and bringing culture “to the people”\textsuperscript{4} movements precipitated an Age of Sensibility when, influenced by Enlightenment concepts of human understanding,\textsuperscript{5} acute sensory


\textsuperscript{5} John Locke, \textit{An Essay Concerning Human Understanding}: In Four Books, (London: The Basset, St Paul’s Churchyard, 1689). Locke’s treatise suggested a heightened nervous sensitivity brought a closer proximity to moral truth and knowledge; Diderot, D., d’Alembert, J.L. ed., \textit{Encyclopedie ou Dictionaire raisonne des sciences, des arts, et des métiers, par une societe des gens de lettres}, ; ”Verres, musique de’”; (Paris; Bd. XVII.), 1765. Houses an entry: ”Verres, musique de’” describing the musical glasses. Its publication intensified a
perception was closely associated with the acquisition of knowledge. The western Pythagorean concept of earthly musical as “audible proof” of its inaudible cosmic and Godly counterpart”\(^6\) also perpetuated a dualistic view of music that could morally uplift but also harm. “Rough music” or charivari – the use of cacophonous sound to punish members of the public diametrically opposed that which pleased or enraptured the listener. The praxis of music, health, and medicine is another fascinating area of historiography which melds some pivotal socio-political aspects of the age along with some extraordinary personal histories - all of which has an enduring appeal for anyone interested in the intersection of music, history, science, economics, and politics, or simply a good story.\(^7\)

In exploring the historiography of glass music and its players, I hope to expand on that which focuses on the science and development of glass instruments - particularly in connection to Benjamin Franklin. Much has been written on Franklin’s beloved invention the armonica, and of its association with eighteenth-century psychic rituals, and what many would view today as hokey medical practice. Less is written about Franklin’s mutually beneficial relationships with its performers, and how they worked together to capture the public imagination. Contemporary writing includes: Corey Mead’s *The Story of Benjamin Franklin’s Glass Armonica*, and William Zeitler’s *The Glass Harmonica: The Music and The Madness*, Harmonica,” Heather Hadlock’s "Sonorous Bodies: Women and the Glass Harmonica," and David A. Gallo’s "The power of a passion and personal commitment to scientific discovery during the ‘Age of Wonder’, as embodied by Franklin's *Investigation of the essence.‘


\(^7\) Doctor Mesmer, “Mesmerism”, First English Translation of Mesmer’s *Memoire sur la decouverte du Magnetisme Animal*. (London: Macdonald, 1948.) 1-63. Details Mesmer’s relationship with the Mozarts, the circle which included the Davies sisters, and Mesmer’s use of the Armonica in the treatment of nervous disorders.
musical instrument: Franklin, the Mozarts, Mesmer, and the glass armonica.” Together with nineteenth century musicology - A. Hyatt King’s *The Musical Glasses and Glass Harmonica*, Charles Ferdinand Pohl’s, *The International Exhibition of 1862: Cursory Notices on the Origin and History of the Glass,* and E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Musical Writings: Kreisleriana, The Poet and the Composer, Music Criticism,* all discuss supernatural associations with the instrument and the climactic turn of events which led to Franklin’s investigation of Anton Mesmer. Mesmer, from whom we get the word ‘mesmerize’, used the armonica in his seances and animal magnetism experiments to stimulate his patients into a state of nervous excitation. Franklin’s royally decreed investigation discredited Mesmer and may, or may not, have contributed to the demise of his own instrument.  

Hyatt A. King, E.T.A. Hoffman, Charles Ferdinand Pohl, Corey Mead and William Zeitler, all trace comprehensively the development of glass music from its earliest origins in Eastern cultures to the height of its popularity in the late eighteenth-century. Pohl’s booklet for the Great Exhibition of 1862 cites George Philipp Horsdorfer’s book from the 16th century called *Mathematical and Philosophical Hours of Relaxation* which describes a “Very merry wine-

---


10 Mead, 155-158. Louis XVI commissioned Franklin (age 78), Jean Bailly (france’s leading astronomer), the chemist Antoine Lavoisier, and Joseph Guillotine (inventor of his namesake instrument of execution) to investigate the validity of animal magnetism. The final report published on Aug 11, 1784, discredited the existence of “animal magnetic fluid” and Mesmer fled Paris. Franklin writes: “I suppose all the Physicians in France put together have not made so much Money during the Time [of Mesmer’s residence in Paris] as he has done.
music”. Pohl’s citations also include Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1762), cht ix. which mentions high-lived company, fashionable topics, pictures, taste, Shakespeare, and the musical glasses. Pohl has some wonderful and humorous stories detailing disasters with the instrument and perpetuations of its dangers, including a Salzburg Museum display which describes the instrument as hazardous to health. Hyatt A. King is the only one to mention J.C. Muller’s armonica method book published at Leipzig in 1788 *Anleitung zum Selbstunterricht auf der Harmonika* which challenged Rollig and the perceived dangers of armonica playing, and of early concerts detailed in Walther’s *Musicalisches Lexikon* 1732. Adding to the historiography of disaster stories he retells Carteret’s unfortunate story of a pig and a glass music concert, the outcome of which favors the pig but sadly not the “machine”!

E.T.A. Hoffmann writes of the hypnotic qualities of the armonica evidencing the contemporaneous view of glass music which could enchant, mesmerize, and even endanger the listener. His view stems from the mediaeval belief that music could “corrupteth and depraveth the minde.” Karl Rollig mythologizes the instrument in his collection of cautionary tales - *Ein Fragment*. According to Rollig “its social effects were such as no other instrument whatever has produced... its tones could reconcile quarrelling friends: restore fainting men to consciousness; make women faint; send a dog into convulsions; make a sleeping girl wake screaming through a

---

11 Pohl, 97.
12 Ibid, 97.
13 Hyatt, A. King, cites: Eisels *Musicus* (1738) showing instructions for making a *Verrillon* from an 18th c. manuscript in the British Museum from the Jesuit College in Paris; Richard Twiss’s journal *Travels through Portugal and Spain* 1772 – 1775; and Richard Pockrich who’s “angelik organ” of musical glasses inspired Franklin himself – and whose fascinating career is marked by his tragic death in a fire; J.C. Muller, *Anleitung zum Selbstunterricht auf der Harmonika*, Leipzig, 1788, states: “If playing the armonica were to bring the performer gradually closer to death, or at least cause certain illness, that would be truly terrible...But where is the evidence?”; Walther, *Musicalisches Lexikon*, 1732.
chord of the diminished seventh, and even cause the death of one very young.” He writes of his personal experience with the instrument and his subsequent illness. He believed the tonal qualities and friction of the glass on the fingertips could be hazardous, particularly to women, but notably falls short of explaining why. His oversight adds to documentation that connotes a prevailing view at the time - of women as fragile and susceptible to ruination by music.

In *From Sensibility to Pathology: The Origins of the Idea of Nervous Music around 1800*, twentieth century writer J. Kennaway, argues that music was viewed as “effeminate for men and potentially hystericizing and pathological for women.” Citing John Brown’s influential barometer of “excitability,” and Dr Thomas Beddoes’s *Hygeia* 1802, he charts the historical view of music as that which caused neuropathological conditions and even death. E.T.A. Hoffman describes the armonica’s popularity that “rose during the period of delicate nerves” and of the well-bred women who would publicly swoon during a time when overly nervous or sensitive emotional “hystera” symbolized virtue, truth, and beauty. The idea of music as a physical stimulant added to the debate about education for English girls, “made sick by sedentary artificial civilized habits,” girls whose genteel cultivation during the cult of sensibility, had its basis in socio-economics. Kennaway cites the armonica as the ultimate paradox of feminine domesticity

---

16 Hyatt A. King, 112-114.
18 Kennaway, 399.
19 Richard Browne, *Medicina Musica* (1729), cited in Kennaway, 401. Browne writes of the Newtonian principles of sound: “Sounds then may be supposed to rise from small vibrations, or tremulous Motions of the Air, and to be propagated in Undulations; and these being collected by the external ear…which, according to Degree of Motion, makes an Empression on the Auditory Nerves in the Labyrinth and Cochlea, so that according to the various refractions of the external Air, The internal Air makes various Impressions upon the Auditory Nerve.”
20 Thomas Beddoes, *Hygeia* (1802), cited in Kennaway, 416. Beddoes edited Browne’s manual and adds “Even when it charms, it co-operates with weights, already suspended with too little consideration upon the nervous system, and all pulling in the same direction that rage for excelling in music, which, of late years, we have seen invading families, and imposing the necessity of such strictness of application upon the girls.”
22 Ibid, 416.
and of the anxiety surrounding the playing of such an audibly stimulating instrument by women. Literature focused on overblown negative connotations with Mesmerism, charlatan mediums, phantasmagoria and other manufactured settings for the instrument, or of illness from its overuse tends to overlook the advancing popularity of the pianoforte and the impracticalities of glass music when discussing the armonica’s demise. Re-addressing the question of why the armonica never regained popularity after the eighteenth century by including the less sensational subject of the economic impact of piano production, allows for a fuller view to be drawn.

