

The Harmonicon

The Harmonicon (1823-33) and *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* (1818-28) were the first long-run music periodicals in Great Britain. Published monthly, *The Harmonicon* “set an admirable standard of musical journalism and still retains much value.”¹

William Ayrton (1777-1858), a prominent figure in British musical life, founded *The Harmonicon* in collaboration with the printer William Clowes, owner of the publication. Ayrton edited the journal and also wrote many of its articles.² A composer, writer, and impresario, Ayrton was one of the founders (and later director) of the Philharmonic Society, musical director of the King’s Theatre, and honorary music critic to *The Morning Chronicle* (1813-26) and *The Examiner* (1837-51). For the latter he reviewed the Concerts of Ancient Music and the Philharmonic Society. He also wrote the articles on music in the *Penny Cyclopaedia* and edited *The Sacred Minstrelsy* (1834), *The Musical Library* (1834-37), and *The Madrigalian Feast* (1838).

Although the length of each number varies from fourteen to thirty pages, the format and contents are fairly regular. A typical issue begins with a “biographical memoir” which is followed by an interesting mixture of feature articles, polemical correspondence, and articles in translation from foreign publications. The first two volumes also include finely-crafted lithographs, usually of the artist discussed in the biographical article. The remainder of each number is devoted to reviews.

Feature articles focus on topics of contemporary, historical, and biographical interest; they include accounts of music of different countries and cultures, essays on music theory, articles on acoustics and the physics of sound, discussions of music competitions, and reports on a wide variety of musical instruments and their manufacture. Specifically British phenomena—such as the meetings of Welsh bards and minstrels (the *eisteddvods*), the provincial music festivals, and the regulations, reforms, and student concerts of the Royal Academy of Music—are frequently treated. Many of the articles in translation come from contemporary French, Italian, and German publications including Fétis’ *Revue musicale* and the Leipzig *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*.

“Review of music,” by far the journal’s largest regular component, begins the review portion of every issue. It deals with published music and concentrates on works for voice, pianoforte, organ, guitar, harp, and flute, as well as on method books and

¹ Watkins Shaw, “Ayrton, William,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London, 1980), 1:757.

² Most of Ayrton’s family and personal papers are now held at the British Library, C.U.L. Add. MSS 6239-6247. See Leanne Langley, “The Use of Private Papers, Correspondence and Archives of the Publishing Trade in British Music Periodicals Research,” *Periodica Musica* I (1983): 12, n. 1.

instruction manuals for these instruments. Reviews in this section frequently contain numerous brief explanatory musical examples. During the concert season, each issue provides detailed notices on the Philharmonic and the Ancient Concerts, along with program listings. In addition to various benefit concerts, the activities of a number of societies, associations, and concert series are also dealt with. Among the most prominent are the Madrigal Society, the Vocal Society, the Festival of the Sons of Clergy, the British Concerts, and the City Amateur Concerts. Under the monthly rubric "the drama," lyric productions at the major theatres—Covent Garden, Drury Lane, King's Theatre, English Opera House, and the Haymarket Theatre—are discussed. The Oratorios, a series held at Covent Garden that presented mixed genre concerts as well as oratorios, are also frequently reviewed.

The regular news and review rubric "foreign musical report" is extensive and concentrates not only on major cities in Italy, Germany, France, and Austria, but also on minor music centers. The report from Paris is always comprehensive; toward the end of the publication run, there are frequent accounts of musical events in New York and other American cities. Partially collated from foreign journals, these reports cover a variety of subjects ranging from theatrical productions, concert life, itineraries of artists and impresarios, and theatrical management and finances, to reports of new publications and newly-invented instruments. There are also a number of foreign reports on performances given by child prodigies.

With each issue of *The Harmonicon*, subscribers received an independent music supplement consisting of six or seven complete pieces frequently for voice, pianoforte, organ, or harp—one by a contemporary "eminent composer, and the remainder . . . selected from the best productions of the great masters."³ Many selections were written specifically for *The Harmonicon* and some were also reviewed in the journal. Several compositions in the supplements were written by women composers.

An announcement at the end of volume V (1827) promised a "new and improved series," one lighter and more popular in character; but, other than reducing the size of the foreign musical report, the contents of later issues do not alter significantly. The only new regular addition is the monthly "extracts from the diary of a dilettante," a compilation of diverse thoughts, quotations, and anecdotes on a variety of contemporary musical topics.

Although very few contributions in *The Harmonicon* are signed, three pseudonyms recur sporadically—"Clio," "Fayolle," and "Veritas." These have not been identified. One, two, four, five, and six asterisks are occasionally employed in the journal as a special signature. A set of three asterisks never appears as a signature. The reader must take care in distinguishing these special signatures in the journal from our editorial indication for an unsigned contribution, three spaced asterisks (* * *). Such special signatures and pseudonyms of an indeterminate character, e.g.,

³ "Prefatory Address," *The Harmonicon* I, no. 1 (January 1823): 1.

“a constant reader of *The Harmonicon*,” “an old subscriber,” do not appear as author references in the keyword-author index.

The 1971 reprint of *The Harmonicon* by Gregg International Publishers Ltd. was used to prepare this publication. With the exception of volume VIII (1830), each volume of this edition is divided into two parts. Part one contains a given year's texts and part two its music supplements, even though the supplements were originally sent to subscribers along with the regular monthly issues.

For clarity, entries for each year begin on a new page and sub-sections (as defined in the *User's Guide*) are not divided between two pages. A larger than usual amount of blank space on a very limited number of pages in the calendar results from the adoption of this editorial practice.