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REDISCOVERING ANTONÍN KAMMELL

Antonín Kammell was a Bohemian composer and violinist active across Europe in the 18th century. Andrew Baker presents a comprehensive look at the composer's life in light of a newly discovered portrait by the renowned British painter Thomas Gainsborough.

KAMMELL'S ENGLISH FRIENDS

The Bohemian composer and violinist Antonín Kammell was baptised on April 21st 1730 at Běleč, a village some twenty-four miles east of Prague. His father was a forester on the estate of Count Vincent Ferrerus Waldstein, who was a musical enthusiast. The Count supported Kammell's education and musical career and was also the patron of the composer Josef Mysliveček (1737–1781).

Kammell went to the school at Slaný, to the north-east of Běleč, which was run by the Order of Poor Clerics Regular of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools. This religious order specialised in teaching the children of poor families. Both Kammell and Mysliveček studied philosophy at Charles-Ferdinand University in Prague. They may have been contemporaries at the university, though Mysliveček was younger by seven years.

Count Waldstein sent Kammell to Padua to study with the great violinist and teacher Giuseppe Tartini (1692–1770). Very little is known about Kammell's early career. There are letters from him in Padua to Count Waldstein dated July 6th and 25th 1759, but these have not been translated into English.¹

At the beginning of 1765, Kammell travelled to Germany. Two manuscripts of early symphonies, his earliest known works, survive in Czech archives. These, unusually, show direct links to the Rhineland. One of the symphonies, in D major (AK5/1/1), has a movement titled *Adagio representa Auerhann-Pfaltz*. The other, in G major (AK5/1/2), has a finale titled *Allegro representa Burkheim-Pfalz*. (The G Major also has a very haunting middle movement headed *Allegretto alla Francese*.)

It is not easy to identify these places. There is a place called Burkheim, near Freiburg, but that is not in the Rhineland area of Pfalz. Could the original have been Durkheim? Bad-Durkheim is in the Pfalz, and is close to Mannheim, a city with a famous musical tradition that would have attracted the composer.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, the court orchestra at Mannheim was famous for its excellence and virtuosity, and the symphony developed as a form to show off the orchestra and explore new dramatic effects. Kammell seems to have been imitating the style of the Mannheim composer Johann Stamitz in these early pieces.

Another link with Mannheim, and with Johann Stamitz, is Kammell's set of string trios (AK3/10 in my catalogue) which were published in Paris as opus 6, but which did not appear in England, where opus

¹Michaela Freemanová and Eva Mikanová, "My honourable lord and father": 18th-century English musical life through Bohemian eyes', in *Early Music* vol. 31 issue 2 (May 2003), and Michaela Freemanová, "A certain M. Nouvelle...": A Rutland association for the musician Anton Kammell', *Rutland Record* 21, *Journal of the Rutland Local History & Record Society* (2003).

6 was a quite different work. The title page states that these may be played by a full orchestra – “Li qualli si Potranno Esequire a piena Orchestra” (“which can be executed by a full orchestra”). This suggests a style different from that of his trios, which were written for intimate music making. The idea of writing music in just three parts – two violin parts and a bass line – intended for orchestral performance originated with Johann Stamitz, whose op. 1 was a set of orchestral trios. These trios may well be works written while Kammell was in Germany.

Kammell came to London as an agent of Count Waldstein, with a large cargo of timber which the Count was hoping to sell to the Royal Navy to use as ship masts. This cargo would be a burden and cause of anxiety to Kammell for several years as the timber did not meet the Royal Navy standards. Kammell arrived in England in March 1765.

Clearly, the real purpose of his journey was to develop his career as a composer and violinist. The Count gave him letters of recommendation to several people in society.

