

A Reading from Sense and Sensibility

The Soldier Tir'd

Thomas Arne

A Reading from Emma

Jane Austen's Songbook

PROGRAM NOTE---- Dr. Miriam Hart and Dr. Julianne Baird

Music and the social status it expressed was an integral part of Jane Austen's life. Her novels are replete with details of domestic musical activities. Accounts of public concerts and private balls as well as music programs with 'hired' musicians fill her letters. A dedicated amateur herself, Austen ordinarily played at the pianoforte at least an hour a day before breakfast from the 8-book music collection now preserved in her home at Chawton. For nieces and nephews she practiced "country dances," a number of which appear in her collections.

The popular "conduct books" of the 18th century England, like Thomas Gisborne's *Enquiry in the Duties of the Female Sex*, recommended that a young woman of gentry (as was Austen) pursue "ornamental acquisitions;" her study was to consist of such subjects as music, dance, drawing, Italian and French. These subjects that would allow for "innocent and amusing occupations" for herself and her family, while making her more marketable for marriage. Austen knew her readers' familiarity with conduct books, thus allowing her to satirize the dominant views of women's education. But Austen's musical selections mirror the broad influences, both European and British, that not only reflect 18th century cult11.2(a)Bld Brihi1.3(l)-7.2(ec).

Each heroine of Austen's novels exhibits a clear musical or non-musical sense; the musical scenes enrich our understanding, and arouse our curiosity about Austen's own musical experiences, experiences she describes throughout her chatty--and sometimes catty--letters. She frequently attended private and public concerts.

Perhaps because Austen was forced to live without an instrument for periods of her life, due to the family's removal to Bath, or to help a relative elsewhere, she criticized those who viewed the fortepiano as merely a stylish possession, another piece of furniture: "I was sorry to hear that she [her cousin, Anna Lefroy] is to have an instrument; it seems throwing money away. They will wish the 24gs. in the shape of sheets and towels six months hence; and as to her playing it can never be anything." Or; "We found only Mrs. Lance at home, and whether she boasts any offspring besides a grand fortepiano did not appear..."

Austen painstakingly copied and bound borrowed music that especially interested her. Two books are in her own hand--one of piano pieces and the other of vocal music (Book III), many pieces of which are presented tonight. Some pieces contain her own suggestions for ornamentation. Prominent themes are naval affairs, country life, drinking songs, love, Turkish and Moorish motifs, female character pieces, and the French Revolution. "William" reflects a girl waiting anxiously on the cliffs for her sailor's return. At last she hears his thrilling signal, a whistle from aboard his ship. In *William*, a parody of a Haydn sonata, two- and four-