Christopher Marsh, Richard Leppert, and Peter Holman discuss the role of music in society and its historic shift away from prescribed theological symbolism towards secular audible stimulant. Transcripts from parish registers detail the increase in concert culture from 1640s – 1700 which include the exceptionally rare records of female instrumentalists such as Moll Cutpurse and other singer/musicians at a time when women were not even present on parish registers. Marsh discusses the musician’s unique place in society and the mobility of common performers to infiltrate elite circles as entertainers and teachers. Also of: music education; virginals and virginity; woman’s use of music as a “romantic lure”; marriage and loss of music; and the fear of feminization for men. In referencing numerous etiquette manuals and education guides, they expose a conventional view of femininity, as that which created paradoxes for feminine domesticity and an increased anxiety over women’s education. They write of the prevailing fear


24 Marsh, 136.

of social suicide for overly-educated daughters who might endeavor to enter the public sphere, and of the economic implications of un-marriageability. Holman and Leppert are valuable sources for the names of other female performers (particularly those of ‘exotic’ instruments), with whom these glass-playing protagonists had shared experiences. Male players of glass instruments cannot be separated from this study any more than players of instruments associated with the other sex – or ‘cross-players’. Melding the experiences of instrumentalists on both sides helps us understand how female glass musicians gained audiences. Holman tells us that Anne Ford set out to play just about every instrument except the harpsichord (that bastion of chaste domestic confinement made compulsory by every parent prospecting for their daughters’ marriageability), and was well-known for her viol de gamba playing. Marianne Davies publicly played several instruments including the “unseemly”26 phallic German Flute – instruments played by the mouth were typically taboo for women. Challenging the societal dictate for women to present a visual image of propriety or “perfect music,”27 they moved from one instrument that courted controversy to another. They made the brave, or perhaps common-sense decisions, to profit from glass music in ways that they were already comfortable with – in other words, they were on the road to expanding female public instrumental performance long before they opted to play the haunting voice-like “glassychord”.28

Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music discusses the “rigid dualism of male/female spheres”29 within much musicological writing leading up and into the 1990s. The authors urge historians to comprehend the “complex power of interlocking relations

26 Ibid.
28 Charles James, Bristol Journal, 1762. “The celebrated glassy-chord, invented by Mr. Franklin of Philadelphia: who has greatly improved the musical glasses, and formed them into a compleat instrument to accompany the voice; capable of a thorough bass, and never out of tune.”
between women and men and between women and women, and how women create private 
performing spaces for themselves in larger mixed-sex public arenas.” 30 Heather Hadlock’s article 
*Sonorous Bodies* argues that the musical glasses epitomized the gendered musical instrument for 
women confined to a male-prescribed world but falls short of discussing an integrated performance 
circuit and some of the more intentional aspects of these women’s lives to understand how glass 
instrumentalists (and consumption of their music), altered the construction and confinements of 
feminine gendering. Contemporary writings such as: Linda Phyllis Austern’s “For, Love's a Good 
Musician: Performance, Audition, and Erotic Disorders in Early Modern Europe,”31 Mirrriam 
Hart’s “Hardly an Innocent Diversion: Music in the Life and Writings of Jane Austen,”32 and M. 
Scheuermann’s, “Her Bread To Earn: Women, Money, and Society from Defoe to Austen,”33 complete 
the list of gender literature cited in this paper which discusses feminine public identity 
through a wider lens of interlocking private and public spheres. Their attention to the domestic 
realm helps to illustrate a Zeitgeist for eighteenth century women who reacted to and made a 
“retreat from” a superficial fashion-oriented world; who hedged their bets to find meaning and 
economic agency in a parallel world of music performance. Women who chose to be ‘seen’ 
publicly as musicians challenged the visual norm of expectation for women whose tenuous 
connection to the public realm was often through the consumption of fashion.

Much has been written about Anne Ford. The luxury of access to numerous reviews, 
correspondence, her own self-referencing writing, along with several more recent studies of her 

---

31 Linda Phyllis Austern, “‘For, Love's a Good Musician’: Performance, Audition, and Erotic Disorders in Early 
32 Mirriam F. Hart, *Hardly an Innocent Diversion: Music in the Life and Writings of Jane Austen*, (Ohio University, 
1999).
33 M. Scheuermann, *Her Bread To Earn: Women, Money, and Society from Defoe to Austen*, (Lexington: The 
life, afford a real opportunity to get to know her. Ford’s *The School for Fashion in Two Volumes*[^34] is a satirical, semi-auto-biographical novel used by Peter Holman in *Anne Ford Revisited*[^35] to study Anne Ford’s life. The novel houses many important details about her complex relationships and savvy to remain in the public eye, details which are affirmed by “Mrs Thicknesse” *Public Characters of 1806*,[^36] and used by Holman, Zeitler, Mead, and Rosenthal,[^37] to evidence her business mind. The review written fifty years after the pinnacle of her career provides a rich context of burgeoning public opinion and self-legacy from which to view her efforts. Similarly, her *Sketches of the Lives and Writings of the Ladies of France*,[^38] dedicated to the writer Elizabeth Carter, provides an insight into Ford’s sphere of educated and “notable” women. In *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810*,[^39] Harriet Guest mentions Ford’s connection to the ‘Blue Stocking Group’ (so named for the collective symbolic rejection of fashion by the group to accommodate a member who couldn’t afford formal black stockings), as part of a solidarity felt between women of differing emerging public groups who chose to connect with each other. Carter’s statement to Ford that “I am perfectly that odious thing call’d a notable Woman”[^40] attests to the social separation of women who in the process of creating meaningful public lives, became subject to voyeurism and criticism.

[^36]: “Mrs Thicknesse”, *Public Characters of 1806*, (London: 1806), 84-137.
[^40]: Ibid, 122.
Marianne Davies is the “only woman listed among the ‘Masters and Professors of Music’ in Mortimer’s *London Universal Directory*.”[^1] Marianne Davies’ proactive approach to the music business is well documented in Sven Hostrop Hansell’s *The Solo Cantatas, Motets, and Antiphons of Johann Adolf Hasse*[^2] and Betty Matthew’s *The Davies Sisters, J. C. Bach and the Glass Harmonica*.[^3] Matthews details the ascendency of Marianne and Cecelia Davies’ careers and Marianne’s edgy efforts to remain employed as a glass musician in later life, as she traded on her reputation as “The original player of the instrument of *electrical* music called the Armonica.”[^4] Hyatt King states that the armonica was the “ONLY instrument to have been introduced to the continent of Europe by a native of England.”[^5] He documents the fashion-ability of the instrument citing *Thomas Gray’s Correspondence* and *Jackson’s Oxford Journal 1761*,[^6] and the public fascination with all things related to the United States, epitomized on July 31st, 1762 when the public were invited to a remarkable melding of cultures: “The Cherokee Kings and two chiefs will be at the Great Room in Spring Gdns to hear Miss Davies perform.”[^7]

**Footnotes:**

[^1]: Peter Holman, *The Viol de Gamba in Britain from Purcell to Dolmetsch*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010). Cites: “Masters and Professors of Music” in Mortimer’s *London Universal Directory*. “The universal director” or, “The nobleman and gentleman’s true guide to the masters and professors of the liberal and polite arts and sciences, and of the mechanic arts, manufactures, and trades, established in London and Westminster, and their environs.” to which is added, a list of the booksellers, distinguishing the particular branches of their trade. (London: J. Coote. 1763).


[^4]: *Gazetta Toscana*, (1783), 84, reprinted in Zeitler, 140.

[^5]: Hyatt King, 108.


[^7]: Hyatt King, 108.
the *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*\(^{48}\) and the Rackett Collection\(^{49}\) detail the influence of key figures in Marianne Davies’ life. Letters of Introduction from: the music critic Joseph Baretti; composers - J.C. Bach, the Mozarts, Gluck, Adolf Hasse; and Mrs Garrick, all reveal the extent to which networking, particularly within elite Catholic circles, empowered this young talented Irish woman to venture out into the arena of public musical performance. Zeitler and Mead also write of Davies’ acquaintance with the Mozarts,\(^{50}\) and her final correspondences with Franklin and last-ditch efforts to revive her career. Her approach to networking and her relationship with Franklin is the quintessential mark of her career-mindedness – akin to Ford’s eager self-publicity, or Kirchgassner’s alignment with composers and glass instrument makers.