Kammell very quickly became a member of the select circle of musicians around Johann Christian Bach. He had a successful career as a composer and violinist in London and also performed in other towns and cities, including Bath, Salisbury, Stamford, and Northampton. His published music is exclusively instrumental, including violin sonatas, duets, trios, quartets, symphonies, and concertos. His historic claim to fame is the fact that one of his string quartets was the first string quartet known to have been performed in public in London, on April 27th 1769.²

Kammell has been a neglected figure, partly because there was, until now, no known portrait of the composer. Many of his musical colleagues, such as Johann Christian Bach (1735–1782), Carl Friedrich Abel (1723–1787), and Johann Christian Fischer (ca. 1733–1800), are remembered thanks to portraits by Thomas Gainsborough, who was a keen musician and close friend of Abel and Bach.

In 2020, I was asked to provide evidence to support the identification of a newly discovered Gainsborough portrait of an unknown musician. Finally, nearly 250 years after his death, we have an image of Antonín Kammell. Seeing the composer’s face, we can now ask: What kind of person was he? What kind of composer? And, of course, the portrait can hopefully inspire us to perform more of his music in the future.

² Susan Wollenberg and Simon McVeigh (eds), *Concert Life in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Ashgate, 2004



Portrait of a Musician, probably Antonín Kammel (1730–1784), ca. 1768

Oil on canvas, 76 x 64 cm

(Private Collection, courtesy of Simon Gillespie Studio)

I came across Kammel when I was researching Thomas Anson (1695–1773), the elder brother of George, Lord Anson, who is famous for his circumnavigation of the world and his significant influence on the development of the Royal Navy. Thomas is a more elusive character. There are very

few records of his private life, but he has emerged from the shadows as a fascinating and influential figure. In his earlier days, he had been an adventurous traveller, visiting the ancient cities of Palmyra and Baalbek and the site of Troy. He was a patron of the arts, particularly of the architect James Stuart, the leading artist of the Greek Revival. Stuart was known as ‘Athenian Stuart’ because of his enthusiasm for ancient Greece. Stuart built a series of buildings based on Greek originals at Thomas Anson’s Staffordshire estate, Shugborough. He also built Thomas’s new London house 15 St James’s Square, which was a showcase for the new Greek Revival style – and for music.

Thomas Anson died in 1773. In his will he left annuities (annual payments) to four close friends – the architect Stuart, the botanist and musician Benjamin Stillingfleet, the agriculturalist Nathaniel Kent, and “Mr Kammell”. When I first read the will I did not know who Mr Kammell was, but the name also appeared in the list of friends who received a mourning ring in memory of Anson.

As a composer myself, I was excited to discover that Mr Kammell, too, was a composer. As soon as I had identified him, I contacted Michaela Freemanová (*a leading Czech musicologist, 1946–2017 – editor’s note*) who had published the only two articles on Kammell in English.³ From Michaela I learned that Thomas Anson had been one of Kammell’s most important patrons.

Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill’s *Music and Theatre in Handel’s World* was published in 2002. The fascinating book is a collection of extracts from the family archives of James Harris, a Member of Parliament, musician, and philosopher.⁴ The archives include interesting glimpses of Kammell’s career in England. The letters of the Harris family reveal that Thomas Anson regularly held concerts at his new London house where, as Mrs Harris wrote: “the best hands in town” could be heard performing. It is probable that Kammell led the music at Thomas Anson’s London house between 1769 and 1773. These concerts took place in the London season, between Christmas and Easter. After Easter, musicians with wealthy patrons would travel with them to the country.

Kammell was well known at Anson’s country estate, Shugborough, in Staffordshire. Sir William Bagot, of neighbouring Blithfield Hall, sent Thomas Anson, who was at his London house, a poem dated April 25th 1772, looking forward to his return to the country at the end of the London season. Bagot exhorts Anson to bring his closest friends with him when he returns to his country estate:

Bring Attic Stuart, Indian Orme,
Kammell unruffled by a storm
Shall tune his softest strain (...)⁵

(‘Attic Stuart’ was the architect James Stuart, who was often at Shugborough. Bagot probably called him ‘Attic’ simply because it fitted the metre of the poem better than ‘Athenian.’ ‘Indian Orme’ was Robert Orme, historian of the East India Company.)

