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## Haydn's London Ladies: Thoughts on Creating and Performing a Program

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## **Haydn's London Ladies: Thoughts on Creating and Performing a Program**

by Clare McCaldin

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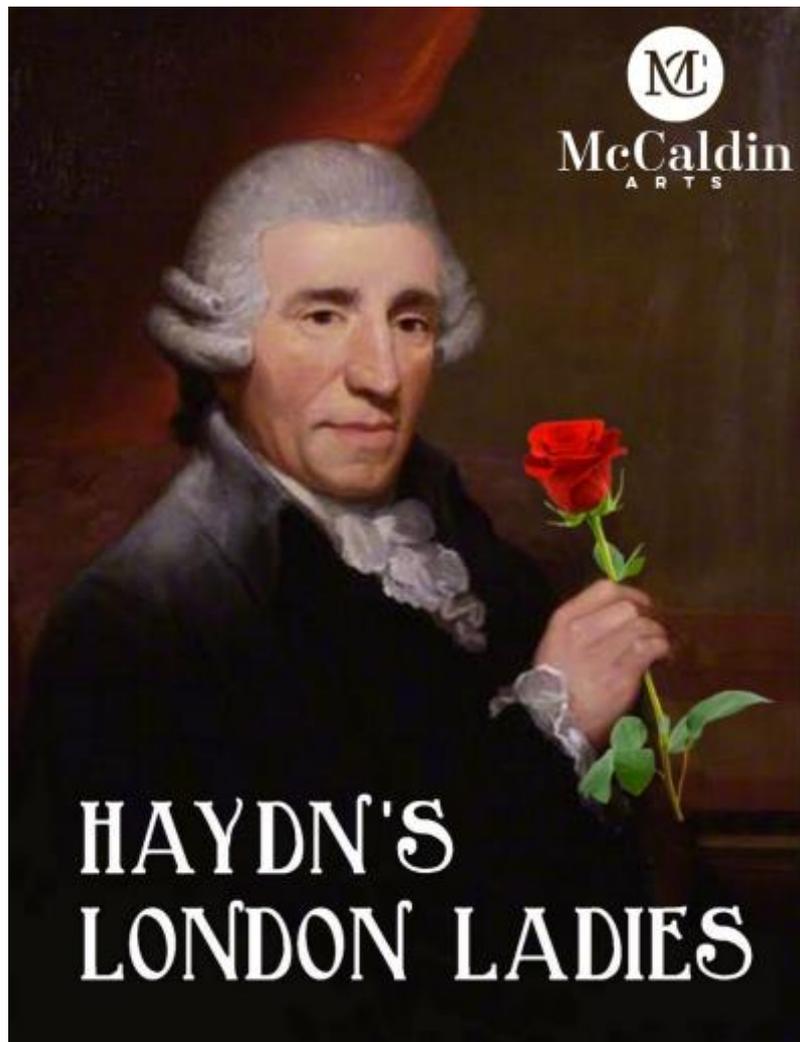
### *I. Introduction*

A few years ago I was chatting about Joseph Haydn with my father Denis McCaldin, founder and current Director of the Haydn Society of Great Britain. We were lamenting the composer's lack of biological heirs (though not his musical ones), and the irony of his unhappy marriage to a non-lover of music despite his fondness for female company and his many music-loving and talented female fans, when an idea occurred to us: might there be a good story to be told about Haydn and his various lady friends?

I am a freelance singer and I generate a lot of my own work creatively as well as at the business end. At the time of our conversation I was looking for a way to experiment with the format of the traditional song recital, having discovered in conversation with agents and fixers that song recitals can be rather polarizing for many UK music club audiences. There seems to be a definite preference at many clubs for strings and chamber ensembles. In responding to a singer in terms of look, personality, directness of communication and sound, listeners often really take to — or take against — an individual voice in a way that is rarer with an instrumentalist. Knowing that lecture-recitals are an established and popular format with this same audience group, I felt there might be some middle-ground that I could occupy, a spoken narrative integrating historical anecdote with related vocal items, all performed live by the same artists, seemed different without being iconoclastic, informative yet not a lecture in the usual sense.