Marianne Kirchgassner appears to have achieved the most sustained career success and been met with the least resistance due to her masterful performances and sterling reputation occurring at the height of glass music’s popularity in Germany towards the end of the eighteenth century. Kirchgassner’s odyssey throughout Europe undertaken with the publisher Heinrich Bossler is well-documented by Mead, Zeitler and King. Bossler’s eulogy testifies to the praises she enjoyed throughout her life. It begins: “Thanks to your magic playing, Muse of the armonica! A young Saint Cecilia!”\(^{51}\) Kirchgessner accrued great wealth from her ten years of glass music tours and her association with Mozart led to three compositions (one unfinished) specifically for her and the armonica. Mozart’s Adagio in C Major, K.356, Mozart’s Adagio & Rondo in C Major,


K.617\textsuperscript{52} are also catalogued by Mozart, and Kirchgassner wrote of them in the \textit{Vienna Journal} for their premier. The symbiosis of composer and performer to promote and publish new works is a recurring theme for Kirchgassner, as illustrated by her performances with Haydn in London and of numerous works which were written for her by other major composers - all of whom she knew personally. Zeitler’s work provides the most comprehensive assessment of Kirchgassner’s perceived perfection and artistry. Reviews, announcements, letters, lists of her concerts and their promotion all attest to her main selling point – that of sheer virtuosity - her ability to play fast pieces instead of the “bare, ponderous, melancholy adagios with individual howling notes.”\textsuperscript{53} Everything is here – her publicity, self-promotion, hype, celebrity, and selling her style of armonica playing which broke away from previous performers.

\textbf{Anne Ford}

Little is known of the female Glass musicians included in Hyatt’s \textit{The Musical Glasses and Glass Harmonic} - of Miss Taylor who auctioned her “musical glasses in 4 large crates at Puttick & Simpson, or the well-known Mrs Shard of Portman Square, whose “performance on the Musical Glasses was unrivalled,”\textsuperscript{54} or of Mrs Wilkinson - a “wire-dancer and player of the musical glasses” who performed at Sadlers Wells in 1755.\textsuperscript{55} These women and others have unfortunately slipped into the shadows of glass music history just as others have stepped forward. Anne Ford - of whom we now know a great deal, began her career as a singer and player of the \textit{viol de gamba} along with

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{52}Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, \textit{Adagio und Rondo KV 617 fur Glasharmonika (Klavier), Flote, Oboe, Viola, Violoncello}. Ed. Henrik Wiese. (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 2001). Original source: Autograph score, preserved in the British Library, London (from the Stefan Zweig collection). Also, Mozart’s entry into his thematic catalogue: den 23\textsuperscript{rd} May (1791).
  \item \textsuperscript{53}Zeitler, 162.
  \item \textsuperscript{54}King, 39.
  \item \textsuperscript{55}Wroth’s \textit{London Pleasure Gardens of the Eighteenth Century}, reprinted in King.
\end{itemize}
other unconventional instruments, long before she was introduced to the musical glasses. The only daughter of wealthy and well-connected parents (her Uncle Dr. Ford was physician to the Hanover royal family), Anne’s education spared no expense, and she quickly showed an aptitude for music and a compelling desire to perform it in public. Music education undertaken as a necessary asset for marriageability, an ornament to men, and a worthy investment, also often posed a dilemma for parents. Etiquette books, and educational writers who condemned “too much learning, or access to the wrong subjects”, which “would bring even worse results” by posing a threat to social boundaries, make Anne Ford’s journey seem even more extraordinary. The limitations of women’s music education is exposed by calculating the amount of countless hours they spent practicing and just how accomplished some of these women must have been. Many of them eventually became married to men who hated music. The phenomenon in England of musically accomplished women who abandoned music once married was observed by Jane Austen in Emma, “for married women, you know – there is a sad story against them, in general. They are but too apt to give up music” or George Colman’s The Musical Lady which has the lines: “I dare say this passion for music is but one of the irregular appetites of virginity; you hardly ever knew lady so devoted to her harpsichord, but she suffered it to go out of tune after matrimony.” For women like Ford, marriage was a dire threat to their passionate involvement with music, and it is hardly surprising, therefore, that Ford notably chose to avoid the instrument most symbolic of feminine domestic confinement - the harpsichord, or that she rejected every proposal made to her until she was thirty years of age.

56 Leppert, Music and Image, 36.
57 Leppert, 87.
59 George Colman’s The Musical Lady, cited in Leppert, The Sight of Sound, 44.
Peter Holman, contests the prevailing view that Anne’s choice to play the \textit{viol de gamba} was scandalous\textsuperscript{61} and attests to the recorded numbers of female \textit{viol de gamba} players and of the rapidly levelling playing field of musicianship which came to view women and men as players of equal stature.\textsuperscript{62} Increases in publishing and literacy; instrument manufacturing; and publicly held musical meetings began to draw talented young women into an amateur/professional dimension already primed by female vocalists.\textsuperscript{63} The \textit{Daily Universal Register} Feb 10\textsuperscript{th}, compared Anne to the great \textit{Viol} player Carl Friedrich Abel (1723-1787) and reviewed her as:

“The best performer on the \textit{Viol di Gamba} now in England …she was his equal [Abel]…her compositions possess a degree of science, taste, and delicacy, which the best of Mr Abel’s productions never excelled.” \textsuperscript{64}

Ford’s addition of glass music to her repertoire and reviews of her “powerful” performances, suggest that Ford chose the glasses, not because they symbolized the “ultimate feminine instrumental paradigm”\textsuperscript{65}, but because they offered up an opportunity to gain recognition and stature as a performer. The fashion-ability of the instrument is well documented from this time with praise and fascination for its unusual sound like: “a cherubim in a box”\textsuperscript{66} as Thomas Gray writes in 1761.

\textsuperscript{61}Zeitler, 78.
\textsuperscript{62}Holman states Miss Marshall from Nottingham played a 5-string violincello in 1774 and other viol de gamba players: Mrs Jilt, Elizabeth Herbert, Lady Elizabeth Spencer, Samuel Pepys’s wife Elizabeth and their acquaintances and, of course, Anne Ford. He lists eleven other players: Grisie Baillie, Lady Katherine Boyd, Jean Chein, Elizabeth Herbert Countess of Pembroke, Mrs Lowther, Sarah Ottey, Anne Owen, Margaret Sinkler, Lavinia Spencer Viscountess Althorp, Georgiana Countess Spencer and Christina Steffkins. 239.
\textsuperscript{63}Marsh, 156.
\textsuperscript{64}Holman, 176.
\textsuperscript{65}Hadlock, 507.
\textsuperscript{66}Thomas Grays’ Correspondence edited by Toynbee and Whibley, 3 vol.1935, and Jackson’s Oxford Journal 1761. Gray’s letter to James Brown no. 309.
Anne Ford emulated those literary women portrayed by Dafoe and Austen, who broke social stereotypes as economically capable human beings, and who rejected the evaporative instability of “snaring husbands” to achieve financial security for themselves. Autonomous and intelligent, Ford saw the potential to prosper by defying “society’s definition” of available means to earn money. Anne’s Ford’s *Instructions for Playing on the Musical Glasses* written in 1761 and found in Franklin’s *Papers*, shows her intent to promote the business of glass music. The front page of her *Instructions* appeals to a consumer market of amateur musicians who might learn how to play the glasses “in a few days, if not in a few hours.” Inside the manual she states that:

---

69 Ibid, 42.
“any lady, who can play or sing (but more particularly the later) will be furnished with an instrument, in itself of no great expence: an instrument, that not only sets off the voice with greater advantage than any other: and if I was to say, will assist and improve the voice.”

Anne also describes how to build and play the instrument, and of her plans to redesign it with keys, fifteen years before Franklin reinvented the instrument (her notes were found amongst Franklin’s and Thomas Jefferson’s papers suggesting a wide circulation of the booklet):

“I have consulted an ingenious Organ-Builder who is very confident he can give the same Touch to these Glasses and cause it to be done by the Keys, as on an Harpsichord: and I have employed him to make me an Organ with Glass Notes instead of Pipes, which I have

---

71 Anne Ford’s Instructions for Playing on the Musical Glasses, 1761. Title page reprinted in Zeitler, 93.
72 Ibid, Title page.
some Reason to believe I shall soon produce before the Public: and which, if it answers what the Workman seems confident it will, may be an Instrument that will astonish and delight more than any ever yet performed on.”