There was certainly music at Shugborough as well as in London. Irish MP Sir John Parnell, visiting Shugborough in May ~~or June~~ 1769, wrote the following in his journal:

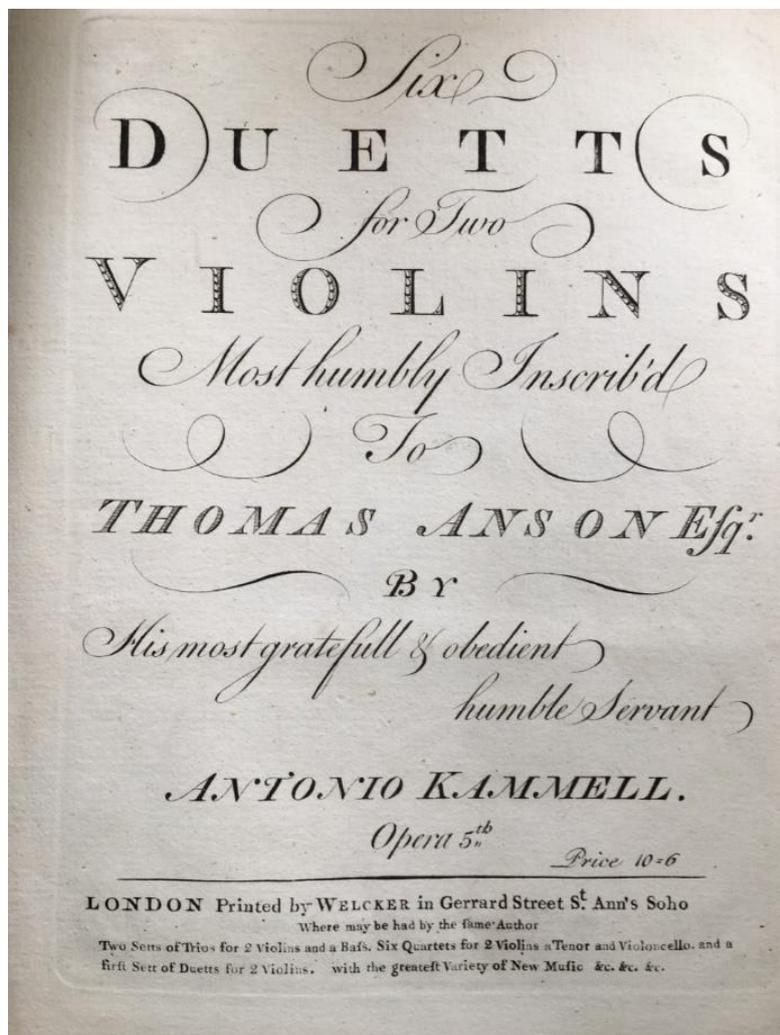
³ Freemanová and Mikanová, op. cit.

⁴ Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill, *Music and Theatre in Handel’s World. The Family Papers of James Harris, 1732–1780*, Oxford University Press, 2002.

⁵ Staffordshire Record Office, *Records of the Anson Family of Shugborough, Earls of Lichfield*. D615/P(S)2/5.

There has been this day, Thursday, a most agreeable meeting of the neighbouring gentry, Snead [Sneyd, of Bishton Hall] Clifford [of Tixall Hall], Piggot [possibly Bagot of Blithfield Hall] etc. who all play or sing and dance together here afterwards and have music again on the evening (...)⁶

Kammell's violin duets op. 5, which he dedicated to Thomas Anson, must have been composed at about this time, perhaps written and played at Shugborough that summer.



On June 3rd 1773, Kammell wrote in English to his Bohemian patron Count Vincent Ferrerus Waldstein:

My dear old good friend Mr. Anson the brother of the Admiral Anson, who defeated so much the Spaniards, died two months ago. I do not like to loose good friends, his death contributed a lot towards my illness, in his testament he left me 50 gineas yearly for the time of my life, my friend George Pitt, when he saw me so distressed after Anson's death, he also gave me by the law 50 gineas yearly, now I have 100 gineas yearly which I can spend as I wish. (...)⁷

⁶ John Parnell's Journal, 1769 (extracts, anonymous transcription). William Salt Library, Staffordshire County Council, CB/Shugborough/8. Original at London School of Economics, LSE Library Misc. 38.

