

Programme note for the performance at the Oxford and Cambridge Musical Club, June 2003

This edition of *The Cooper* wasn't originally intended for public performance. It was made last year for a private run-through by a group I sing with from time to time, just for ourselves with no audience, and a few notes may be of interest.

According to Roger Fiske's *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century*, *The Cooper* was staged in London in June 1772, and had nine performances. No complete score appears to have survived, but the British Library holds two editions of the libretto, and also a copy of a condensed musical edition (voice, violin, figured bass) which was published by W. Napier at about the time of first performance. It is from these that I have worked.

In principle, I have done little more than make a straightforward performing edition, writing a narrator's script to replace the stage action and setting the accompaniment for two violins and a cello (I have left the realisation of the figured bass to the keyboard player). There are however two major changes. Arne was a practical musician writing for the theatre, so the vocal line is normally doubled by the first violins and not infrequently by the second violins as well. But what is right in a large and possibly noisy theatre is quite wrong for small-scale private performance, where the "orchestra" is reduced to one instrument per part and the doubling of a competent singer's line is neither necessary nor desirable. I have therefore taken out this doubling except in a couple of places where the violin is an octave above the voice and is doing something more than merely reinforcing the tune.

The second major change consists in the introduction of a chorus. I have done this (a) to spread the jam around (the work has some delightful tunes and the edition was prepared for a group who were singers and not just listeners) and (b) to insert some variety into strophic airs (a theatrical performance can offer action and even stage business to hold the audience's interest through two or three verses, but a concert performance cannot, and there is a case for changing the musical treatment at each reprise). Sometimes the chorus takes over the accompaniment, supplementing or replacing the orchestra for a verse or two; sometimes it offers a comment on the action in the style of a classical Greek chorus; sometimes it simply provides a change of tone colour.

The Napier musical edition leaves a couple of gaps, and I have interpolated items from other sources to fill them. The first is Martin's song to the bottle towards the end of Act 1. The words of this are in the libretti, but it is not in the Napier edition and any setting Arne may have written has been lost. However, it forms part of the main thread of the action, so I felt it should be included if at all possible, and a search for some music that would fit eventually turned up the air from the end of Arne's *Thomas and Sally*. I have had to transpose and slightly simplify this (mainly by taking out upbeat at the start of lines), but it suits the verse remarkably well, and I hope those who know it in its original form will not be too distressed at its use here.

The second addition concerns Farmer Twig, whose inopportune and drunken arrival precipitates the final action. Even the bare words of the libretti suggest that this must have been a peach of a part to play; one can imagine him being shooed away, staggering back, and so on about six times, to the hilarious delight of the audience and the increasing desperation of the lovers whose tryst he is interrupting. But he doesn't sing, at least not in any coherent manner, and in the present edition we are replacing the action by a narrator and concentrating on the music. Well, if a joke will not survive translation, the translator must introduce a new joke to replace it. Interruption by a single non-singing drunk no longer being appropriate, I have replaced him by a trio of singers, giving Twig two companions and arranging "Beer-drinking Britons can never be beat" from Arne's *Harlequin Mercury* as an unaccompanied three-part song for them to fool about with; and how much control the conductor will have over this part of the proceedings remains to be seen.

The Cooper is an attractive work, tuneful, varied, and not overly demanding on vocal and instrumental resources, and it is ideally suited to occasions when something lasting less than an full evening is required. A friend tells me that he toured with it in South Africa in the 1970s, singing the title role in over 30 performances, and I am fairly certain I remember its being given at a Cambridge May Week concert in 1962. No doubt there have been other modern presentations of which I am unaware. The present edition was made solely for the pleasure of myself and my friends, but if its performance here causes others to consider the work's possibilities I shall be very happy to make copies available.

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