Ford’s semi-autobiographical novel *School for Fashion* houses appendices of all concerts given and an inventory of the musical supplement to *Lessons and Instructions for playing on the Guitar*. This supplement happens to be the exact same supplement included in *Instructions for Playing on the Musical Glasses* showing musical plates of popular tunes all written in the key of C major. Their playability again show that Anne is targeting an amateur market. Ads from *The Public Advertiser*, reviews, and many illustrations can be found in *Public Characters of 1806*, an annual compilation of biographies of people in the public eye, printed between 1798-1809 corroborate Anne’s life as *Euterpe* in her autobiographical novel. *Euterpe* maps out her intentions to organize a subscription concert series:

“My plan, Madam,…is to hire the little Opera house for three nights only, and a band of the very best musicians in town, when I will perform myself upon four different instruments, and sing some English and Italian airs; but I do not intend to have any vocal performer. – I am advised to have no Ticket under half-a-guinea, which will of course conduct those who honour me with their presence to any part of the house, as gallery and

---


75 “Mrs. Thicknesse”, *Public Characters of 1806*. (London: 1806), 84-137. There is also no record of Franklin ever meeting Ford but Thicknesse had written to him in support of the American Revolution (costing him $10,000). No reply survives.

boxes will be put at equal price, for which reason I have ordered a thousand Tickets to be printed. (Vol. 1, 172-173) 77

“Mrs Thicknesse” published in Public Characters of 1806 fifty years after Anne was the “most accomplished woman of her day,”78 assures the reader that School for Fashion is “founded on fact, and contains an exact transcript of what occurred in the history of the bon ton of a former day.”79

The Public Advertiser and Public Characters80 detail Anne’s: “round of visits; they found that she seldom had less than five guineas, and oftener twenty, for a single ticket! with the result that she made forty guineas in a morning and 1,500 pounds overall.”81 – A fantastic sum in those days! School for Fashion details many of the concerts and theatrical productions she organized, and houses important details about her successful subscription concert series. Anne’s mutual arrangement with Sheridan to play after his lecture series in Cox’s Auction Room shows her competitiveness to gain audiences for glass music while she vied with her former teacher Schuman for popularity ratings. Holman describes Anne’s rivalry with Schuman as a “good example of the jealousy that an upper-class female amateur musician could arouse in a male professional.”82

Between 1761 and 1764 competition for audiences intensified during: “a spate of daily exhibition performances given by young ladies and self-publicising teachers.”83 Women saw the initiatives of others as opportunities for innovative approaches to concertizing. A review which

78 “Mrs Thicknesse”, Public Characters of 1806, (London: 1806), 84-137.
79 Public Characters of 1806, (London: 1806), 84-137.
80 Public Characters of 1806, 96.
81 The Public Advertiser, (vol. 1, 173-174).
82 Holman, 174.
accompanied the illustration by James Gillray entitled “Lieutenant Govenor Gall-Stone”,
documents both the performers and the audience at one of Ford’s concerts. The performance
comprising nine amateurs and eight professors, almost all of whom are men, also interestingly
included of a ‘piano-forte’ - an unusual instrument in 1759 before manufacturing had begun in
1760. Ford put herself at the cutting edge of musical innovation and at the epicenter of the music-
going public. Public Characters states that “as she had lived in habits of familiarity with the first
nobility, she conceived the idea of rendering their patronage subservient to her scheme.” The
unwelcome commotion surrounding some of Anne’s concerts caused by interference from John
Fielding’s onerous Bow St Guards hired by her father, or the counter-efforts of her snubbed would-
be husband the Earl of Jersey, all served to hype Anne’s public profile.

“All avenues to the Haymarket were occupied by Sir John’s runners…these myrmidons
were dispersed by the late Lord Tankerville [Officer to the Royal Guard]…Prince Edward
condescended to drink a cup of tea with her in the green-room…the Duke of Montagu,
stood behind his chair, and soon after handed her to the stage door, where she was received
with bursts of applause…when Miss Ford, who was dressed in white satin and pearls, sang
one of Handel’s oratorio songs, beginning ‘Return, O God of Hosts! Relieve thy servant in
distress!’ she displayed such exquisite sensibility, that many of her friends actually burst
into tears.”

School for Fashion alludes to the problematic relationship with her father and her jousting
match with the Earl of Jersey (humorously portrayed as the Earl of Guernsey). In 1758, the Earl

84 “Lieutenant Govenor Gall-Stone”, Inspired by Alecto; - or – The Birth of Minerva (Feb 15, 1790), reprinted in
Zeitler 88.
85 Holman, 170.
86 Public Characters, 95-96. Cited in Holman, 171.
of Jersey (whom Gainsborough also painted and Anne met during her time in Bath), offered to pay Ann 800 pounds per annum to “keep her” as his wife, a nice offer, but one she could now afford to turn down. Their public slanging match worthy of a modern tabloid gossip column and her father’s conjecture all made her more determined to “turn her talents to advantage and independence.”  

The extent to which Anne’s father “abhorred the idea that his daughter should appear on the stage for any period, however short, or under any circumstances however favourable,” is shown by his attempts to sabotage her concerts, even ones with Royal attendance. Her reasons for performing publicly were now driven by a rebellious determination and expediency in lieu of impending familial severance. Her passion for music serviced a challenge to the broader question of social expectation and marriageability. Ford’s confrontation with the Earl of Jersey, is a case in point. In A Letter from Miss Ford to a Person of Distinction, Anne resolves to “consolidate her reputation as a musician and singer by moving from private to public.” Her rebuff includes a comic illustration showing a caged songbird which alludes to her prospective confinement in marriage as a female performer.

Image from “A Letter From Miss F.d to Person of Distinction”

---

87 Holman, 170.
88 Holman, 171.
89 Ibid.
The letter sold 500 copies within the first few days and *The Gentleman’s Magazine* treated readers to long excerpts of the pamphlets along with a third rebuff by Miss Ford to “A Person of Distinction” which prolonged the public confrontation. Jersey responded:

“let us wonder…that she should, with determined resolution, renounce her father and her father’s house; correct her passions, her pity, and every female weakness; resign her views of wealth and pleasure, of grandeur and preeminence; and endeavor to earn the bread she eats in the humble station of a *public* singer.”

The ultimate put-down is the use of the phrase “public singer.” Jersey concludes: “Never appeal to the Public on any occasion”- a view heaped upon women considered to be of loose moral fiber. Ford, however, was willing to risk public ridicule in response to attempts to ruin her career, which had set alight her determination to succeed. Her comment exposes a shifting view of public acceptance for female performance following gains already made by women vocalists:

“I have the satisfaction to find many sensible people of opinion, that a young woman may sing in public, or (to use your Lordship’s words) be a public singer, with virtue and innocence; and be looked upon in as favourable a light as a surgeon or midwife, who can pay his court to a man of quality, who he knows had designs against the honour of his niece.”

Her rejection of marriage was a powerful statement of feminine dissidence and determination, in line with other women (Mary Wollstonecraft 1759-1797) who saw women separated into

---

91 Rosenthal, 653.
92 William Zeitler, *The Glass Harmonica: The Music and The Madness*, 78. Zeitler opines that Ford’s use of the Viol de gamba is scandalous but as Holman points out, there were many female players of the instrument who played it side-saddle.
93 Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, (Boston: Peter Edes, 1792). 158-160. She writes of the “misemployed talents” of middle-class women, corruption of femininity by consumerism, and of the need to
categories of unmarried vs. married. On another level, Ford’s writing provided literary catharsis for someone challenging social convention and who was subjected to so much interference. It reveals Ford’s view of herself as seer and sayer – as commentator and formulato of her own life’s journey. As a writer she adjoined to another emerging public sphere of women’s professionalism. Ford dedicates her first edition of *Sketches of the Lives and Writings of the Ladies of France*[^94] to “Blue Stocking” writer Elizabeth Carter. Ford writes of the “superior excellence” of Carter’s success that (unlike Ford’s) has arisen out of her middle-class rank and relative obscurity. She admires her “private virtues, and public character”[^96] as something separate from her “personal accomplishments”. Carter writes to fellow writer Montagu of the book saying “Have you seen Mrs. Thicknesse’s book? I have just looked into it, enough to see your name…in a very private party”[^97] – more evidence that Ford directly accessed her own life for the book. Montagu points out the contradiction of “that odious thing call’d a notable woman”[^98] who “might have lived in an age in which we should never have had ye pleasure of seeing our features, or characters, in Pocket books, Magazines, Museums, literary & monthly reviews, Annual registers &c &c &c.”[^99] Montagu makes light of the inner conflict that women might have felt stepping out into the public arena – despite all her successes, Ford herself retreated from the public realm at the age of thirty.

[^97]: Ibid, 121.
[^98]: Ibid, 121.
[^99]: Ibid, 121.
Moralization over the effects of capitalism caused some women to override the “embarrassment of self-display”\(^{100}\) and act out of social duty or moral obligation. Learning was “analogous to riches or ornament” for women like Carter, Ford, and Austen who rejected frivolity and by-passed mainstream conduits to public space, (eg., through consumption of fashion) in carving out public lives that gravitated towards something of meaning and substance. In the case of Ford, her association with other notable women writers, performers, and artists, afforded her a certain amount of solidarity and an emboldened agency to create a meaningful social identity. Unfortunately for Anne, that journey was also fraught with contradiction.