⁷ Freemanová and Mikanová, op. cit.

George Pitt (1721–1803), from 1776 Baron Rivers of Stratfield Saye in Hampshire, was a diplomat and Member of Parliament in the constituency of Dorset. He was Kammell's other significant patron in this period of his life. Patron is a misleading word. Anson and Pitt were not simply financial supporters of the composer. Anson was a "dear old good friend". In 1769, Kammell was living in George Pitt's London house, in Half Moon Street, Piccadilly. From 1770 onwards, this became Kammell's own house. His first daughter was born at Pitt's country house, Stratfield Saye, that Christmas. Kammell dedicated his first set of string quartets, op. 4, to George Pitt.

George Pitt is Kammell's strongest link to Thomas Gainsborough, who called Pitt a "staunch friend".

KAMMELL BY GAINSBOROUGH

Gainsborough authority Hugh Belsey has dated the portrait⁸ to late 1768, when Kammell was performing in Bath, Gainsborough's home at the time. It is probable that the composer had travelled to Bath with George Pitt from Pitt's country house.

A striking aspect of the portrait is that no instrument is shown. The subject holds a roll of music manuscript paper. This is Kammell the composer rather than Kammell the violinist.

The concerts Kammell gave in Bath in 1768 and 1769 presented him as the composer of a variety of works, rather than as a violin virtuoso. The concert advertised in the Bath Journal on October 31st 1768 included two overtures (symphonies), a quintetto, which would have featured all the solo instrumentalists, and a solo by Kammell.

The portrait shows Kammell looking upwards in a philosophical, almost Romantic pose. It raises the question: How did composers of this era see themselves? Were they craftsmen, or inspired artists? What was the business of composing about? What was the nature of music? This was something that occupied the mind of Kammell's teacher, Giuseppe Tartini, and there are good reasons to suppose that Tartini's ideas would have been discussed amongst Kammell's circle of friends in England.

Another of Tartini's students, Maddalena Lombardini Sirmen⁹ (1745–1818), appears to have stayed with Kammell in Half Moon Street during her time in England between 1771 and 1772. She had begun her studies with Tartini while a student at the orphanage of San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti in Venice, being granted special permission by the orphanage to travel to Padua in the 1760s. Sirmen has a special place amongst Tartini's students. In 1762, he wrote her a letter of advice on violin playing which was later published, with an English translation by Charles Burney, in 1779.

In March 1772, Sirmen performed with Kammell at one of Thomas Anson's concerts. A letter from Elizabeth Harris to her son from March 17th 1772 mentions the performers:

Yesterday morning we were all at that most elegant house of Mr Anson's to a breakfast and concert after, ever thing suited the elegance of the house. When breakfast was ended the rooms were open for people to walk about and admire – after that the concert, for which he

⁸ The catalogue entry will appear in future editions of Hugh Belsey, *Thomas Gainsborough: The portraits, fancy pictures and copies after old masters*, Yale University Press, 2019.

⁹ Maddalena Laura Lombardini Sirmen, *Three violin concertos*, Ed. By Jane L Berdes, A-R Editions, 1991.

had collected the best hands in town – Madame Sirman, Grasi, Fischer, Crosdale, Ponto, Kamell etc. Got home in time enough to snap a short dinner before the opera.¹⁰



(Thomas Anson's London House, 15 St James's Square.)

(“Grasi” was Cecilia Grassi (ca. 1740–1791), later the wife of J. C. Bach. “Crosdale” was the cellist John Crosdill (1751–1825). “Ponto” was the Bohemian horn player Jan Václav Stich (1746–1803), known as Giovanni Punto, a translation of his name into Italian which he adopted after escaping to Italy from the service of Count Joseph Johann von Thun, to whom his father was a serf.)

