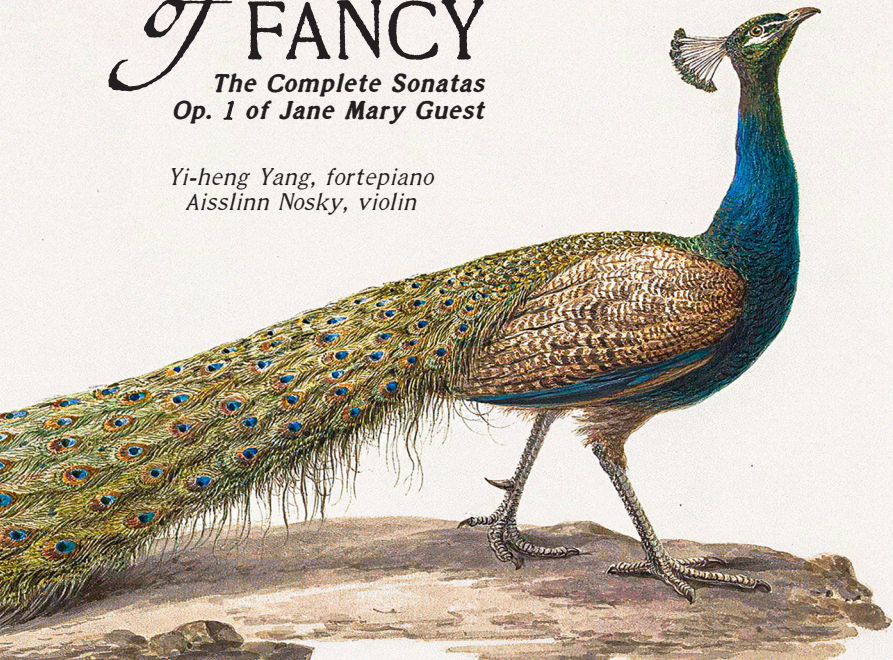


*A*  
**RICHNESS  
OF FANCY**

*The Complete Sonatas  
Op. 1 of Jane Mary Guest*

*Yi-heng Yang, fortepiano  
Aisslinn Nosky, violin*





In 1780, the Bath-based writer and socialite Hester Thrale (1741-1821) wrote a letter to her friend, Samuel Johnson, about a young local music teacher of exceptional promise:

*"Poor Queeney's sore eyes have just released her... so my master treated her very good-naturedly with the visits of a young woman in this town, a taylor's daughter, who professes musick, and teaches so as to give six lessons a day to ladies... Miss [Fanny] Burney says she is a great performer; and I respect the wench for getting her living so prettily; she is very modest and pretty-mannered, and not seventeen years old."*

Venanzio Rauzzini (1747–1810),  
with His Dog 'Turk'  
by Joseph Hutchinson (1747–1830)

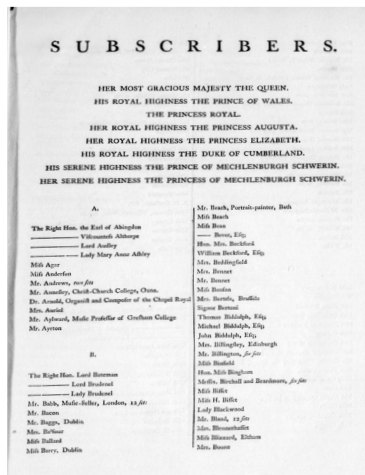
This modest young musician was Jane Mary Guest (1762-1846). Born in Bath in 1762, Guest emerged first as a child prodigy—making her public debut at age six—and matured into one of the city’s most prominent pianists, composers, and teachers.

Bath, famed for its Roman hot springs, was a vibrant cultural centre that attracted royalty and high society, who gathered in the Upper Rooms and Pump Rooms to socialise, gamble, and attend concerts. Guest’s father was a merchant tailor who also played in the local Pump Room Orchestra, and the family ran a boarding house which received many of the prominent musicians visiting Bath. One of the family’s lodgers, Thomas Orpin, an organist, became “Jenny’s” first music teacher, and as his student, she performed a lesson and concerto in 1769.

