

# 19th Century adaptations of concert music for concert use as seen in contemporary periodicals

Digital scholarship built on the foundations of IIIF, MEI and Linked Data

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## Motivation

Without sound recording, and with public concerts often an expensive luxury – with a limited repertory – music enthusiasts of the early nineteenth century had most of their musical experience in amateur circles – primarily at home. That the highest status compositions of the developing musical canon were those for the concert hall or the opera house complicated matters for those who wanted to cultivate their musical knowledge and sophistication.

In response, the music publishing industry produced vast quantities of arrangements of large-scale works for smaller-scale use. It is through these versions that many people encountered, became familiar with, and even studied symphonies and overtures, arias and concertos. Beethoven's last string quartets, which famously went largely unperformed for decades after their composition, were quite successful sellers in the composer's own piano duet arrangement.

## The Harmonicon & The Musical Library

The Harmonicon (1823–1833) and its successor The Musical Library (1834–1837) provided a monthly combination of concert listings, reviews and biographical sketches in their textual sections and large amounts of music scores in a separate volume.

Throughout its run, about half of the included pieces are **arrangements of pre-existing music**, including the first known précis arrangement of Beethoven's 7th Symphony (reduced to piano solo) in 1824. The simplest of these are reductions of orchestral movements or opera arias, but there are many more exotic reconceptions.

'**Ancient**' and new music are both important components of the periodicals, with music from previous centuries by composers such as Weelkes, Purcell or Corelli mixing with works by Weber, Moscheles, Johann Strauß I and a 6-year old Frederick Ouseley.

The Harmonicon was a loss-making venture, although arguably it acted as a promotional publication for the music printers who funded it. To break even, they needed to sell around 1,500 copies each month – something that meant reaching as large an audience as possible.

Accessibility was enhanced through **ease of playing**, simplifying some parts, focussing on short movements, and adapting sung texts to familiar languages. In repeated relaunches, the music became easier to play and sightread, and perhaps a little more populist (for example, the anonymous round 'Call Phillip flat-nose' in the first issue of The Musical Library). It also meant reducing the text. The Harmonicon was a text periodical with an equally large musical supplement. The Musical Library consisted of two music sections (instrumental and vocal) that trebled the size of its textual supplement.



Adaptations in The Harmonicon come in many forms, but by far the most common is reduction from multiple instruments or full orchestra to solo piano, to a piano accompanying voice(s) or a solo instrument, such as violin or flute. In these cases, the arrangements usually follow the source material closely.

In the example shown here, though, Beethoven's **Ah! Perfido** for solo soprano and orchestra is given a new key, a sacred Latin text and a rather crude choral setting. Why this work was singled out for such treatment is unclear.



The Harmonicon contains many vocal pieces. For works with a Latin, French or Italian text, the original is almost always preserved. German lyrics, however, are consistently replaced – often with poems that bear no resemblance in content to the originals. The Musical Library continues this approach, but in some cases 'Englished' versions had already reached the UK. **When flow'ry Meadows deck the Year** had been established as a text for Palestrina's *I vaghi fiori* at least by the eighteenth century. It may even have been better known to madrigal singers in this form.

## Digital scholarship, tools and data

Working with arrangements necessarily means comparing versions of a piece. Digital tools can support the juxtaposition of materials this requires.

Digitisation on a mass scale by libraries and archives has made it much easier to access and research digitised source materials for geographically distributed subject matter. This reduces the need for full digital editions of all materials as a prerequisite for research to start, whilst allowing the incorporation of extract or full encodings as they become available.

This research was partly carried out using a new application specifically developed to support comparing and annotating different versions of the same music. If we consider an outline research process as sketched below, the tool is designed to support the **Annotate**, **Analyse** and **Evidence** steps in particular.

Building on IIIF for images and MEI for music, our app allows a user to mark passages of interest and indicate where parallel passages occur in different versions, recorded using a new Linked Data Model[1].

Annotations to these passages can then be made using Web Annotations[2].

All these objects are written to the user's Solid pod – cloud storage on an open-source, standards-based model, which gives the user control of who can access their data.

The tool is built as a web application, based on the MELD framework[3].

[1] D. Lewis, E. Shibata, M. Saccomano, L. Rosendahl, J. Kepper, A. Hankinson, C. Siegert, and K. R. Page, "A model for annotating musical versions and arrangements across multiple documents and media," in Proc. DLFM 2022, ACM, 2022, 10–18.

[2] R. Sanderson, P. Ciccarese, and B. Young, "Web annotation data model," W3C, W3C Recommendation, Feb. 2017, <https://www.w3.org/TR/2017/REC-annotation-model-20170223/>.

[3] D.M. Weigl and K.R. Page. A framework for distributed semantic annotation of musical score: "Take it to the bridge!". In Proc. ISMR 2017, Suzhou, China, October 2017.