Tartini was born in Istria, which is now in Slovenia but was then part of the Republic of Venice. He was taught in Assisi by the Bohemian composer Bohuslav Matěj Černohorský (1684–1742), who was organist at the Basilica of St Francis. Tartini settled in Padua and continued his connection with the Franciscans, performing violin concertos at the Basilica of St Anthony in celebrations honouring the

¹⁰ Burrows and Dunhill, op. cit.

saint's miraculous preaching. Instrumental music could, like St Anthony's words, convey meaning to people whatever their mother tongue.¹¹

Tartini writes that a composer should compose "musica secondo natura", according to nature¹². The key to Tartini's ideas is the belief that nature has laws within it that guide the formation of things, and that the composer or artist should be attuned to nature's laws, working in harmony with nature, rather than trying to imitate the works of nature. This view of music was inspired by Tartini's neo-Platonic philosophy. Tartini's belief that to truly follow nature music should be simple was in turn inspired by his Franciscan background.

An English translation of Tartini's *Trattato di musica* (1754) with a commentary was published in 1771 as *The Principles and Power of Harmony*. It was published anonymously, but its author was Benjamin Stillingfleet, a botanist, cellist, and author of libretti for oratorios and for an opera by Handel's amanuensis John Christopher Smith the younger. Stillingfleet was also, with Kammell, one of the four close friends of Thomas Anson who had received annuities in his will.

Stillingfleet wrote, translating Tartini:

Every nation (...) has its popular songs, many of which are of antient tradition, many newly composed, and adopted by common consent. In general, they are extremely simple; nay, the most simple are generally the greatest favourites (...) Nature has more power than Art (...)¹³

Through this simplicity, Tartini hoped to rediscover the power of ancient Greek music and drama.

Tartini's most personal music, which most closely follows this philosophy, was his collection of *sonate piccole*—sonatas for unaccompanied violin. Some of these sonatas have poetic inscriptions, sometimes in code, as if the instrumental music could convey the meaning of the words. These sonatas were not published in Tartini's lifetime.

Kammell mentions in a letter on October 20th 1766 that he had written:

52 solos for the violin, which, to tell the truth, are very beautiful, and 6 for the Viola da Gamba, which start in a very decorative way.¹⁴

Kammell only published two sets of six violin sonatas with continuo. These fifty-two solos were more likely to have been unaccompanied pieces imitating his teacher's private music. These works are lost, as are the solos for viola da gamba.

Unaccompanied music for viola da gamba had been a private form of music since the 16th century. In 18th century England, the instrument was still popular for private, intimate music making. The English viola da gamba player Sam Stadlen has shown that some of Kammell's trios are designed to be played by violin, viola da gamba, and piano, and were probably played in this way by Kammell, Abel, and J. C. Bach.

¹¹ https://www.academia.edu/8194435/TARTINI_AND_THE_TONGUE_OF_SAINT_ANTHONY, accessed 8 June 2021.

¹² Pierpaolo Polzonetti, *Tartini e la musica secondo natura*, LIM, 1999. p. 148

¹³ Tartini translated by Stillingfleet, *The Principles and Power of Harmony*, 1771

¹⁴ Michaela Freemanová, "A certain M. Nouvelle...": A Rutland association for the musician Anton Kammell', *Rutland Record* 21, *Journal of the Rutland Local History & Record Society* (2003.), p.18.

Thomas Gainsborough, one of the leading painters of 18th-century England, was a very enthusiastic musician, and a good player of the viola da gamba, the instrument of his close friend Carl Friedrich Abel. In 1773 he wrote:

(I wish) very much to take my viola-da-gamba and make off to some sweet village, where I can paint landscapes and enjoy the fag-end of life in quietness and ease.¹⁵

There are close connections between music and ideas of nature and landscape in this period – attitudes that we might associate with the Romantic period which is generally thought to have begun forty years later but had its roots much earlier. Landscape painting was Gainsborough's passion, though he made his living by painting portraits – and even his portraits often show their subjects in landscape settings. Gainsborough was interested in the forms of nature rather than literal representation. Gainsborough was an artist "secondo natura".

Gainsborough developed his theories of landscape while staying with the Price family at the romantically wooded estate of Foxley in Herefordshire. His friend Robert Price (who died in 1761) was a composer and he, his father and his son, Uvedale Price, developed new, Romantic ideas of landscape gardening following nature. It is curious, and significant, that Benjamin Stillingfleet, with Kammell a close friend of Thomas Anson, had a cottage on the Foxley estate. Stillingfleet had been Robert Price's tutor and made a Grand Tour of Italy with him, ending with a long stay in Switzerland. Stillingfleet shared the family's interest in music and nature.

Stillingfleet was certainly in Bath at the time of Kammell's concerts in 1768, when Gainsborough probably painted Kammell's portrait. It seems very likely that Thomas Anson and Uvedale Price were there too.

Bearing these philosophical interests in nature and music in mind, it is worth looking again at the newly discovered portrait of Kammell. It might be fanciful, but I see this as the portrait of a philosophical composer, painted by an artist who had a serious interest in nature and music. It is easy to imagine that these ideas, of the meaning and nature of music, and the music of nature, which Gainsborough had explored at Foxley, were discussed by Kammell and his friends who had escaped the heat of London for the woods and landscaped gardens of Shugborough.

FUTURE RESEARCH

In 2006, when I began my research into Kammell, the only substantial articles in English were by Michaela Freemanová, one in collaboration with Eva Mikanová. The articles are based on Kammell's letters to his Bohemian patron Count Waldstein. They are full of fascinating details of the composer's life in England – his delight at making the ladies fall in love with him as he played his adagios, the expense of buying the elaborate clothes a virtuoso needed to make a good impression, his travels to Edinburgh in the guise of "Signor Carmellino". More recently, my research has been supported very generously by Sylva Šimsová whose *Traces in the Sand: The Story of Anthony Kammell in 18th Century Britain* was published by the Dvořák Society in 2014.

My study of Kammell, which contains a great deal of material that has not previously been published, including the story of his family in England, can be downloaded from my website, together with my thematic catalogue of his works.¹⁶

¹⁵ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/thomas-gainsborough-199>

¹⁶ <https://andrewbakercomposer.com/anton-kammell-a-bohemian-composer-in-18th-century-england/>

Kammell published a series of works in England. Some of these were also published in Europe, often with entirely different opus numbers. Other music was published in Europe but never appeared in England – most importantly, several violin concertos, only one of which seems to have survived.

There are many missing works. Where are the fifty-two violin solos and the six solos for viola da gamba? Where are the “new overtures” he performed after the publication of his op. 10 set? Where are the missing violin concertos? Where is his violin?

Kammell died on October 5th 1784 at Norton Court, Kent. He was buried at St Mary’s Church, Norton, on October 8th 1784.



(St Mary’s Church, Norton, Kent)

Norton Court was the home of John Cockin Sole, whom Kammell had met soon after coming to England. When Sole died in 1790, *The Times* advertised the sale of the contents of the library at Norton Court, including:

(...) a capital violin which formerly belonged to the celebrated Kammel. Manuscript music never published (...) ¹⁷

This manuscript music is very likely to have included works by Kammell that he had with him when he died.

All the quotations from Kammell’s letters which I have used are from Michaela Freemanová’s articles. According to her 2003 article in *Early Music* the letters are in the Central State Archive, Prague (RAV – Doksy deposit, shelfmark VI-4/3). The collection must contain information that would cast light on Kammell’s career before he travelled to England. Very little is known about his early life. There are

¹⁷ *The Times* 22/6/1790, 25/6/1790

the letters from Padua in 1759, the two early manuscript symphonies have titles that show that he spent time in the Rhineland. Sometimes the smallest passing remark or mention of a name can lead to interesting discoveries about his friends and acquaintances.

I hope that this portrait will encourage researchers in the Czech Republic to study the letters, discover more about Kammell as a personality, and search for more music from his early years. Most importantly, however, I hope that now Kammell's image has reappeared, more musicians will be inspired to perform his music.