I knew various of Haydn's *Canzonettas* and about his connection with the author of their texts, Anne Hunter, but not much more than that, so I chose to pursue this topic for my performance idea. My father is a genuine specialist, and there is nothing quite so useful as having one's own Haydn expert in the family. So we got to work. We had originally thought that my list of Haydn's ladies might include Maria Anna von Genzinger, who is known to have corresponded extensively with Haydn while he

was in London. Many of Haydn's letters to her are included in the *The Collected Correspondence and London Notebooks of Joseph Haydn* edited by H.C. Robbins Landon, and show the depth of his friendship with her as well as interesting practical details about the business side of his life, with gossip and anecdote about London. However, her side of the correspondence no longer exists and we can only intuit Genzinger's replies from remarks he makes in his letters to her, of which he kept copies in his first London Notebook. In terms of the music directly associated with different women, it was clear to us that there was a better story around those that Haydn met in London during his two visits. *Haydn's London Ladies* was born.



*McCaldin Arts' publicity image, playing on Thomas Hardy's portrait painted during Haydn's visit to London in 1791.*

## II. Forming the Program

A quick literature review including Haydn's own *Collected Correspondence and London Notebooks*, Robbins Landon's writings and academic works on Anne Hunter and Rebecca Schroeter, confirmed the central place of those two women in the story. The addition of pianist Therese Jansen suggested the need to program solo piano music as well as vocal items, which in performance proves a welcome rest both for me and the audience. I turned to the British Library to research a certain Harriet Abrams whose name had popped up and found published copies of her songs, including one with text by Anne Hunter.<sup>1</sup> I added Emma (Lady) Hamilton to the list because she and Haydn were both in London in 1791. While we cannot prove they met then, we also cannot be sure that they *didn't* meet, particularly in view of their similar social circles.

The storyline and musical programming in *Haydn's London Ladies* developed in parallel, as more historical information and story suggested new or different musical choices. "The Battle of the Nile" is a work written in haste at Emma Hamilton's request. Introducing this piece at a concert she was giving, British soprano Catherine Bott said that, in her opinion, this piece is the "least adequate" vocal piece ever written by Haydn. I'm afraid I have to agree with her, although we both cite as an exception to this the wonderful opening piano solo. However, "The Battle of the Nile" is interesting historically, not least because it shows Haydn setting English words without Anne Hunter at his shoulder. There is little doubt that she helped him with word-setting in the *Canzonettas*, which is why their underlay shows a better understanding of the language, despite being completed earlier.

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<sup>1</sup> "Crazy Jane." [Song.] Composed and sung by Miss Abrams. British Library Music Collections G.809.kk.(8.). "The Ballad of William and Nancy. Written to commemorate an interesting incident which happened on the embarkation of the 85th Regt. August 10th, 1799 at Ramsgate ..." Composed and arranged for the Harp or Piano Forte. British Library Music Collections H.2832.l.(1.).

## PROGRAMME

The Sailor's Song

Fidelity

Sonata No.50 for piano - Allegro

Crazy Jane (Harriet Abrams)

The Ballad of William and Mary (Harriet Abrams)

The Mermaid's Song

Sonata No.50 for piano - Adagio

She never told her love

Piano trio No.26 (extract)

INTERVAL (20 mins)

Piano Variations on Gott Erhalte

Arianna a Naxos

Recitative: Teseo mio ben - Aria: Dove sei, mio bel tesoro?

Recitative: Ma, a chi parlo? - Aria: Ah! che morir vorrei

The Battle of the Nile

Recollection

*Program of musical items performed in the full-length version of Haydn's London Ladies.*

The process of getting to know a composer's works and story in this way, and presenting this to an audience, makes interesting demands of the performers. Neither my pianist Paul Turner nor I are specialists in what is generally referred to as "early music," but we are both accomplished recitalists and approached Haydn's music from this perspective. While we did our preparation and research into early classical ornamentation and styling, we were also prepared to make decisions based less on historical precedent than on the need to dramatize the music as part of the narrative in an effective manner for our modern audiences. We decided to omit verse two of "Recollection," cut sections of music from the middle of the "Gott, Erhalte" variations, and leave out most of "The Battle of the Nile" altogether, in order to keep the story of Haydn and his ladies moving forward. However, it felt wrong to commit such crimes against the cantata "Arianna a Naxos." In fact, the reverse applied. By this point in the program the audience will have heard a series of short songs and pieces, all about 3-4 minutes long. What they needed and, we discovered, responded to positively, was a great big piece of drama. For the performers, too, this has proved to be a welcome opportunity to engage with a longer span of music; a mini-opera, containing some of Haydn's most inspired and dramatic writing for the voice. It plays to my strengths as a performer and you can hear the audience's enthusiastic response to the piece at the end of this video clip (See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6UopUtNDrs&feature=youtu.be>).

We try to integrate the spoken and sung parts of *Haydn's London Ladies* so that we can flow easily between them. I made an early decision to experiment with amplification for the spoken text, which had various advantages. The transition between singing and speaking was easier with practice but the sustained projection of my speaking voice into a large space quickly became tiring. I was also keen that the spoken parts should not be delivered like a speech but more like a radio chat. Using a microphone allows me to modulate my voice more variously while still being audible and has also encouraged me to be more myself in the phrasing and delivery of the narrative. I am lucky that Paul is not just a fantastic pianist but is also happy to act and I could therefore ask him to take occasional lines of text which were quotations by male writers in the narrative. Not only has the audience been pleased to hear a different voice, but this also helps to separate the various personalities referred to in the text and improves the audience's comprehension.

Initially *Haydn's London Ladies* was to be an hour-long recital, covering the stories of four women, and suitable for lunchtime concerts without an interval. We tested this first draft a couple of times and our audiences' enthusiasm persuaded us that we could extend the show to a full evening, to include an interval and a fifth lady, Emma Hamilton. Apart from the color and spectacle that her story adds to the narrative, she brings with her the music of "Arianna a Naxos," which we know she adored and in which she was accompanied by Haydn when they met at the Esterházy court in Eisenstadt in 1800. We even have "reviews" of her singing, ranging from the ecstasies of the local newspaper to the acerbic comments of a fellow guest:

One of her many rare qualities is her clear, strong, voice, with which, accompanied by the famous Haydn, she filled the audience with such enthusiasm that they almost became ecstatic.<sup>2</sup>

Her voice is good, and very strong, but she is frequently out of tune; her expression strongly marked and various; but she has no shake, no flexibility and no sweetness. She acts her songs, which I think the last degree of bad taste.<sup>3</sup>

As a celebrity there was naturally plenty about Emma in the historical record, but noticeably less about some of the other women, particularly after the death of their husbands, a point I will come back to later in this article.

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<sup>2</sup> From *Magyar Hirmondo* newspaper quoted in Flora Fraser, *Beloved Emma: The life of Emma, Lady Hamilton* (London: Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2012), 256.

<sup>3</sup> From the "Remains" of Mrs. St George quoted by Deutsch, Otto Eric. *Admiral Nelson and Joseph Haydn* (Slinfold: Springfield Press, 2000), 132.

### *III. Discoveries Regarding Performance Matters*

As performers we look for every opportunity to add color and nuance to the songs, and this is something that Paul and I discussed as recitalists when preparing these songs.

In "The Mermaid's Song" the same descending pairs of notes occur in both verses but we treat them differently. In verse one "glass-y sea" is delivered with as much legato line as possible to suggest the stillness of the sea's surface. When the identical musical phrase occurs in the second verse, the words are "roll-ing waves," so we over-phrase the note pairings to evoke the sea's active swell.

*From Haydn's "The Mermaid's Song," bars 28-29.*

In "Fidelity" the song takes an unexpected turn into new musical material at the lines "a wayward fate hath spun the thread on which our days depend." The shape of the singer's phrase can feel too jaunty for the thought, especially if too strongly phrased away on "de-pend." Paul and I agreed that the darker harmony underpinning the idea of the "checker'd shade" in the second phrase needs to be connected to the "wayward fate" in the first phrase by an intensely sung legato that draws us all the way to the end of the line. This doesn't require louder or stronger singing, but a change in intention and a technical, bel canto legato, supported by a smoother piano articulation.

The image shows a musical score for Haydn's "Fidelity" (bars 36-43). The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "thee. A way-ward fate hath spun the thread on which our days de-pend, and dark-ling in the check-er'd shade, she draws it to an end. But what-soe'er may be". The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The vocal line is in a recitative style, with some ornamentation. The score is divided into three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment.

*From Haydn's "Fidelity," bars 36-43.*

Questions of performance practice and style are raised more directly by "Arianna a Naxos" than any of the other vocal material we perform. It contains several long recitative sections, with many opportunities for the singer to ornament (or not), particularly with appoggiaturas. There is a school of thought that such a figure should be applied at every opportunity on principal, which I confess to disagreeing with for two reasons. Firstly, the appoggiatura is an expressive device whose use should be judged in each context; and secondly, to paraphrase a conversation with a far more knowledgeable colleague, Ian Page, Director of the highly successful Classical Opera Company, it also relates to the cadence of the Italian language, most obviously to its feminine endings, so shouldn't be applied to every musical cadence without question. For example, Arianna's first utterance is "Teseo mio ben." (See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUCySBFMKyw&feature=youtu.be>.) Although the note for "ben" could carry an appoggiatura, which might express the depth of Arianna's feeling for Teseo, I believe there should be no ornament. Arianna is in the process of waking up, half-asleep, neither lost in the deep emotion of a

dream nor awake enough to be expressing herself consciously. The piano has set the scene in a long and beautiful introduction and the voice part should emerge from the ensuing silence without drama; we've got a long way to go in this story and it would prove dramatically ill-considered to invest the first phrase with too much extraneous meaning.

How we present the music also depends on the keyboard in use. Paul and I have performed *Haydn's London Ladies* with everything from a fortepiano to a Steinway Model D. The technical demands of each instrument on the pianist are very different, as are the depth of sound, attack, sustaining power and general volume that the instruments can offer. All these things, added to the acoustic of the performance space, affect our choice of tempi and, particularly, the way in which we can use silence to dramatic effect. From a pianist's point of view, many of these decisions have to be made spontaneously, but a carefully placed spread chord (either up, down, or occasionally both as well as varying the speed of the spread) can add drama, direction, poignancy, tenderness, attack and the illusion of volume. The use of the sustain pedal varies from using it at every opportunity on a fortepiano, to hardly touching it on the much more resonant Steinway Model D. A willingness to be infinitely flexible within the style, but by paying attention to the instrument and acoustic, can often lead to revelatory performances for both pianist and singer.

To experience the range of difference offered within a single song, here are three commercial recordings by which to compare performances of "She Never Told Her Love." The pacing of this song illustrates how issues of sound decay, the size of voice being accompanied and the instincts of the performers themselves are all key factors in the performance.

"She Never Told Her Love" recordings—

Emma Kirkby (soprano) and Marcia Kadjimarkos (fortepiano)

(See <https://play.spotify.com/search/She%20never%20told%20her%20love%20Kirkby>)

Mark Padmore (tenor) and Kristian Bezuidenhout (fortepiano)

(See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYGISGRtYww&feature=youtu.be>)

Christoph Genz (tenor) and Julius Drake (piano)

(See <https://play.spotify.com/search/She%20never%20told%20her%20love%20Genz>)

"She Never Told Her Love" has moments of drama and poignant silence, the handling of which is at the heart of any interpretation. The decay of the fortepiano sound generally indicates a faster reading of the song, as in the two fortepiano performances here, which also tend to employ far less rubato than the Genz/Drake recording with a modern instrument. While noting how the sustain of a modern instrument permits a more luxurious, nineteenth-century interpretation, principally by creating a deeper bed of sound, it's also important to acknowledge that the way this is used is still the performers' interpretive choice. From the very first chord we hear the rubato that Drake uses throughout to craft a supple and romantic reading of the solo introduction, especially noticeable at 0'42" and the long sustain of the chord at 1'05". The sequential falling figure at 0'24" is plangent, with the phrases joined-up, whereas Kadjimarkos is much more peremptory, almost hurrying through them. Haydn doesn't indicate a spread chord under the word "*never*" in the opening statement of the voice part, and Drake and Kadjimarkos play what's written, but Bezuidenhout arpeggiates it, perhaps to accommodate Padmore taking a little time on the word. The third phrase "but let concealment, like a worm in the bud" is sung by Genz with a serpentine legato line, which Drake supports, whereas both Padmore and Kirkby move this phrase forward with an urgency that perhaps comments on the drama rather more than it illustrates it. Accompanying Kirkby in this same phrase Kadjimarkos finds an interesting, muffled tone that she returns to at the postlude, with much less articulation of the piano quavers than either of the other two renditions. The climactic moment when the singer reaches the word "grief" for the first time is underpinned by a diminished chord and it is easy to hit the word too hard in an attempt to create volume and impact. For my taste, Padmore overdoes it in this instance and Kirkby achieves it by developing the volume just enough within the note, despite limited support from the fortepiano. Drake has much more firepower with which to support Genz and so the singer doesn't need to do all the work.

All of this is clearly a matter of taste rather than necessity in the hands of top-class performers, and it's also interesting to note where ornamentation is applied and to what end. At the very end of the song, Padmore ornaments the final statement of "smiling" in a way that suggests to me an optimistic kind of smile, whereas Kirkby

applies the simplest and most poignant passing-note which, for me, captures the essence of this particular smile, which is that it is through tears.

The other factor here is the pitch which the instrument imposes on us. This has implications for the singer, in terms of the optimal keys for certain songs. I'm very happy performing any of the *Haydn's London Ladies* repertoire in its written key at A=415, but the half-tone higher added by working at modern concert pitch changes things. For a mezzo many of these songs sit relatively high, which drove my decision to transpose several of them for performances at A=440. This is not really a question of making the songs easier to sing, but for the expressive advantage offered by locating them in a slightly different place in my range. A half-tone down moves the final phrase of "Recollection" into the area of my voice where the top note can be more easily controlled. It is the last thing you hear me sing in the concert and we are using the song to make a point about Haydn's separation from his London Ladies, so it is an important conclusion to the emotional arc of the concert.

("Recollection" video:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrrVtk\\_tmFE4&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrrVtk_tmFE4&feature=youtu.be).)

The two songs we include by Harriet Abrams — "Crazy Jane" and "The Ballad of William and Nancy" — are popular street ballads, whose core is the entertaining story they tell; transposing them down improves the audibility of the words and brings them further into the vocal range where I can color words most imaginatively and with greatest variety.

We include a number of Haydn's *Canzonettas* in our program ("The Sailor's Song," "Fidelity," "The Mermaid's Song," "She Never Told Her Love," and "Recollection"), which demand something different from us as performers. These songs are unique in Haydn's output, so much so that they have led me to question why he wrote them. Given his poor grasp of English, it seems more likely that their composition was a response to Anne Hunter and her social circle rather than a purely creative response to her poetry. Mozart had been writing Lieder since the 1780s and Haydn may have heard the most known of these, but his own vocal compositions had previously been limited to operas for the court at Eszterháza. While we know he had a fondness for folk music, his arrangements of folk songs came much later during his second London visit, and were accompaniments for an existing melody. There's no question

that there was a commercial market for music that could be performed domestically, so perhaps the *Canzonettas* were in part a response to a market opportunity.



*Anne Hunter, née Home as The Pensive Muse, before her marriage to John Hunter.*

*Engraving by W. W. Ryland, after a lost portrait by Angelica Kauffman, 1767.*

The *Canzonettas* are proto-art-songs that look forward to Schubert and his generation. A mere twenty years separate “She Never Told Her Love” from “Gretchen am Spinnrade” and “Die Erlkönig,” with Beethoven’s *An die ferne Geliebte* a further year in the future. Although Haydn is clearly on a learning curve in an unfamiliar genre, we can see him exploring the possibilities. “The Mermaid’s Song” has a prelude of unusual length for the pianist, and in “Fidelity” Haydn exploited elements of his earlier *Sturm und Drang* style to dramatize the text. “She Never Told Her Love” is undoubtedly his finest and most distinctive *Canzonetta* and is, in my opinion, two pages of perfection, capturing the mood of the poem and supporting it with a piano part that expresses the poignancy of the story and the noble character of Shakespeare’s Viola. The piano is no longer an accompaniment to a melodic line but an equal partner in the story-telling.

#### *IV. Conclusion*

As I pieced together the history of these women's relationships with Haydn and his music, a secondary narrative strand began to emerge which I thought important to include. I refer to it most explicitly at the end of the concert. The precariousness of women's lives at this time, regardless of their social class and breeding, was a startling and poignant reality. Despite very different beginnings and careers, all five of the Ladies found themselves in similarly straitened circumstances once they lost the proxy status conferred by a powerful man in their life, whether that was a husband, brother or 'protector.'

Anne Hunter waited nine years to receive anything from her late husband's estate, much reduced after his debts had been cleared, and wrote to a friend "I am but a shabbi person; however we scramble on thro' weeks and months, somehow or other, as well as we can."<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Schroeter waited even longer; eighteen years, during which time her family punished her for her poor choice of husband by keeping her on a tiny allowance. Emma Hamilton loved gambling too much to ever be good with money: "Her rage is play, and Sir William [Hamilton] says when he is dead, she will be a beggar."<sup>5</sup> She died in penury in Calais having fled her English creditors. And yet *Haydn's London Ladies* all responded to their changing circumstances with strength of character and tenacity. Whatever their end, their effect on Haydn and his creativity is indisputable and we have much to thank them for.

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<sup>4</sup> From a letter to Joanna Baillie c1816. Royal College of Surgeons of England library, MS0014/7/189.

<sup>5</sup> Howarth, David, and Howarth, Stephen, *Nelson: The Immortal Memory* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1988), 223.

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