

Rayner Taylor: Chamber Music, ed. John Metz and Barbara Bailey-Metz. *Recent Researches in American Music*, 43. Middleton, Wisc : A-R Editions, Inc. 2001. xiii, 117 pp.

Six Sonatas for Harpsichord or Piano Forte with an Accompaniment for a Violin, op. 2

Sonata No. 1 in C major

Sonata No. 2 in F major

Sonata No. 3 in B-flat major

Sonata No. 4 in D major

Sonata No. 5 in G major

Sonata No. 6 in E-flat major

Six Sonatas for Violoncello (with Keyboard Accompaniment)

Sonata No. 1 in A major

Sonata No. 2 in D major

Sonata No. 3 in A major

Sonata No. 4 in D major

Sonata No. 5 in G major

Sonata No. 6 in C major

Rayner Taylor's chamber music for keyboard and cello or with violin accompaniment is music written with a purpose in mind; these works filled a specific need within the cultural context of the period in which they were composed. Taylor's diverse roles as accompanist for singers, theatre musician, master organist, and teacher seem to have made him an enterprising composer, skillful in recognizing what society's musical taste required.

Rayner Taylor (1747-1825) was one of the leading British-born composers who settled in Philadelphia after 1790. As a choirboy at the Chapel Royal in London, he sang at Handel's funeral in 1759. From 1765 to 1792, Taylor established himself in the London area as a successful teacher, organist, music director, and composer of sacred and secular (theatrical and non-theatrical) works. Prior to his arrival in Philadelphia in 1793, he and a Miss Huntley, his London pupil and recent performer with the Theatre Royal at Covent Garden, had presented musical entertainments of his own composition in Richmond, Annapolis, and Baltimore. After settling in Philadelphia, Taylor composed incidental music for the Chestnut Street Theatre, opened in early February 1793 by his former pupil, Alexander Reinagle (1756-1809), and English actor and singer Thomas Wignell (d. 1803). The historically important theatre piece, William Dimond's *The Ethiop* (New World Records 80232-2), for which Taylor wrote the music, was premiered at the Chestnut Street Theatre in 1814. His other musical activities in Philadelphia were numerous: concert performer, light musical entertainer, teacher, music dealer, and organist at St. Peter's (Episcopal) Church (1795-1813). Lists of his compositions reveal an eclectic array of stage, instru-

mental, sacred, and secular vocal music suited to the performance opportunities available in Philadelphia between 1793 and 1822.

In the edition's introduction, John and Barbara Metz substantiate the foregoing, citing quotes from Benjamin Carr's "Musical Reminiscences" of Taylor and details from previous research by Victor Yellin and John A. Cuthbert. We can also add that in 1820, as a charter member of the Musical Fund Society of Philadelphia, he was elected as one of its twelve original Directors of the Music. Recommended for aid beginning 27 August 1823, he was apparently the first professional musician-member to benefit from the financial assistance provided through the Society's constitution. A month following his death on 17 August 1825, a committee was appointed to erect a tombstone on Taylor's grave, a task completed by the Society before the end of 1825. This act demonstrated respect for him and his musical contributions to the city's musical culture.

The "Six Sonatas for Harpsichord or Piano Forte with an Accompaniment for a Violin, op. 2" were published in London by Longman and Broderip about 1781, prior to Taylor's departure from England. The first sonata was reprinted, apparently from the same plates, in Philadelphia in 1797. The Metzses shed light on the historical details associated with the rise of this particular sonata style. Young men learned to play the violin, but they were also expected to develop "manly arts" and advance their formal education, while young women studied the piano and were encouraged to develop greater musical proficiency to attract a husband. Taylor's accompanied keyboard sonatas are intended for domestic music-making, suited to these customs and expectations.

Despite what the title "with an accompaniment for a violin" implies, the keyboard part of Taylor's opus 2 sonatas cannot stand alone. The editors cite the earliest known examples of the genre from 1707, as well as composers (the youthful Mozart among them) who published hundreds of these accompanied keyboard sonatas. The ambiguity of "accompaniment" is evident in Taylor's opus 2 sonatas, in which the violin parts are alternately accompanimental, duet-like, or melodic, even occasionally soloistic.