Gainsborough’s own statement about his girls’ education: “I don’t mean to make them only Miss Fords…to be partly admired and partly laughed at, at every tea-table”\(^{101}\) points to some of the very real problems for women who chose public careers - and particularly for women who attempted to embrace and utilize visual publicity which, in turn, subjected them to so much voyeurism and ridicule.\(^ {102}\) Ford’s goal to be ‘seen’ within the public arena plays out in her mutually beneficial association with the painter Thomas Gainsborough. Their association proved to be a veritable meeting of business minds. His systematic pragmatism “about making his name and bringing his work to the attention of the public”\(^{103}\) afforded both he and Ford an ambitious opportunity.

When Handel’s friend Mrs Mary Delany stated: “but I should be very sorry to have any one I loved set forth in such a manner”\(^{104}\) she is referring to Ford who is seated with her legs crossed in

---

\(^{100}\) Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810.* Ford’s letter to Elizabeth Carter, 121.

\(^{101}\) Ibid, 121.


\(^{103}\) Rosenthal, 649.


Gainsborough’s full length portrait. Whether Ford deliberately courted controversy to gain publicity is a mystery, but her challenge to the norm within an existing continuation of tradition stretched the gender dimensions of visual representation. Quoting Louis-Francois Roubiliac’s statue of G.F. Handel in London who is portrayed with crossed legs, Ford’s full length portrait is an “edgy compromise”\(^\text{105}\) between a break with convention and classic portraiture. Ford’s choice of instruments and her approach to publicity, readdresses and revises music production and reception, by challenging former associations for gender. The politics of consumption in mid-century England relate specifically to Anne Ford’s portrait by Gainsborough. If consumption of artwork with musical themes was a “feminine and feminized practice…in a culture that constructed the feminine, and the women confined by that construction,” \(^\text{106}\) then I would argue that Ford knowingly played with that construction to further her publicity. She challenged the “perfect music” of representation in opposition to the dominant ideology of domesticity and marital confinement of female musicianship.

\(^\text{105}\) Ibid.

Susanna Duncombe, *Miss Ford/Mrs Thicknesse*. 107


Gainsborough’s preliminary sketches and drawings by Susanna Duncombe, Giovanni Cipriani and William Hoare, also reveal challenges to the male prescribed code for female representation by showing Anne’s fingers playing her unusual instruments. Unfortunately, none show her playing the musical glasses except for one.

In Gilray’s Lieutenant Governor Gall-Stone (1790) Anne is accompanied by an orchestra of little devils and playing her musical glasses to an audience of boars, one of which is moved to tears. On a balcony to the right, a boar holds a sheet with the words: “Pathetic Ode to Lord Jersey,” and a cherub holds a banner which reads: “St Cecelia’s first appearance at the Little Theatre.”\(^{109}\) The illustration highlights the paradox of celebration and ridicule which permeated Anne’s career. The parody ascribes a new narrative to Gainsborough’s celebratory portrait, - that Ford’s legacy was no longer unquestionable talent and success, but how that success was subordinate to external forces of negative publicity and infamy. Playing the publicity game, ultimately back-fired for Ford.

\(^{109}\) Gilray’s Lieutenant Governor Gallstone (1790), reprinted in Zeitler, 90-91.
\(^{110}\) Ibid, 88 & 90.
and after marrying her best friend’s widower and fellow musician, Philip Thicknesses in 1787 she retreated from public life. Anne is true to Austen-form by giving only one more charity performance. Her later travels throughout Europe which resulted in her internment in a French Convent for the four years of Robespierre’s “Terror” are unfortunately lacking in documentation. She died in England during January of 1824 at the ripe age of eighty-six.

Marianne Davies

Marianne Davies is the “only woman listed among the ‘Masters and Professors of Music’ in Mortimer’s London Universal Directory”¹¹¹ and she is listed as performing the German flute and armonica which was extremely unusual at the time. Many letters found in the Papers of Benjamin Franklin¹¹² and the Rackett Collection¹¹³ detail the influence of key figures in the Marianne and Cecelia Davies’ lives (Cecelia was an accomplished singer). Letters of Introduction from: the music critic Joseph Baretti; composers - J.C. Bach, the Mozarts, Gluck, Adolf Hasse; and Mrs Garrick, all reveal the extent to which networking, particularly within elite Catholic circles, empowered these talented Irish women to venture out into the arena of public musical performance. But it is her relationship with the scientist and amateur musician Benjamin Franklin which characterizes both the rise and fall of Marianne’s career. We know something of their relationship from letters of recommendation¹¹⁴ and from correspondence by Marianne,¹¹⁵ which

---

¹¹¹ Peter Holman, The Viol de Gamba in Britain from Purcell to Dolmetsch, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press), 2010.
¹¹⁴ Sven Hostrup Hansell, The Solo Cantatas, Motets, and Antiphons of Johann Adolf Hasse. Order No. 6706623, (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), 1966.
¹¹⁵ Papers of Benjamin Franklin, Zeitler, 136-140.
reveals her proactive approach to the business of glass music and an intentional alignment with Franklin and his glass armonica, as means to make a living.

Franklin’s friend and Cambridge University & Royal Society colleague Edward Delavel had first exposed him to the charms of glass music during their work together protecting St Paul’s Cathedral from lightning strikes. We don’t know if Franklin also had seen Anne Ford perform but he did own a copy of her Instructions For Playing on the Musical Glasses, and Anne’s good friend and future husband Philippe Thicknesse had written to him pledging support for the American Revolution to the tune of $10,000. Franklin inspired a respect for American ingenuity and his armonica symbolizes the political scope within music production - of new and old worlds in cultural counterpoint with each other.

Franklin’s unbounded enthusiasm to “see the glasses disposed in more convenient form, and brought together in a narrower compass, so as to admit a greater number of tones, and all within reach of hand to a person sitting before the instrument”116 led to his selection of the finest craftsmen and glassmakers, and the construction of a portable instrument employing Newton’s color-coded three octave system. It produced a sound “uncomparably sweet beyond those of any other.”117 The ethereal timbre pitched between 1,000 and 4,000 hertz falls within the range of frequencies that the brain struggles to comprehend in terms of identification and location of sound. The play on this blind spot of the brain gave the instrument its startling other-worldly qualities and magical appeal. Listening to armonica music, it is not hard to imagine how bewildering and futuristic it must have seemed. Before the days of synthesized sound, it is easy to see how Franklin’s published Experiments and Observations on Electricity inspired the related term ‘electrical music’, or how

116 Franklin, cited in Mead, 58.
117 Franklin, cited in Mead, 59.
the instrument was used to enhance seances and phantasmagoria shows. A century later, George Sand’s words “before it became popular” attest to the sensational impact of the instrument at the onset of Davies’ career. Sand writes:

“Everyone knows that the armonica created such a sensation with its appearance in Germany, that the imaginations of poets heard in it supernatural voices, evoked by the celebrants of certain mysteries. For some time this instrument, considered magic before it became popular, was raised by the practitioners of German theosophy to the same divine honor as the lyre among the ancients.”

In letter of B. Franklin to Abbé en: Giambatista Beccaria. July 13, 1762.

---

Unfortunately, no record survives of how or when the prodigious Davies sisters met Franklin, but at some point during 1761, they acquired an armonica from him and Marianne was performing on it regularly from 1762. The *Bristol Journal* announces its premier on Jan 12th, 1762 at the Great Room in Spring Gardens, London - where Marianne also sang, played harpsichord, and played the German flute. “Miss Davies from London, was to perform in the month of January, several favourite airs, English, Scotch and Italian on the Glassy chord accompanied occasionally with the voice and German flute.”

Performing the German flute was a rarity at the time - only Lady Tankerville, listed in *Public Characters* is also credited with playing the instrument. John Essex’s *The Young Ladies Conduct* written in 1772 states the conventional gendered view of feminine instrumental propriety which excluded the flute and hautboy (early oboe) as instruments off-limits to women: “The Harpsichord, Spinet, Lute, and Base Violin, are instruments most agreeable to the Ladies: There are some others that really are unbecoming the Fair Sex; as the Flute, Violin and Hautboy: the last of which is too Manlike, and would look indecent in a Woman’s Mouth.”