Guest then studied with Venanzio Rauzzini (1746-1810), the Italian castrato and composer who emigrated to Bath in the 1770s to build his fortune and career, and who was to become director and manager of most of the important concerts in town for the following four decades. A larger-than-life Cassanova, a colleague of Haydn and Mozart, and a

colourful, charming and talented musical figure, he brought Bath’s musical culture to a peak of excellence comparable to that of any major European city.

It was perhaps through Rauzzini that Guest was then referred to study composition in London with Johann Christian Bach (1735-1782). The premier keyboardist, composer, and impresario of London,



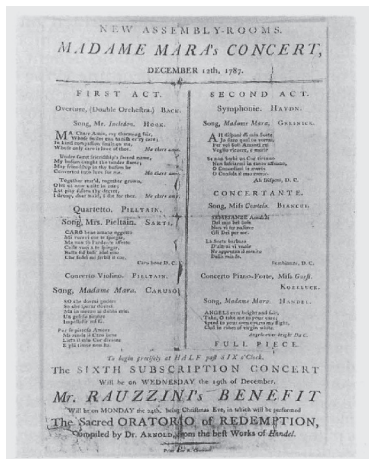
J.C. Bach was also the Music Master to Queen Charlotte and made a critical introduction for Guest with the Royal Family.

With this prestigious association, Guest's list of subscribers for her first publication (1783) of the *Six Sonatas for the Harpsichord or Pianoforte, with an Accompaniment for a Violin or German Flute, op. 1, dedicated to Queen Charlotte* are a who's-who of England at that time. The list included prominent members of British royalty, as well as the cultural literati and leading musicians, composers, organists, instrument builders, music dealers, professors, and artists of the day. With a total of 482 subscribers, half of whom were women, Guest's subscription was reported by *European Magazine* to be "from its lustre and magnitude, is perhaps, unequalled by any thing of the kind that has preceded it." The review continues, rather ambivalently:

*As this is the work of a lady whose merits as a performer are eminently conspicuous, we would willingly, in speaking of it, only use the language of applause;—nothing indeed would afford us more satisfaction;— but impartiality*

*requires, that amidst our approbation of some passages, we should point out the defects of others. In our perusal of Miss Guest's Sonatas, we discover somewhat of a richness of fancy, aided very often by an elegance of embellishment, and lucky strokes of science; at the same time we must observe, that these compositions would have pleased more, had the author been less fond of extraneous sharps and flats, which are so profusely introduced through the whole work, as often to fatigue and pain the most patient ear. In the Accompaniment, the effect is frequently pleasing; but we cannot trace any remarkable contrivance. These Sonatas, however, on the whole possess a considerable share of merit. Their perfections more than compensate their defects, and reflect great credit on Miss Guest's abilities as a composer for an instrument on which she so eminently excels as a performer.*

Sharps and flats notwithstanding, the sonatas were immediately published abroad, in Paris in 1784, and also in Berlin in 1785. Upon the heels of this early success, Guest received a royal appointment to be



Grand Concerts in 1783, and in that year and the next, ran a series of her own concerts at the Tottenham Street Rooms. Throughout the last decades of the 18th and first decades of the 19th centuries, concert programmes in Bath usually included a piano concerto performed by Guest (as Mrs. Miles, her married name), often her own compositions.

Kenneth James' dissertation, *Concert Life in 18th-century Bath*, speaks of Guest as a performer who could evoke audiences' "admiration, astonishment, delight, and even 'electric pleasure'", reporting that "on November 30, 1799, the *Herald* published a verse to a lady who almost wept in disappointment when Mrs. Miles did not perform a concerto in a concert she had attended." *The European Magazine* sums up her playing in this way:

*To Miss Guest's execution on the harpsichord and grand piano-forte, we have often listened with rapture. Her fleetness and facility of finger, expression of touch, diversity of grace, and general mastery upon the instrument, is without rivalship, and thrills through the hearts of all who hear her.*

the instructor to Princess Amalie in 1804, and in 1806, to Princess Charlotte, daughter of George IV.

For the remainder of her working musical life, Guest was a flourishing performer and composer, and wrote many piano concertos (all sadly lost), arias and songs, and additional sonatas for violin and piano. She performed in London's prestigious Hanover Room

This album is the first recording of Guest's Op. 1 set. The keyboard part displays an abundance and variety of ideas and calls for brilliance and virtuosity at the fortepiano, bearing witness to Guest's technical prowess and far-reaching musical imagination. Ornate *galant* melody, embellished operatic vocal lines, as well as concerto writing display a wide range of mastery of fashionable 18th-century genres. Contrasts between melancholic, sanguine and dancing characters feel like musical descriptions of a convivial and varied social life in a recreational town where people came to rest, take the waters, socialise, party, and court.

The use of historical instruments in this recording gives a sense of play and organicism in discovering fine details of articulation, colour, and balance that help recreate the scintillating atmosphere of Guest's musical world. A replica of a 5.5-octave Anton Walter Viennese fortepiano by Christopher Clarke, used for this recording, is contemporary in style to Guest's English piano. While she most likely would have been most familiar with the English-style grands and square pianos by builders such as Zumpe, Longman and Broderip, and Broadwood, the Viennese piano

carries the same traits of registral variety, lightness of touch, and fleetness of articulation that were present in late 18th-century pianos. Significantly for the intimate and quick-witted exchanges of chamber music found in the genre of the accompanied sonata, early pianos and gut-strung violins find balance in volume as well as commonality and relationship in note lengths, attacks and lyrical transparency and blending. The results present themselves here as genuine dialogue and flexibility of character and rhetoric.

Guest's rich imagination and abundance of musical ideas present themselves at every turn. Sonata No. 3 in E-flat, for example, opens with a luscious Italianate *bel canto* melody evocative of Mozart's Countess aria from Act II of *The Marriage of Figaro*. Ensuing are delightful trains of thought, new themes, and spring-like flowery pathways that contain both lyricism, depth and whimsy in their intricate shapes. Sonata No. 4 in G Major opens as an earnest and noble conversation. Often the Menuet movements, such as in Sonata No. 2, contain typical *galant* charm as well as unique wit. The contrasting moods, characters, and textures, from lyrical to virtuosic, display the ▶



*The Mozart family. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)  
playing in Paris with his father Jean-Georg-Leopold Mozart (1719-1787)  
and his sister Maria-Anna Mozart (1751-1829)  
by Louis Carrogis Carmontelle, 1763*

range of Guest's musical mastery and talent for observing and depicting human interactions and emotional states.

Sonata No. 6, the only one of the set to be notated only in two staves, in grand staff keyboard format, presents a curious question for the performers. While this change of notation could imply that the sonata was meant to be a keyboard solo and is evidence of Guest's celebrated virtuosity, another interpretation is possible. We suspect that the endless succession of quick double thirds in the right hand of the piano is not a sudden leap in technical challenge within this amateur music-making set, but rather an invitation for the accompanying melodic instrument to read over the keyboardist's shoulder, spontaneously drawing their own part out of the texture. Some historical precedents for this are outlined in Rebecca Cypess' book, *Musical Salons in the Enlightenment*, highlighting the "sociability" of spontaneously re-arranged chamber music for salon settings. Mozart's Piano Sonata K. 570 in B-Flat Major, for example, is a stand-alone solo keyboard piece that appears also in accompanied form, and a contemporary portrait of the young

Mozart family shows his father, Leopold, playing the violin while reading from the harpsichord's music stand, over the shoulder of Wolfgang, who is seated. Given this common music-making posture, Guest's sixth sonata, while written in the unusual notation described above, seems to suggest an improvised violin or flute accompaniment drawn out of the keyboard staves. This is the rendition that we present in this recording. Moreover, in the spirit of 18th-century improvised ornamentation and arrangement in domestic music-making, we have added various lines and decorations to enhance their reading.

The Op. 1 of Jane Mary Guest is one of the rare large sets of accompanied sonatas written by a female composer of the 18th century and an accomplishment that is worth celebrating, recreating, and hearing again today. Even with the scant biographical information and minimal surviving repertoire we have, Guest emerges as a rare genius who found every way afforded to her to flourish, engage with, and find fame and influence in her musical world. We hope that the music itself presents a genuine portrait of this vivacious and wonderful historical musician. ■

A portrait of Yi-heng Yang, a woman with dark hair, wearing a black top, looking upwards and to the right with a slight smile. Her right hand is raised near her face.

## YI-HENG YANG

Fortepianist and historical keyboardist Yi-heng Yang is recognised for her “remarkable expressivity and technique (*Early Music Magazine*).” Her playing has been described as “impeccable (BBC Music)” and “superbly adept” (*Gramophone*).

Her album of Schubert Lieder with fortepiano, “Where Only Stars Can Hear Us” (*Avie Records*) with Grammy award-winning tenor Karim Sulayman, was #1 on Classical Billboard and listed in the *New York Times*’ “Best Classical Music of 2020.” Her many other albums on period instruments, including a solo album “Free Spirits: early Romantic music on the Graf piano”, Brahms Cello Sonatas with Kate Bennett Wadsworth, and Schumann Piano Trios (Trio Ilona, with Ravenna Lipchik and Kate Bennett Wadsworth) have also received wide critical acclaim. ▶

In recent seasons, Ms. Yang has been a featured performer with the Albany Symphony, the New York Philharmonic Chamber Music Series at Merkin, The Boston Early Music Festival, Forte/Piano Festival at Cornell Center for Historical Keyboards, with the Twelfth Night Ensemble, at the People's Symphony Concerts, The Boston Clavichord Society, Carnegie Hall, The Phillips Collection, Columbus Early Music, and The Helicon Foundation.

A devoted educator, she is a faculty member of The Juilliard School, where she teaches

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## **AISSLINN NOSKY**

A unique and dynamic violinist, Aisslinn Nosky has captivated audiences around the world with her innovative interpretations and impeccable technique. Her fierce passion for early music and skill as a soloist, director, and conductor has generated robust appreciation by press and audiences alike. Hailed as “superb” by *The New York Times* and “a fearsomely powerful musician” by *The Toronto Star*,

performance practice, chamber music, fortepiano, improvisation, and piano. A sought after guest teacher, she has given guest classes at schools such as NEC, Curtis, Mannes and Rutgers. She is artistic director of the RIVAA Gallery Concert Series, which focuses on period chamber and solo music of the classical and romantic eras. She is creator and co-host of the International Fortepiano Salon Online and co-creator and director of the Sociable Fortepiano mini-residency and festival in NYC. Yi-heng lives with her husband and two kids on Roosevelt Island, New York. ■

widespread demand for Aisslinn continues to grow.

As a soloist and director Aisslinn has collaborated with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Holland Baroque, Portland Baroque Orchestra, and the New World Symphony. She was a core member of Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra from 2005 to

2016. Aisslinn served as Principal Guest Conductor of the Niagara Symphony from 2016 to 2019 and was Guest Artist-in-Residence of the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra from 2019 to 2022.

In 2011 Aisslinn was appointed concertmaster of the Grammy-winning Handel and Haydn Society. Founded in 1815, the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston is one of the world's longest continuously performing musical organizations. Aisslinn has recorded the complete Haydn and Mozart violin concerti with H&H on the CORO label.

A passionate educator, Aisslinn has been on faculty at Amherst Early Music Festival, the International Baroque Institute of Longy, Tafelmusik Baroque Summer Institute, Mount Holyoke College, and The Banff Centre. She has given masterclasses, workshops and performances at The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, the New England Conservatory of Music, Codarts Rotterdam and the Juilliard School. ■



JANE MARY GUEST (1762-1846)  
SIX SONATAS, OP. 1

**Sonata No. 1 in A Major**

1	Allegro .....	5:29
2	Rondo. Allegretto.....	3:20

**Sonata No. 2 in D Major**

3	Allegro .....	8:00
4	Minuetto. Grazioso.....	2:40

**Sonata No. 3 in B-Flat Major**

5	Adagio .....	4:49
6	Presto .....	6:03

**Sonata No. 4 in G Major**

7	Allegro .....	7:57
8	Allegretto.....	4:16

**Sonata No. 5 in E-Flat Major**

9	Allegro .....	6:11
10	Presto.....	4:49

**Sonata No. 6 in B-Flat Major**

11	Allegro .....	6:58
12	Presto .....	4:59

Total playing time: 65:31

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**Engineer** Loren Stata | **Producer** Maureen Murchie | **Editing and mastering** Kate Bennett Wadsworth and Matthew Wadsworth  
Fortepiano 5.5-octave Walter replica by Christopher Clarke | **Booklet editing** Kate Bennett Wadsworth  
**Cover and booklet design** Tim A'Court | Recorded in Drew University Concert Hall, Madison, NJ, 21-23 June 2024  
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