Each of the six sonatas in Taylor's opus 2 has two movements, except for No. 6 (in E-flat), which has an extended *Andante maestoso pomposo* first movement, followed by a *Largo e sostenuto* and a third-movement *Giga*. In the first movement of both Sonata No. 6 and Sonata No. 5 (G), the violin is given a substantial number of melodic and duet passages (with the keyboard's upper voice). Sonata No. 5 stands out as the most musically compelling and gratifying for the violin, leaning more toward equality of parts than mere accompaniment for the keyboard part. The keyboard writing is dominant in the first four sonatas (C, F, B-flat, and D, respectively), although the violin gradually acquires more prominence (as seen in the second movement of Sonata No. 4 [4.ii, *Allegro spiritoso*]), becoming at the same time less awkward. The keyboard parts are easily sight-read by a skilled player, but rhythmic changes and transitional pas-

sages offer challenges to the aspirant. Similarly, some awkward string crossings and rhythmic juxtapositions pose difficulties that cause one to reflect on the skill of the amateur violinists for whom the music was intended. This latter point raises the question of how useful these sonatas are today. They can be performed as historical novelties, gratifying for the keyboardist and of tolerable interest to the violinist, but are better suited for use as training pieces, with which a young player could develop the essential versatility needed for all chamber music, for example, Mozart's eighteen sonatas for piano and violin (1778-88).

Prior to this edition, Taylor's *Six Sonatas for Cello (with Keyboard Accompaniment)* existed only in an autograph copy held by the Library of Congress. They are bound into a volume with *Six Solos for Cello and Bass*, Op. 13 (London: J. Bland [c. 1795]) by German composer and cellist Johann Georg Christoph Schetky. Just as the title suggests, the cello has prominence in this set of sonatas. Because the accompaniment published here is just the figured bass line, as in Taylor's manuscript, the keyboard part depends on the keyboardist's improvisatory skill and understanding of historical performance-practice to make a satisfactory performance. The edition's lack of figured bass realization follows the norm of recent critical editions, but it also severely limits the accessibility of these attractive sonatas for more widespread performance, which is unfortunate. The musically expressive cello parts, replete with subtleties of rhythm, articulation, and ornamentation, are clearly intended for the expert cellist. The predominant use of tenor clef, especially in the first four sonatas, was Taylor's choice and is retained by the editors. As published in this edition, the cello sonatas could also provide historically instructive and musically gratifying literature for cellists alone without keyboard, since the bass line could be executed as accompaniment by a second cellist.

The Metzses address the question of which instrument would be most appropriate for accompaniment and support their reasons for choosing a keyboard alone, rather than an accompanying second cello, by discussing the performance stipulations and practices of other sonatas during this era. Their recording of the six cello sonatas is available on Soundset SR1016. An earlier recording (1960) by cellist Harry Sturm and pianist Franz Pfau was made for the *Music in America* series, sponsored by the Society for the Preservation of the American Musical Heritage, founded and directed by Karl Krueger. At that time the sonatas were arranged by composer Leroy Robertson and given a somewhat romanticized rendition. As specialists in early music performance (see <http://music.asu.edu/faculty>) the Metzses' recording presents the sonatas in a style more closely aligned with the period in which Taylor composed them. The chosen keyboard instrument is the fortepiano, which has a timbre and clarity of sound desirable for early Classic music.

The editors have omitted two works by Taylor that might have contributed to this volume's historical usefulness. Between 1767 and 1800, Taylor composed two divertimenti similar in style to the sonatas with vio-

lin accompaniment. Under the title to the score of Divertimento I (D major) is printed: "For the Harpsichord or Forte Piano, with Accompaniment for the Violin, design'd for Young Practioners by R. Taylor, Organist of Chelmsford. For the Musical Magazine." Imprinted under the title for Divertimento II (E major) we find simply "By Mr. R. Taylor for the Musical Magazine." Since Taylor is identified as "Organist of Chelmsford," quite likely the publication was the *Musical Magazine* published in London between 1767 and 1800. Could the success of these have been the impetus for Taylor composing the six sonatas? Each divertimento has two contrasting movements, similar in length and style to movements in the sonatas. As possible precursors to the sonatas, and still in need of editing, these two divertimenti would have contributed to the comprehensiveness of this collection of Taylor's chamber music.