Following Anne Ford’s earlier diverse musicianship and compulsion towards unusual instruments, Marianne’s choices enabled her to compete in a challenging performance sphere. Marianne continued performing on Franklin’s newly designed instrument as part of her eclectic performances in Bristol, Bath, and London. *Jackson’s Oxford Journal* for May 29th, 1761 firmly establishes Davies as the original player of Franklin’s instrument when it cites the manufacturer Charles James as: “the person who has been employed in the management of the Glass Machines from the beginning, by the ingenious and well-known inventor (Franklin) which are on the same

---

120 *The Bristol Journal*, 1762, reprinted in Mead, 60.
principles, and guided by the same hand as that played by Miss Davies at Spring Gardens."\textsuperscript{122} It was in Dublin that she began playing the armonica exclusively - a decision perhaps prompted by the legacy of Mr Puckeridge,\textsuperscript{123} the Irish performer and business entrepreneur who had already made a name for himself from his performances on the musical glasses.\textsuperscript{124}

At least at the onset of her career, Davies’ friendship with Franklin was a close one. Her famed armonica performances stemmed from her association with him and her promotion of his prized invention. A symbiotic relationship had developed between them – she publicized his favorite invention and fed Franklin’s amateur interest in music, while he helped to aim and launch her trajectory into the world of female instrumental performance. An attending German tourist writes of the armonica in 1766, that Marianne is “at present the only person to play it with proper perfection; Mr Franklin himself is only musical enough to play it for his own enjoyment.”\textsuperscript{125} Franklin travelled with an armonica everywhere he went for the rest of his life. From between 1763 and 1767 Marianne and her sister Cecelia concertized in Dublin, London and Paris, and as their fame spread the sisters embarked upon a tour of continental Europe in 1768 - keeping in step with Franklin’s own continental celebrity status.

Letters of recommendation housed in the afore-mentioned Rackett Collection had secured the sisters a place at the Hapsburg Royal court in Vienna as music instructors to the royal daughters: Marie-Antoinette of France and Maria Carolina of Naples. Marianne also taught the Empress Maria Theresa how to play the armonica, and this court position led to the booking of a

\textsuperscript{122} Jackson’s Oxford Journal, May 29\textsuperscript{th} 1761. Cited in Zeitler, 131-132.
\textsuperscript{125} Mead, Corey, Angelic Music: The Story of Benjamin Franklin’s Glass Armonica, (New York: Simon & Schuste, 2016), 100.
lifetime. The high point of Marianne’s career arrived with her accompaniment of Adolf Hasse’s Cantata “L’Armonica” during the wedding ceremony of the Archduchess Amalia to Duke Ferdinand of Parma. The cantata set to the words of the poet Pietro Metastasio, was performed on June 27th, and to great acclaim. The words of Metastasio’s poem and a description of Marianne’s performance were found amongst Franklin’s papers, presumably sent to him by Marianne. When Franklin read the Cantata’s recitative he must have been filled with a pride that his instrument and its most accomplished performer could extract such lofty words:

“Sister be bold. Fit your skillful hand to the spinning crystals; and rouse their rare seductive harmony. I too, with song shall try to imitate their amorous tenor. Who could repress applause and good wishes, now that Amalia’s languid, tenuous, plaintive tone of the new harmonic instrument gives you pause,” 126

Her high-rolling success at court aligned Marianne with the gravitational pull of music concertizing and publishing which drew her into other elite musical circles. Moving around, as she, Ford, and Kirchgassner all did, provided opportunities for reinvention and for masquerading behind their “evolving public personas.” 127 Mozart’s letter to his wife dated Sept 21st 1771 states: “You will surely remember Miss Davies with her harmonica.” 128 Leopold wrote on July 21st 1773; “Herr von Messmer, at whose house we lunched on Monday, played to us on Miss Davie’s harmonica or glass instrument, and played very well. It cost him about 50 ducats and it is very beautifully made,” and again on Aug 12th: “Do you know that Herr von Messmer plays Miss Davies Harmonica unusually well? He is the only person in Vienna who has learnt it and he possesses a

126 Sven Hostrup Hansell, *The Solo Cantatas, Motets, and Antiphons of Johann Adolf Hasse*. Order No. 6706623 (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), 1966.
much finer instrument than Miss Davies does. Wolfgang too has played upon it. How I should like to have one!” 129 Marianne Davies had landed at the melting point of this experimental musical world met by a collision of sound, innovation, and opportunity.

After seeing Marianne perform, the German inventor, composer, and writer Karl Leopold Rollig, (also based in Vienna), redesigned the instrument and attempted to give its sound more mystery by concealing the treadle and flywheel. He also experimented with different glass-makers and unsuccessfully added a keyboard in the belief that contact with the rotating glass bells had made him unwell. His regular performances further popularized the instrument and he also published stories of ceremonial uses for the armonica and anecdotes of its supernatural effects. Rollig’s first letter in his collection of stories published in 1787: Concerning the Armonica: A Fragment, describes the possession of a girl who is enchanted by its irresistible spell-like charms, his fourth letter reads like a macabre tale of audible molestation: “After her first movement I stopped playing, then continued again quietly; but she started to scream, jumped up and ran away as fast as she could.” 130 Rollig believed that there was “never an instrument more important for the future” 131 and commercialized its magical properties by issuing a hazard warning to his readers that the armonica “is no instrument to be used for just sheer amusement; it is worth much more.” 132

129 Ibid.
130 Rollig’s Ein Fragment, reprinted in Zeitler, 150-158.
131 Ibid, in Mead, 120.
132 Ibid, in Mead, 121.
Rollig’s newly designed armonica without a foot pedal, hidden glass bells and candles to enhance its magical effects, resembles an ordinary writing desk.

Rollig who had become unwell, was convinced of its addictive and dangerous effects to health, and stressed its dangers to his readership when he discovered that Marianne Davis and the organist Phillip Frick had also been suffering from nervous illness. As well as reinforcing the suspicion that glass music could make you unwell, Rollig’s tri-factored sale of science, supernatural, and showmanship, promoted the other-worldly qualities of armonica music for which Mozart family friend - Anton Mesmer best became known.

Mesmer believed, as did Franklin, that the mythical and metaphysical qualities of armonica music could cure the melancholy and the sick – a paradoxical cure-all with the potential to also do harm. Mesmer, influenced by Newton’s theory of gravity, played glass music during his ‘animal magnetism’ experiments to encourage the flow of animal magnetism fluid which was “communicated, propagated, and reinforced by sound.”133 The prescribed dose of armonica music

133 Anton Mesmer, Memoire sur la decouverte du magnetism animal, (1779), cited in Mead, 150. Mesmer initially called his experiments “animal gravity” and outlines the principles of animal magnetism and of the single bodily fluid constituting the five different states of gravity, fire, light, magnetism, and electricity which Mesmer believed was responsible for bodily health - and the flow of which, could be manipulated by music.
would escalate a patient’s emotional state to a peak of nervous excitability from which he could begin to heal them. On one occasion his technique is said to have overcome his assistant:

“Mesmer experimented on [d’Elson] by playing on the glass harmonica…and conveying animal magnetism to him. D’Elson was obliged to beg for mercy about the music, presumably because of the discomfort caused by the charge of animal magnetism which it carried.”

Another doctor attending one of Mesmer’s seances states: “Mr Mesmer then seated him near the harmonica; he had hardly begun to play when my friend was affected emotionally, trembled, lost his breath, changed color and felt pulled to the floor.”

---

135 Words of Frank Pattie, Ibid, 337.
How all of this relates to Marianne Davies is to highlight the sensationalism and heightened emotional response to armonica music that was prevalent during the peak of its popularity. During the ‘Age of Sensibility’ exaggerated emotional affectation was elevated to cult-like status, as impassioned spontaneity characterized the romantic age. The Prussian novelist E.T.A. Hoffman’s fictional music critic Kapelmeister Johannes Kreisler describes a man “totally obsessed”\(^{137}\) by the armonica and his servant who is equally “possessed”\(^{138}\) by its sound. Heather Hadlock writes of the Armonica as the ultimate symbol of woman’s “sensuality” and “delicacy,”\(^{139}\) and of the social anxiety surrounding the stimulation of a feminine-sounding instrument, often played by women, to seduce the listener and cause physical effect.

Angelika Kauffman at the armonica. Note the female player’s lower body is concealed behind a curtain to hide her treading leg.\(^{140}\)

\(^{138}\) Ibid.
\(^{140}\) Claude Desrais, *L’Harmonica*, (1819), reprinted in Zeitler, 137.
The peak of Davies’ career occurred at the apex of the armonica’s publicity during a time when public outpourings of affected emotion and expression were embraced. Davies’ pragmatic application of armonica performance within this intangible environment uncannily fed her success. She perfectly timed the cultivation of her public persona to realize her potential as the original artist of a unique instrument. Through her network of royal patrons, composers, musicians, and of course Franklin, Davies rode the wave of sensationalized and yet celebrated female performance.

Her relationship with the Mozarts, Mesmer, and Rollig, indicate an integrated performance environment during the second half of the eighteenth century when female musicians “saw gender in a more complex pluralistic and even idiosyncratic way than has been assumed previously.”

Women and men both prospered from glass instruments “on-the-basis of their good sense” and knowingly manipulated audiences in different ways. As manager of her income, bills, tallies, orders, banking, repertoire, and music performance – Davies’ defied that “Woman’s potential for productive work is limited only by society’s definition of what means for earning money are available to her.” She transcended gendered and professional barriers by existing in a mobile space of viable economic opportunity.