Although the Editorial Policy is clearly stated, inconsistencies in various markings in the score raise questions that one expects to find addressed in a critical edition. For example, the editors point out that some unusual markings, such as "Tutti for." and "Soli P.," have been retained in the opus 2 sonatas. These designations appear in only two movements (see sonata 3.i *Soli* [m. 11] and *Tutti* [m. 15]; sonata 5.i *sol* [m. 56] and *tutti for.* [m. 60]). The peculiar appearance of these markings seems to warrant at least some comment or speculation as to why Taylor would include a typically orchestral designation here. None is found.

The editors also apparently made no effort to resolve inconsistent markings of slurred versus unslurred trill terminations (suffixes) found in the cello sonatas. Close scrutiny of the score suggests that editorial intervention and addition exist only if a slurred termination first appears in a given sonata movement of Taylor's manuscript. Even assuming that the editors are accurately transcribing, discrepancies abound and demand further discussion. For example, in the cello sonata 3.i (m. 10), the termination is slurred (presumably as it is in the original manuscript), but an editorial dashed slur does not appear on all the other similar trill terminations (mm. 5, 7, 13, 14). Further, slurred trill terminations are indicated in the cello sonata 3.ii (mm. 13 and 16), and, appropriately, an editorial dashed slur appears in a similar passage (m. 17), but not in parallel passages (mm. 33, 35, and 37). Finally, more consistency is shown in the cello sonata 3.iii, where a slurred trill termination marked by the composer in measure 17 supports the editorial dashed slur in measures 1 and 9.

Perhaps minor, but troubling, is the absence of some accidentals, both of individual notes and those within trills (e.g., op. 2, sonata 2.i [mm. 53-60]; cello sonata 2.i [mm. 29-30]; cello sonata 1.ii [m. 63]). Other editorial lapses or inadequate proof-reading are evident, such as inconsistent bowing articulations (e.g., op. 2, sonata 5.ii [mm. 33-36]; cello sonata 2.i [m.44, notes 8-11]) and lack of proper key signature (cello sonata 1.ii [m.71]).

Despite the edition's omissions, the volume brings to light a little-known repertoire that provides gratifyingly "useful" chamber music with violin accompaniment and artistic salon sonatas for cello published here for the

first time. Taylor's penchant for interjecting unexpected harmonies, which he often repeats; lovely sequential passages; and contrasting minor-key sections is noteworthy. The Metzses deserve credit for this contribution to the history of chamber music repertoire during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. One part of the critical apparatus, *Performance Suggestions*, is particularly appropriate and welcome. Although Taylor's opus 2 sonatas were composed before his arrival in the United States and the cello sonatas quite possibly date from a similar time, these two sets of sonatas could well have been available for Philadelphia's professional and amateur "lovers of music" who gathered on occasion for "musical enjoyment and cultivation."

Joanne Swenson-Eldridge
Beloit College

Notes

1. Variant spellings of a name were common during this time. Minutes of the Musical Fund Society of Philadelphia refer to Raynor Taylor. The second edition (2001) of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* indicates both spellings—Raynor [Rayner] Taylor.

2. Minutes of the Musical Fund Society Joint Board of Officers meetings, II: 32-33, 1 July 1823 and 126, 5 September 1825.

3. The cello sonatas were quite possibly composed between 1772 and 1783 when Taylor was organist at Chelmsford, England. John A. Cuthbert, *Rayner Taylor and Anglo-American Music Life* (Ph.D. diss., West Virginia University, 1980). J.G.C. Schetky was the father of cellist J(ohn) George Schetky, who immigrated to the United States from Scotland in 1787 and became a leading performer and teacher in Philadelphia.

4. Quotes from William L. Mactier's manuscript sketch of the Musical Fund Society, read by him before the Musical Fund Society on 29 January 1885. The Musical Fund Society Collection, University of Pennsylvania Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center, Special Collections.