The success of another grueling six years touring Europe’s finest capitals and performing to elite audiences, came to a faltering halt in Florence when the sisters experienced a double blow in the death of their father and in Davies’ own declining health. Writing to Franklin in Paris on
January 29th 1778, the sisters reached out once again to the “universally ador’d” and “ever dear and worthy friend and benefactor Doctor Franklin.” Cecelia on behalf of her ailing sister writes:

“I should think myself guilty of an unpardonable neglect were I not to take an opportunity of waiting on the ingenious inventor of the divine armonica. My sister continually expresses her infinite obligations to you sir, and as she is just at present able to go out and is extremely desirous to have the pleasure of seeing you.”

Their meeting with Franklin is presumed to be the last, and Davies’ two letters to Benjamin Franklin five years later in 1783 reveal much about the increasingly precarious circumstances of their lives. Her letter dated April 26th, 1783 attests to the increasing “losses and vexations” of their situation. She writes openly, as only a close friend would, honestly appraising her depression which resulted from: the loss of their mother; the nervous complaints which had her confined to bed for twelve months; the subsequent declines of lucrative invitations to perform; the loss of their investments to an unscrupulous person; and the death of their former benefactress the Empress Maria Theresa – she summarizes: “that for my part I am heartily disgusted of the world.” Pathos aside, she beseeches Franklin to do her a favor as she mapped out her plans for a come-back:

“I am destin’d to begin the world again, and that at a time when I did suppose my career of life was at an end. However, since it must be so, I have once more got in practice of the armonica, and make no doubt that if I could travel with it to different capital cities and courts as I have done before, ‘twould be well worth my while… When I consider that I have the prerogative (thro’ your goodness) of being the first public performer on that

144 Marianne Davies’ letter to Benjamin Franklin, April 26, 1783. Papers of Benjamin Franklin; (Yale University. 25:543), Reprinted in Mead, 136.
145 Ibid, reprinted in Zeitler, 137.
146 Ibid, 137.
147 Ibid, 138.
instrument; and that even yet, by all I can get information of, no one else has made much progress on it, tho; some attempt it; these reflections give me courage.”

She goes on to describe her anxiety over the potential damage of the instrument and how she cannot imagine “roving” without the protection of her parents. Caught between a determined sense of self-purpose and fear of the future she appeals to Franklin’s altruistic instincts and writes: “Were I to be in Paris under your protection!” In the crux of her letter she directly confronts his power to influence her former student Queen Marie-Antoinette of France whom she hopes will grant her an annual income. Despite her unique place as a commoner possessing a superior technical ability who had gained access to elite circles as Marie-Antoinette’s teacher, she felt she could not write to the Queen directly – thus exposing her reliance on Franklin’s influence.

Franklin was either put off by her assertiveness or their correspondence was lost, but no post was taken up in Paris. Davies wrote a second letter on October 17th, 1783 which reiterated the proposal with one additional pertinent request: “that no other Person particularly in the musical profession should have it in their power to boast of having instructions from Doctor Franklin either for making one of these Instruments or for the method of playing on it.”

Davies reviews the special circumstances her successful career as the performer of the armonica and her self-aggrandizement ignores other influential players of the instrument. Having failed to hear back from Franklin, and perhaps out of frustration, she resorts to placing an ad in the Tuscan Gazette during May of the same year. Her deliberate and desperate exploitation of their association is never more clearly in mind here, as it reads:

149 Ibid, 139.
150 Marianne Davies’ letter to Franklin, October 17, 1783. Papers of Benjamin Franklin; (Yale University. 25:543) Reprinted in Zeitler, 139.
“The original player of the instrument of *electrical* music called the Armonica, in view of her imminent departure from this city, informs the public that those who wish to hear her in their homes can be served if they will give notice a day in advance.”151

Cashing in on Franklin’s experiments with electricity - the rotating bells of the armonica somewhat resembled the electrostatic generators of the day which used silk rubbing rotating glass to produce electricity152 - she re-sensationalized the armonica in the hope that it would help to ‘jump-start’ her career. The sad fact is that Davies’ career failed to regain ground or even generate enough income to return home to England. With help the sisters were eventually able to return to England where by 1797 they were to take up posts as music teachers with the Rackett family. Marianne Davies died sometime between the years of 1816-19.

**Marianne Kirchgressner**

Kirchgressner’s strategy to work with the composers of the day, and her alignment with technicians, both testify to her business acumen and a similarly equalized gender environment. It is likely that the popularity of armonicas in Germany led to the engineering of better ones, and Kirchgressner may have had a superior instrument to Davies which enabled her to play in more virtuosic way.153 Her career illustrates a shifting context for music in enlightened post-French revolutionary Europe, that saw a broader reception of music as stimulating entertainment, and a trend towards bravura solo performance. By all accounts, her ability to hype the technical aspects of her performance and to sell her virtuosity to an amateur market - she self-aggrandizes her talent in no uncertain terms - “earned Kirchgressner a small fortune.”154

151 *Gazetta Toscana*, 1783:84 reprinted in Zeitler, 140.
152 Zeitler, 140.
153 Zeitler, 164.
She was born in 1769 to musical parents, and after contracting small pox at the age of four had become blind. Her extreme musical sensitivity was noted at an early age when she was sent to Joseph Schmittbauer the music director of Karlsruhe and owner of an armonica building factory for armonica lessons. A decade later, at the age of twenty-one, her technical ability and repertoire, learned by copy-cat memorization, equipped her to take on a solo concert tour which traversed all the European capitals between England and Russia. The publisher Heinrich Bossler and his wife Sophie became her tour managers, and Bossler states that her temperament that “was free from all artist moods, obliging everyone whom she could please with her talents” afforded her great celebrity and respect. Reviews document her as the “famous blind virtuosa” whose “heavenly playing on this extraordinarily precious instrument delighted everyone with pure harmony to our ears, utterly exceeding all our expectations.” A three-month spell in Vienna capitalized on the burgeoning scene of music publishing, solo performance, and occurred at the peak of armonica popularity.

Kirchgessner’s arrival in Vienna of spring 1791 connected her with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in a world that was revolving around musical innovation. Her inspirational playing resulted in three subsequent compositions including his last chamber work *Adagio und Rondo KV 617 fur Glasharmonika (Klavier), Flote, Oboe, Viola, Violoncello.* The Mozart-armonica connection had begun in Milan 1771, when Mozart was 14 and he later played the Davies’ armonica at Anton Mesmer’s home in Vienna in 1773, but his affection for Kirchgessner a fellow small pox survivor, (Mozart himself had made a miraculous recovery from the disease at the age of ten with sight

---

156 Mead, 112.
intact), can be seen in the compositions which he tailored for her. The quintet for armonica, viola, cello, flute and oboe, was premiered at the Karntnertor Theater on Aug 18th and Kirchgessner wrote her own preview of the performance for the Vienna Journal.158

“I deem it my duty to respond with all the lies in my power to the exhortation, so flattering to me, to allow myself to be heard on the armonica once more. I shall therefore, with most gracious permission already obtained from I. & R, hold another grand musical concert next week before my departure hence to Berlin, at the I. & R. Karntnertor Theater, and play on the armonica an entirely new and surpassingly beautiful concert quintet accompanied by wind instruments, by Herr Kapellmeister Mozart….to persuade every connoisseur of music entirely that the armonica is the noblest of musical instruments, exciting not sad and melancholy, but rather glad, gentle and elevated feelings. The forthcoming poster will give further details.”159

Mozart’s second solo Adagio for the armonica was also promoted in Kirchgessner’s preview and advertisements - as a solo piece tailored for her abilities, it attests to her center-stage appeal. She felt it her moral and public duty to honor her audience’s acceptance and praise, and by promising them another “grand” concert, she both reciprocated their generosity and cashed in on her success. She set out to “persuade” concert goers of the armonica’s full potential, and to break with its former associations with slow melancholic music. If the armonica was falling from grace in public opinion, then Kirchgessner’s campaign certainly served to suspend the fall, even if only in the short term.

159 Quoted in Deutsch, 399-400, reprinted in Zeitler, 168.
If Mozart did play with her during that grand concert, it would have been his final appearance before his death in 1791. Nonetheless their mutual arrangement to perform “entirely new” compositions and promote them as such, indicates the dualism and urgency between master composer and prodigy performer to create cutting edge works for a market eager to consume them. Kirchgessner epitomizes the protagonist of a malleable secular world of instrumental music as she dictates her terms to a seasoned Viennese concert-going audience keen to hear something new. Thirteen measures of a final, unfinished composition lay on Mozart’s desk after his death. Struggling to come to terms with her financial predicament, Constanze Mozart proposed to the publishers Breitkopf & Hartel that the former two pieces were to be published as piano pieces – indicating that the revolutionary keyboards were starting to exceed the armonica in popularity. An edition of the work published in 1799 mentions the piano as an alternative to the armonica – by which time the impractical armonica had been forced into full decline. E.T.A. Hoffman discusses a Beethoven piano trio played on a Streicher four-pedal piano which required the use of the Harmonica or “Una corda” pedal in combination with the soft and sustaining pedals to create a sound recalling the “Aeolian harp or armonica.” The success of the pianoforte to create a sound “enticing it into a magical world of curious presentiments” validates Hoffman’s view of glass instruments which were incapable of competing with the pianoforte’s variety of depths and tones, and so contributing to the armonica’s decline in use.

The de facto use of pianos did little to undermine Kirchgessner’s career, however, as she continued to answer to her audience and blaze a profitable trail across Europe. A strategic trip to

---

162 Hoffman, 418.
England in 1794 to play in Salomon’s highly popular Haydn series, paid off with two lauded performances in both the sixth and ninth concerts of the series. One critic wrote: “The only novelty of the evening worth mentioning was the performance of Mademoiselle KirchGessner on the Harmonica.”163 While in London, Kirchgessner responded to criticisms that the sound of the armonica was failed to be heard above that of the accompanying musicians, by commissioning a German craftsman named Froschle to craft her a new instrument. It received a review in 1795:

“She has a completely new armonica by Mr. Froschle (one of the first mechanics of London, which if I may say so, is in truth first in his craft) leaving behind all well-known instruments by far, and with good reason it deserves to be called the most perfect musical instrument. Mr Rath B. looked for the most simple, flexible resonator he could attach, whereby the armonica, especially the bass, has an uncommon strength so that now the soul — elevating effect of the deep tones affects each listener unbelievably with true charm. With this improvement, the instrument, which has a reputation of being gentle, noble in tone — and the delicacy of the inimitable performance of Miss Kirchgessner still makes abundantly clear its excellent tone — is all the more full and free.”164

Like others who redesigned the instrument, efforts to improve the resonance of the box surrounding the glasses and to give the tone more depth, were competing with the new pianoforte which had accomplished just that.

Kirchgessner’s success in England continued following the marketability of her new-improved armonica. The London Times of May 8, 1795 advertised her twice daily two-hour concerts under the royal patronage of The Duchess of York by inviting “nobility, gentry, and her

163 Morning Chronicle, Mar 18, 1794, quoted in Zeitler, 166.
friends...and those amateurs, who are sensible to the superiority which this instrument maintains above all others” to “have the opportunity to hear this precious and unique instrument under the inspiring fingers of Miss Kirchgessner.”

Her overly-stated assertion of the instrument’s “superiority over all others” addresses the silenced suggestion that pianos were perhaps drawing more crowds. The ad reflects the necessity to appeal to a wide cross-section of attending concert-goers with an affordable 5s. ticket price which could insure sold out performances and consolidate her status as the “it” performer of her day. No doubt exhausted, Marianne also begs her audience to let her take her leave in a week’s time! When she left England’s shores she was a far wealthier woman than whence she arrived, and went on to purchase a vast home with Bossler just outside of Leipzig.

Kirchgessner’s Concert in Vienna (Mozart’s K. 617) – Feb 23, 1806. (Franklin’s invention is ironically called the English harmonica.)

166 Ibid, 168.
167 Advertisement for Kirchgessner's Concert in Vienna (Mozart's K. 617). Feb 23, 1806.
Kirchgessner toured up until 1800, including trips to the royal courts of Denmark and St Petersburg, and the receipt of compositions from Clementi, Fasch, Haydn, Hoffmeister, Naumann (Beethoven’s teacher), Salieri, Reichardt, and Vanhall - all of whom she knew personally. At thirty-one she retired from international touring only to perform in major German towns. Her perfectly virtuous ascendance which didn’t end in a fall from grace, was sadly tainted by a home invasion and abuse at the hands of some of Napoleon’s soldiers returning to France from their successes in Jena. Kirchgessner is said to have never fully recovered from the attack, but did perform one last charity concert in 1808, attended by Goethe, who wrote:

“Thanks to your magic playing,
Muse of the armonica!
A young Saint Cecilia!
O you sounds of the spirit are gradually
Over everywhere, which is holy,
And a human cherub is,
Even would an atheist
Call faith from the depts. Of his heart:
God! Immortality! Thous Art.\textsuperscript{168}

Virtually canonized in death her glowing obituary describes the state-like ceremony attended by the “fourteen of the noblest daughters of this city; together with the whole music college with their president…The crowding was so great that the hotels had to call the police to keep peace and

\textsuperscript{168} Goethe’s diary entry of Nov 23, 1808. Reprinted in Zeitler, 170.
order.”169 Bossler laments his loss and writes: “I saw her art germinate, bloom, and prosper to the highest maturity, and the deadly wounds [of her death] strike deep into my heart.”170

Kirchgassner’s fully rounded career that did not end in nervous illness, notoriety, nor destitution, exemplified a self-realization that only few women could dream of - even today. As national treasure and woman ahead of her time, her state burial evoking royal splendor and ceremony, was unparalleled. Only the nineteenth century Russian songstress Anastasiia Vial’tseva comes to mind as having grown such a cult of personality,171 and not even Germany’s own Clara Schumann received such recognition in death.172 The last of these three glass musicians to carve out a career, Kirchgessner enjoyed a working environment that was receptive to her talents and in which her intentional efforts achieved a gender parity along with great economic success. Her stunning career extended the armonica’s run of success and crystallizes a moment in time when glass music transcended gender, borders, class, religion, and mortality.

Financial opportunities for 18th century musicians resulting from late Enlightenment views of a music aesthetic associated with nervous stimulation, a secular reordering of the universe, and entertainment, were also still strongly tied to former cosmic associations of music and its power over the body.173 Glass instruments which brought the science of sound and bodily stimulation into closer proximity epitomized a collision of innovation, music culture, and socio-economics that allowed women to exist as shifters and shapers of performance space and time. The increase in demand for musicians to perform (and even accompany trips to the New World) had catalyzed

170 Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung, Vienna, Jan 18, 1809, reprinted in Zeitler, 174.
a “Creeping professionalism”\textsuperscript{174} of systems of licenses; increases in publishing and literacy; instrument manufacturing; and employment from high-ranking families. Musical meetings in the back rooms of public houses acted as precursors to public concerts that, in turn, led to the creation of an amateur/professional dimension and a communication between gentry and peasant classes.\textsuperscript{175} An evolving world of vying private concerts and societies informed an emerging public sphere with its kindred boom in secular music publishing and amateur consumer markets.

As expert musicians in their field, these women mobilized and infiltrated a formerly male public sphere. As teachers and performers at court they occupied space amongst the privileged elite, that cut across class lines. They were ‘new women’ a century before the age for which that historical term was coined. Their ingenuity coexisted within a shifting framework of public acceptance, and afforded them economic opportunity and recognition for their talents in ways that stretched far beyond the confines of domestic musical adornment and fashion-ability. A new category of solo female performance tore down the fences of feminine confinement with its pickets dug in by socio-economic success and marriageability. A perfect timing of altered public space, professional alliance, and cultivated public personas brought them into an equalized gender space - all pitched to suit an expanding consumer market. Marian Hart writes that: “the powers of music further disrupted the boundaries between the mundane and the fantastical, between the temporal and the eternal, between love and death, and between hearing and the lower senses of taste and smell.”\textsuperscript{176} The transcendent roots of glass music grew a new fetish for female performance and modern instrumentation with economic benefits for women that foreshadowed the cresting wave

\textsuperscript{174} Marsh, 153.
\textsuperscript{175} Marsh, 156.
\textsuperscript{176} Miriam F. Hart, \textit{Hardly an Innocent Diversion: Music in the Life and Writings of Jane Austen}. Order No. 9956772 (Ohio University, 1999), 6-7.
of amateur and professional piano-playing women. Ford, Davies and Kirchgessner all achieved recognition for their talent whilst forging new social and economically independent identities - all of which transformed audiences and solo instrumental performance. Their journeys rounded off the efforts of others to a happy conclusion – they repaved the way of expectation for future female musicians for whom music signified much more than mere female accomplishment, women who played an equal role in the cultural and economic formation of eighteenth-century Europe.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


Beddoes, Thomas. Hygeia. 1802.

Colman, George. The Musical Lady. Dublin: Printed for A. Leathly. 1762. A Farce as it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane. London. 1762.

Desrais, Claude. L’Harmonica. 1819.


Essex, John. The Young Ladies Conduct or Rules for Education. London. 1722.


Gazetta Toscana. 1783.


Goethe’s Diary. Entry of Nov 23, 1808.


James, Charles. *Bristol Journal.* 1762.


Kirchgessner's flyer for her Concert in Vienna performing Mozart's K. 617. Feb, 23, 1806.


Pepys, Samuel. *Diary of Samuel Pepys*. Vol. IX.


Rackett Collection. Dorset County Archive Office.


Secondary Sources:


