One of the most striking features of British musical life in the 19th century was its lack of engagement with centralised functions of any kind, whether court or national (or local) government. This of course meant that there was no direct state subsidy of music. No musician of international importance was employed by monarchy or state (certainly not in the fashion enjoyed by Liszt at the Weimar court, nor by Bülow at Meiningen). Even the main opera and concert institutions were neither supported nor underwritten in any way: and indeed, although this was undoubtedly an age of institutional organisation, it was quite common for an official-sounding title to mask a purely individual commercial enterprise.¹

In London, music was generally viewed not so much as an artistic and social good in itself than as an entertainment for the leisured class, neither requiring nor deserving special privileges, still less actual financial subsidy; except where it formed an adjunct to religious and moral edification in churches or choral societies, both assumed to have access to alternative means of support. Concerts were therefore reckoned to be essentially commercial enterprises dependent on ticket sales: even that most potent symbol of aristocratic status and conspicuous consumption, the Italian Opera, was essentially a private-enterprise undertaking.

This does not, of course, mean there was no involvement of court or aristocracy in the direction and administration of London’s musical institutions, but the days of Handelian Opera being underwritten by the King (and opposed by the Prince of Wales’s Opera of the Nobility) were long since gone. Likewise, where lady patronesses had formerly exerted strong control over tickets, this kind of

¹ Only at the very end of the period did the left-wing London County Council direct local taxes towards band music in parks across the capital. This article is related to the project «The Transformation of London Concert Life, 1880–1914», undertaken with Leanne Langley with the generous support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council. I am deeply grateful for her perceptive comments on an early draft; a joint book entitled London Concert Life, 1880–1914: A Social and Cultural History is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.
social intervention diminished at fashionable concerts towards the end of the 18th century, and at the Opera in the wake of the parliamentary reform of 1832 – even if audiences themselves continued to be dominated by the landed elite in exactly the same way as was parliament.\(^2\)

1. An Open Market

London music therefore did not enjoy the advantages of court or state patronage, yet neither was it encumbered with any of the limitations associated with such support. Indeed, there were remarkably few restrictions on musical events in the capital; and those that remained gradually faded away as the 19th century progressed. The Theatres Act of 1843 brought to an end the domination of Covent Garden and Drury Lane for English entertainments and Her Majesty’s Theatre for Italian Opera – as much a prising open of strongly vested interests as a triumph of moral liberalisation. By the end of the century London’s modern theatreland was flourishing in the West End shopping district, alongside the principal concert halls and piano showrooms. Covent Garden itself had been transformed into the Royal Italian Opera House, attracting such international divas as Patti and Melba, joined in that Golden Age of the 1900s by Caruso and Tetrazzini. At the same time there was potent competition from rival Italian opera companies, Wagner seasons and operas in English by the Carl Rosa company, not to speak of variety theatre and music-halls, now transformed out of their lower-class drinking culture into respectable and opulent emporia of light entertainment.

A second effect of the 1843 Act was on concert life, with the Lord Chamberlain’s permission no longer being required for afternoon concerts. By the mid 1900s, such concert halls as the Bechstein (now Wigmore) Hall could host recitals twice daily across a season spanning October to July. The result was an almost unmanageable profusion of recitals throughout the week, competing with a full programme of orchestral concerts at the larger Queen’s Hall.\(^3\)

One final restriction on London’s musical activity was only removed in the 1890s after an intense struggle: the ban on Sunday concerts (by contrast, a prime day for concerts in Paris). While concerts of sacred music had long been tolerated on the Sabbath, it was only towards the end of the century that an ideological movement began to promote the social advantages of the provision of music on Sundays, as an alternative to the tavern. Thus the National Sunday League («[we]
conscientiously and religiously believe in brightening the lives of the People on Sunday) encouraged Sunday evening concerts around the capital’s suburbs, to match the opening of art galleries and similarly ‘improving’ pastimes. It was Robert Newman, manager of the Queen’s Hall, who first recognised the commercial potential for Sunday afternoon concerts, against the fervent joint opposition of sabbatarians and the first stirrings of musicians’ labour organisations. During the 1900s there was a burgeoning of popular concerts on Sundays – not only at the Queen’s Hall, but also at the vast Albert Hall in Kensington, and even at such luxurious music-halls as the Alhambra and Palladium (still banned from Sunday stage presentations).

Thus by 1900 anyone could promote a concert at virtually any time in London, in an unrestricted market environment that extended to both enterprise and musical employment. In theory, concert activity in the capital was limited only by the number of venues and by the extent of the available audience. The result was a commercial mêlée of extraordinary vitality and richness, even if the sheer variety and profusion at times seemed to threaten to overwhelm the musical calendar – and to stretch audiences well beyond any reasonable demand.

London’s musical life during the 19th century was undoubtedly highly commercial in its orientation. Even back in 1829 a cultivated visitor like Mendelssohn found the cut-and-thrust of the commodification of culture unnerving and vaguely distasteful: «Here they pursue music like a business, calculating, paying, bargaining, and truly a great deal is lacking [...] but they still remain gentlemen, otherwise they would be expelled from polite society.»

Writing to Liszt in 1852, the violinist Joseph Joachim similarly railed against a culture «ruined by the commercial cries of the speculators in whose hands music rests entirely». Tensions between money and art also came into sharp focus in Joachim’s dealings five years later with conductor and showman Louis Jullien, who offered him an extraordinary £240 to play at Surrey Gardens nightly for a month:

«I have debated with myself as to whether there were not a certain amount of artistic arrogance in my refusal of such a pecuniarily brilliant offer – but my original feeling against such an association with an undisguised charlatan and speculator triumphs over all arguments to the contrary. What relations can remain sacred to me in life if I cheapen my art by active association with a mountebank?»

It would be easy to suggest that this pervasive market orientation, coupled with the nagging need to sell tickets, must inevitably have led to an ephemeral culture

pandering to the lowest common denominator of audience taste. Yet this would be a vast over-simplification. In the first place, musicians themselves adopted measures to mediate the ill effects of excessive commercialisation. For example, the Philharmonic Society, London’s principal (or at least longest-lived) society for orchestral music, projected a mission to serve the cause of serious symphonic art. Not only were its subscribers vetted for their musical understanding and dedication; but programmes of the highest artistic integrity were enabled by persuading distinguished musicians to moderate their fees in tribute to their long tradition. John Ella’s Musical Union (in reality a commercial undertaking established for the benefit of its upper-crust membership) was equally devoted to veneration of the classical canon, in this case chamber music, and a rare silence reigned throughout its concerts.

Ella’s diplomatic manner with leading musical figures of the day – Joachim, Clara Schumann, Rubinstein, Wieniawski – led him into a position of remarkable artistic leadership within the classical arena. Joachim was soon waxing lyrical about the loyalty and general attentiveness of the London public, even at the quite different Popular Concerts promoted by the Chappell publishing firm at St James’s Hall, where classical chamber-works might be heard for as little as a shilling:

«Only the very best Chamber music is played, from the latest Beethoven to the earliest Haydn, before an audience of over 2000, and here Apollo certainly sheds his golden rays over just and unjust alike!»

Nor was innovative concert programming necessarily stifled by the overtly commercial orientation. It is true that London during the 19th century to some extent mirrored the ‹oratorio culture› of the provincial musical festival, where the continuing Handel tradition (into which Mendelssohn and his imitators were effortlessly absorbed) triumphed over more adventurous composers. There was undoubtedly initial resistance to the new siren voices of Liszt and Wagner. But London was by no means the culturally conservative backwater that has sometimes been portrayed, nor merely a chrysalis awaiting only the metamorphosis of the so-called English Musical Renaissance at the end of the century.

Partly this was because the commercial bias was moderated by an enlightened patronage that served to give direction and innovation to London’s concert life.

One striking example from 1852 is provided by the New Philharmonic Society, where financial support came from such leading capitalists as Sir Charles Fox, engineer of the Great Exhibition, and railway contractors Sir Morton Peto and Thomas Brassey, in return for innovative programming and prices low enough to entice a wide social spectrum to the 3000-seat Exeter Hall. A progressive international agenda was signalled by the engagement of Berlioz, who was as enraptured by the superb and amply rehearsed choir and orchestra as about the reception he received («the warmth of the huge public, its close attention, its interruptions […] There was a public for you!»).

Half a century later, Edgar Speyer, wealthy scion of the Frankfurt banking family, underwrote the Queen’s Hall Orchestra, backing those Promenade concerts at which Henry Wood introduced a parade of new and experimental music – right up to the premiere of a work regarded as at the very edge of music for its time, Schoenberg’s *Five Orchestral Pieces* (1912). Although this performance has gone down in history for the hostility of the audience (according to Ernest Newman a third hissed, a third laughed, and the rest were too nonplussed to do either). Wood characteristically reprogrammed the challenging masterwork at his regular series in 1914. This time it was conducted by the composer in an atmosphere of appreciative cordiality: Schoenberg himself wrote an extravagant letter of thanks to the orchestra for its artistic sympathy and careful preparation of this demanding score.

Thus what might have become a musical free-for-all, exacerbated by the London audiences’ febrile attachment to new sensation, remained tempered by patronal mediation, by critical and artistic vision, and by the influence of those idealists who viewed music as a tool for social improvement. One feature of the resultant culture – lacking an obvious site of cultural direction – was a remarkable unity of artistic purpose. After the culture wars of the earlier 19th century (the contrasting ideologies of the patrician Concert of Ancient Music, the more bourgeois Philharmonic Society for orchestral music, the Sacred Harmonic Society’s espousal of socially beneficial oratorio singing) a broad consensus emerged about what kinds of music should be promulgated. For example, the chamber music repertoire at the intimate and well-heeled Musical Union was replicated – as were many of its performers – at the Popular Concerts for the «shilling public».

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Similarly, in the orchestral sphere, the Philharmonic’s artistic aims were matched – and even exceeded – at the Crystal Palace, the gigantic glass exhibition hall in out-of-town Sydenham where (seemingly against all odds) the conductor August Manns was supported by the administrator George Grove in building up a Saturday symphony concert series of such innovative programming as to bestow real cultural cachet on the Palace.\textsuperscript{16} Something of the same could even be said of the mid-century Promenade concerts, in a foretaste of later developments. Indeed, although Joachim may have been privately scathing about the populist Jullien, he remained in general sympathy with the aims of Surrey Gardens, «which is otherwise so praiseworthy in its attempts to popularise our great masters of music».\textsuperscript{17}

Thus musicians and promoters carefully constructed cultural and social images out of an essentially commercial product. The Philharmonic Society set itself up as the guardian of symphonic values by appealing to a musical elite indifferent to aristocratic pedigree; later the celebrated conductor Hans Richter, whose concert series were built around Beethoven and Wagner, was similarly projected as a high priest of serious musical values. By contrast such unorthodox venues as the Crystal Palace and the Queen’s Hall Promenade Concerts developed a powerful image as advocates of new and experimental repertoire for equally new audiences unaffected by traditional listening habits.\textsuperscript{18}

2. Free Trade

It will already have become amply apparent that London both drew upon and fully participated in a truly European musical culture throughout the 19\textsuperscript{th} century – as was only to be expected, for Britain’s economic policy encouraged an international free trade in culture as much as in commodities.\textsuperscript{19} This was recognised as an entirely benevolent and universalist goal:

«Indeed the economy of free trade was not intended to lead to rampant individualism and destructive competition. Opening international markets to the blessings of comparative advantage was a means of moralizing economics, creating international harmony between interdependent nations.»\textsuperscript{20}

Such a perception was extended directly into the musical sphere. Thus when Richter was controversially appointed to the position of Birmingham Festival conductor in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} M. Musgrave, \textit{The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace} (Cambridge, 1995).
\item \textsuperscript{17} Letter of 15 January 1857 in \textit{Letters from and to Joseph Joachim}, ed. Bickley, 140.
\end{itemize}
1884, Hermann Klein could write about Sullivan’s resentment: «Neither did he refuse to admit the application to his own art of the essentially British principle of «free trade».»

Musicians from the continent – and, latterly, from America and the Empire – were both permitted and encouraged to play a full part in London’s musical environment. There were as yet no restrictions, no legal protectionism: in fact, it was not until the economic rigours of the years around 1930, combined with the deleterious effects of recordings and the «talkies», that work permits and the protectionist line of the Musicians’ Union limited the influx of foreign musicians. Thus in the 19th century, as in the 18th (when London had openly welcomed Handel, J. C. Bach, Haydn and Clementi), any foreigner could come and work in Britain, promoting musical events without restriction.

Yet Sullivan’s acceptance of the general principle of an open market was by no means universally shared. Local musicians frequently railed against comparatively limited opportunities as well as (quite justifiably) against aristocratic prejudices in favour of foreigners. During the years after Waterloo, years of a crisis of confidence when the very question of British identity was a prominent trope, there were serious lamentations about Britain’s lack of a distinctive musical culture of international stature. After all, if Britain was a leading power on the world stage – politically, economically, technologically – should it not exert the same kind of leadership and authority across all the arts?

During the 1830s and 1840s the national musical culture became a political issue, leading to the formation of the Society of British Musicians for orchestral music and to the founding of an English Opera House, as a response to musicians’ own perceptions of cultural repression. All this coincided with the long political struggle about the Corn Laws, finally repealed in 1846, after which the debate around the plight of a British national music largely faded away. Certainly it was not prosecuted with such vehemence in the ensuing decades and it is surely no coincidence that this was the very time when a free-trade philosophy achieved widespread acceptance, even attaining the status of economic orthodoxy.

It might be considered misleading to correlate the two debates precisely: for protectionism in the form of tariffs against foreign grain imports was essentially designed to protect the rural economy by maintaining the high price of British bread. The trade in musical culture could never be comparable, since continental neighbours demonstrably possessed something Britain lacked, a superior artistic product – certainly with regard to composers and also, in most respects, to...
Simon McVeigh
performers. Indeed Britain never sought direct protection against foreign competition in music. Even the forthright, sometimes aggressive, Society of British Musicians did not argue that foreign music or musicians should be excluded, nor that preferential treatment should be accorded to home-grown talent: only that the latter should be given a fair trial, without discrimination, and that every advantage (through education) should be given to British music in such an internationally competitive market.

The free-trade creed underpinning the emerging political consensus involved more than mere opposition to quotas, to tariffs on goods and services, to trade-distorting taxes, subsidies and regulations. It also actively encouraged the free movement of labour and capital between states, and (more generally) a philosophy of governmental non-interference wherever possible. Indeed while continental states variously retained protectionist policies during the later 19th century, Britain was alone in entirely embracing this free-trade ethos. Thus it was entirely to be expected that the unimpeded movement of foreign music and musicians – and corresponding lack of preferential treatment towards British culture – would continue not only to be tolerated, but indeed almost taken for granted.

In this respect London’s music may directly be contrasted with that of Paris, where significant state involvement in the arts was designed to advance the cause of French culture. Opera companies and Conservatoire concerts were both heavily subsidized and correspondingly under the control of the State apparatus, while during the intense period of cultural renewal after the Franco-Prussian war (1870/71) French composition was directly state-supported – witness government subsidy for the low-priced concerts of Colonne and Lamoureux, conditional on their performing new works by French composers.24

3. A Haven
As a direct consequence of this open-door policy, and in tribute to the commercial potential that it offered, London continued to be a thriving metropolis of European musical culture throughout the 19th century, supplying a musical public hungry for the best, as well as the newest, that Europe could offer. It can certainly be postulated that Britain’s virtually unchallenged international strength – its economic and political dominance – meant that it did not need to exert a nationalistic agenda in the arts, as did so many, more subordinate, nations. Furthermore as the hub of a diverse nation and an ever-expanding empire, London maintained a responsibility for cultural diffusion around the world. The Great Exhibition of 1851 (sited in the

original Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, and encouraged by the visionary Prince Albert) symbolised London’s role as a pivotal European capital city: not purely in a commercial sense as a symbol of modern manufacturing, but also as a beacon of a new order of political stability and peace in a Europe racked by revolution.  

Britain had often served before as a stable refuge for artists fleeing political turbulence on the continent: «Before 1905 Britain had no immigration laws and its inhabitants traditionally prided themselves on an ‹open doors› policy which made their country a haven for political dissidents fleeing from oppressive regimes abroad.» In 1793 a newspaper referred to musical émigrés from the French court such as Viotti and Dussek:

«Nothing less than the demolition of one monarchy, and the general derangement of all the rest, could have poured into England and settled such a mass of talents as we have now to boast. Music as well as misery has fled for shelter to England … »

In the Preface to his memoirs, written in London in 1848, Berlioz melodramatically captured the drastic effects of new political uncertainties:

«As I write, the juggernaut of Republicanism rolls across Europe. The art of music, long since dying, is now quite dead. They are about to bury it, or rather to throw it on the dung-heap. France and Germany have no further existence for me. Russia is too remote, I cannot go back there. England, since I have lived here, has treated me most warmly and hospitably; but now, with the first tremors from the Continent, flocks of frightened artists come hurrying from all points to seek refuge, as sea-birds fly landward before great storms. Will the British capital be able to maintain so many exiles? »

In line with its broader symbolic significance, the Crystal Palace played a central role in drawing together the skeins of a common European musical culture. Partly through Grove’s own efforts (he personally unearthed all the unpublished symphonies of Schubert in Vienna and secured their performance rights) «work after work unheard of in this country was produced at the Palace with loving care and received with fervent admiration. We were fortunate in those days, for it seemed to us that the shining glasshouse at Sydenham had become the temple of a new and gracious gospel.»

25 I am indebted to Leanne Langley for suggesting this line of argument.  
27 Morning Chronicle, 15 February 1793.  
Thus out of an apparently merely populist concert venue was created an audience of connoisseurs, willing to undertake the trip from central London in order to savour the best new orchestral repertoire: not only symphonies by Schumann, Brahms and Dvořák (including the premiere of Symphony No. 6), but also overtures and the larger, more difficult, works of Berlioz, as well as London premières of Richard Strauss tone-poems. For the young Elgar it was even worth the long and difficult day-trip from Worcester in order to hear unfamiliar new music at Crystal Palace, catching the rehearsal as well as the afternoon concert, should trains permit.

4. A Magnet

Foreign musicians were naturally attracted by the prospect of tapping into British wealth and patronage, as well as by the free-market opportunities of London’s concert life. Thus almost every international virtuoso or leading composer of the age visited this pivotal capital city, from Spohr, Mendelssohn and Chopin in the early decades, through Liszt, Berlioz and Wagner in mid-century, to Dvořák, Grieg, Saint-Saëns and Tchaikovsky at century’s end. Before the outbreak of war decimated international musical exchange in 1914, London hosted Richard Strauss, Fauré, Sibelius, Debussy, Scriabin and many others. At the same time concert programmes ranged across an even wider spectrum, matching the European network of London’s highly developed publishing industry.

Not that this should be thought of simply as opportunistic money-making by foreigners (though they were admittedly sometimes portrayed in this fashion). London promoters went out of their way to attract the latest and the best from the continent, knowing that this was what audiences expected – and what they were willing to pay for. The Philharmonic Society files are crammed with correspondence with leading composers, documenting numerous commissions and world premières, from Mendelssohn’s <i>Italian</i> Symphony (1833) to Saint-Saëns’s <i>Organ Symphony</i> (1886) and Dvořák’s <i>Cello Concerto</i> (1896).

Nineteenth-century composers and virtuosi commonly visited London for part of the season (occasionally adding an appearance at some provincial festival, or combining their London appearances with a tour around the country). Mendelssohn, indisputably the dominant figure in British musical life during the second quarter of the century, will serve as an example. Following the astounding success of his appearances as a pianist, conductor and symphonist in 1829, he

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32 See Appendix 2 in Ehrlich, <i>First Philharmonic</i>, 248–266.
travelled to Edinburgh, a natural destination for a cultured intellectual ("the Athens of the North"), before going on to experience the romantic wildness of the Scottish highlands and islands. In 1832 he returned to London with the resultant *Hebrides* overture, as well as a new piano concerto, leading to a further commission from the Philharmonic Society. *The Italian Symphony*, inspired this time by his southern travels, was first performed in London in May 1833. Further visits followed in subsequent years, during which he was frequently in demand at salons: for it should not be forgotten that foreign musicians were constantly feted by society, especially an artist as suave and well-educated as Mendelssohn, who also possessed the advantage of being deemed a gentleman of independent fortune. But his most lasting impact was in the field of oratorio. Performances of *St Paul* in London and Birmingham in 1837 were followed by *Elijah*, which was conceived for the 1846 Birmingham Festival and repeated in London the following year – a defining moment for British musical culture.

Another visitor who established a close relationship with the British public was the Hungarian/German violinist Joseph Joachim, who took on something of Mendelssohn's mantle in London, a role later reinforced by his close friendship with Brahms. Typically Joachim came to London for a few weeks each spring, engaged by Chappells for their St James's Hall Popular Concerts, where his string quartet, along with other serious-minded artists like Clara Schumann, came to represent the essence of the German classical tradition in London – artistic, reverential, somewhat staid. The British public appropriated Joachim as one of their own, and his jubilee dinner in 1894 was one of those occasions of sentiment and veneration that lived for years within the collective British memory: so deep was this identification that, once the Pops came to an end, the concerts were continued by a Joachim Concerts Committee headed by Edward Speyer.

Another figure to prove crucial in forming the character of British concert life was that outstanding Wagnerian, Hans Richter, who combined a career as conductor of the Vienna Opera with a strong attraction to Britain.\(^{34}\) Every season from 1879 to 1904 he conducted a short series of orchestral concerts in London, focusing on the music of Beethoven and Wagner – in the final season, as conductor of the Manchester-based Hallé orchestra, to which he had been appointed in 1899. Richter’s importance within British musical life can hardly be exaggerated. Although his later repertoire may appear somewhat limited, he not only brought a European professionalism to British orchestral playing, but also acted as a persuasive advocate for British music, most famously as conductor of several Elgar premières: *the Enigma* Variations (1899), the *Dream of Gerontius* (1900) and the *First Symphony* (1908).


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Later in the period continental composers tended to visit London for specific events, rather than extended visits – often to conduct premieres of their own music, for it was an important part of the experience and impact of new music that the composer was seen to be associated directly with it. Richard Strauss built his initial connections with Britain through performances of his (supposedly modernist) tone-poems. In 1897 he conducted the London premiere of *Tod und Verklärung* at a Wagner concert, as well as *Till Eulenspiegel* and Mozart; while six years later his reputation was sealed by a Richard Strauss Festival, at which he shared the conducting of the Amsterdam Orchestra with Mengelberg.\(^\text{35}\)

Perfectly aware of his commercial drawing power, Strauss drove a hard bargain with impresarios and organisations such as the Philharmonic, while at the same time expecting the highest performance standards through extra (and costly) rehearsals.\(^\text{36}\) While critics appeared divided with regard to his advanced musical idiom and programmatic concepts (an issue that came to a head with the Symphonia Domestica in 1905), Strauss was assuredly the flavour of the 1900s, as witness the reception of the premiere of *Ein Heldenleben* in 1902:

«*Heldenleben* was, in London (where I stayed in some style with the wealthy E. Speyer, and in whose electric automobile I travelled; he has a house that is modelled after the old Italian style), a fabulous success! 3500 people attended the concert and, for London, unheard of cheers! All the papers were full of it!»\(^\text{37}\)

The case of Debussy illustrates London’s demand to see a composer even if he lacked any track record as a conductor. Engaged at the instigation of Edgar Speyer for the remarkable fee of 200 guineas, Debussy made his London conducting debut on 1 February 1908 in two demanding scores, *L’après-midi d’un faune* and *La mer*; yet this was only the third time he had ever conducted an orchestra.\(^\text{38}\) Nevertheless the audience’s response was quite exceptional: «Debussy seemed delighted – almost like a child – because he thought that we in London appreciated his music more than his countrymen in his beloved Paris […] not even Strauss had received a warmer welcome.»\(^\text{39}\)

5. The Touring Virtuoso

London may have presented unrivalled commercial opportunities for musicians from the continent, but the seemingly unstoppable profusion of concerts during the 19th century resulted in intense competition between rival artists. Charles

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Hallé, one of Berlioz’s refugees from Paris, highlighted the cut-throat atmosphere among pianists in 1848:

«The competition is very keen, for, besides the native musicians, there are at present here – Thalberg, Chopin, Kalkbrenner, Pixis, Osborn, Prudent, Pilet, and a lot of other pianists besides myself who have all, through necessity, been driven to England, and we shall probably end by devouring one another.»

In order to mark themselves out in this competitive marketplace, some virtuosi elected to concentrate on particular repertoires: thus Hallé himself became closely identified with Beethoven (he was the first in London to put on a complete Beethoven sonata cycle); Walter Bache focussed his advocacy on a unique understanding of Liszt; Richard Buhlig made a particular point of scheduling advanced new music; the violinist Fritz Kreisler capitalised on a growing interest in earlier repertoires by programming baroque violin sonatas; and so on.

With the avalanche of performers of the stature of Busoni, Ysaÿe and Kreisler in the 1900s London promoters were careful to ration appearances so as to retain audience appeal. This gave the top artists a strong bargaining position: in return for limiting their appearances they were able to ratchet up their fees to unprecedented levels. One visiting instrumentalist even achieved the superstar status normally accorded only to divas such as Patti or Melba. The Polish pianist (and future Prime Minister) Ignacy Paderewski was the one virtuoso whose every performance caused the kind of furore that Paganini had achieved back in the 1830s – as well as something of the hysteria that Liszt inspired among his female admirers. Paderewski’s quite exceptional drawing power fully justified his outlandish fees: thus when in 1913 he charged the London Symphony Orchestra £300 for a single concerto performance the orchestra made an unprecedented £276 profit.

One way of maximising returns was the concert tour, a form of economy of scale that allowed for repetition without exhausting the audience market. Around the turn of the century, as travel and communications enabled virtuosi to become increasingly internationalised, their lives became more and more subject to lengthy tours meticulously organised by professional managers and international agents. London became an almost inevitable stop on an international schedule, yet still crucial in terms of public profile and press impact, its importance further advantaged by its position as gateway to both America and the Empire.


London Symphony Orchestra, Account Book, 16 June 1913.
The tours of the violinist Sarasate illustrate the central role played by London in the hectic lifestyle of the travelling virtuoso. In the 1888/89 season he himself referred to «una vida vertiginosa» on a tour that stretched from Paris in the autumn through Switzerland, Holland and Germany to London in the spring.44 In October he premiered his friend Mackenzie’s *Pibroch Suite* at the Leeds Festival, slotting in a pair of concerts at London’s St James’s Hall before sailing from Southampton for a seven-month tour of 100 concerts in the USA and Mexico, only to return to London for his usual end-of-season concerts in June.

The newest breed of travelling star was the conductor, no longer necessarily a composer hired to conduct his own works. The founding of the highly independent and internationally orientated London Symphony Orchestra in 1904 brought interpreters of the stature of Nikisch, Weingartner, Saфонoff and Mengelberg for one-off performances at high fees. Together with Richter they defined a new standard of musical individuality compared with their uninspiring British predecessors: and they were obviously highly marketable. Audiences began to attend London Symphony Orchestra and Philharmonic concerts in order to experience novel interpretative insights, as much as for the actual repertoire itself: only Henry Wood and (later) the mercurial Thomas Beecham, both of whom adopted the «artistic» Nikisch moustache, could begin to compare with the European giants.

In a wide open market the smart promoter knew that London audiences wanted international figures of the very highest quality; and such was the drawing power of these few outstanding stars that it was worth paying extremely high fees in order to entice them to London. The same principle applied, perhaps more surprisingly, to orchestras. It was a sign of the growing confidence of the British orchestral profession that in 1899 Newman invited Lamoureux and his orchestra to take part in a London Music Festival alongside his own Queen’s Hall Orchestra under Wood. The two orchestras alternated concerts, thus inviting direct comparison – and even combined together in a grand finale. The Londoners were deemed to excel in expressive fire and vigour, as well as in sight-reading capability, but it was the Parisians’ slickness and unified sonority that impressed audiences unused to the benefits of continental rehearsal discipline.

### 6. Britain in Europe

So where does a notion of British musical culture fit into this eclectic Europeanised mix? Perhaps this is not an especially well-phrased question: for Britain not only welcomed European musical visitors, but also appropriated much of European culture to itself. Not only Mendelssohn, but also Beethoven and Bach were quietly absorbed into the Victorian view of British culture, though the former

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was only tangentially connected (through the Philharmonic’s commission of his *Ninth Symphony*) and the latter not linked at all. It was a form of musical colonisation that sat comfortably with Britain’s confident projection of its place in the world towards the end of the Victorian era, even if doubts were being expressed in some quarters about the sustainability of its vast empire. Striking evidence for this thesis was provided by the ostentatiously cosmopolitan display of diverse European music at Edward VII’s coronation in 1902, which provided an up-to-date gloss on the traditional Handelian ceremony. While the music for the service presented a grand survey of British music from Tallis and Purcell to Parry and Stanford, the preceding music included suitably ceremonial marches by Saint-Saëns, Wagner, Tchaikovsky and Gounod; and the recessional music was none other than Wagner’s *Kaisermarsch* (with a new text, naturally) followed by the Prelude to Act 3 of *Lohengrin*.

Primarily this was – in the concert sphere at any rate – an Austro-German musical culture, broadly defined. Despite the occasional nod to locale with regard to subject matter or musical coloration, British music itself largely followed suit, with Mendelssohn providing inspiration for the renascent British oratorio tradition. It is surely no coincidence that the cause of British music was significantly advanced by patrons of German origin, such as Elgar’s associates: Frank Schuster, the wealthy financier; Alfred E. Rodewald, the Liverpool textile magnate; the two Speyers. Still more ironically, Elgar’s staunchest advocate at Novello was the Düsseldorf-born August Jaeger – ‘Nimrod’ in the *Enigma Variations*, music sometimes perceived as the embodiment of Englishness.

For many this predominance of German culture, often promulgated by resident German conductors, was simply in the natural course of things, and therefore neither to be regretted nor especially celebrated. It could, however, be seen to resonate explicitly with a currently fashionable Teutonic perception of history: the sense of Britain as an essentially Saxon race (rather than an intermingling with Celtic and other European races). Nor should it be forgotten that the royal family itself was German in origin, and that almost all the offspring of Victoria and Albert (themselves keen supporters of German music) married into titled German families. In addition, as G. R. Searle has emphasised, admiration for Germany was strongly reflected in British acknowledgment of the prestige enjoyed by her science, philosophy and music; while London was host to innumerable German émigrés. Austro-German music is also a recurrent trope in Victorian and

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Chapter 5 of Forster’s *Howards End* includes a famous account of a concert of music by Mendelssohn, Beethoven, Brahms and Elgar, suggesting a Richter concert, though in truth an entirely fictional juxtaposition of genres. The setting is used to point cultural and national disjunctions between the English and the part-German Schlegel family.

For British composers such as Hubert Parry, director of the Royal College of Music, this Teutonic succession had a distinctly Darwinian basis. Parry’s brand of evolutionism was strongly inspired by Herbert Spencer’s Social Darwinism: a sense of the torch being handed on from J. S. Bach through Beethoven to Brahms, with others falling away from the lofty path towards the highest musical intelligence («There is an infinite variety of moods which admit of being expressed, from the noble, aspiring, human sincerity of a great nature like Brahms to the rank, impudent, false sentimentality of impostors who shall be nameless.»).

Parry’s own music, along with that of his Royal College of Music colleague Charles Villiers Stanford, was (despite occasional Irish colouring in the case of the latter) positioned firmly in the Brahms camp. Although the so-called English Musical Renaissance represented to some extent an assault on German domination, in part offering a release from the stultifying traditions of Victorian oratorio, in reality the Royal College of Music institutionalised the teaching of German musical style and ideology as a universal language with no national connotations.

British identification with a universally perceived German culture was further emphasised not only by the training of young musicians such as Sullivan (at the Leipzig Conservatoire, where Mendelssohn himself had been the first director) but also by that subtle validation which composers received from successes in Germany – such as an all-Stanford concert in Berlin in 1889, after which the new *Fourth Symphony* was acclaimed in the German press («in the front rank of the composers of our own day»). As Jeremy Dibble points out, «Britain’s musical progress, fed by the anxiety of musical inferiority, had been predicated on achieving equality, rather than differentiation from, Germany.» The same applied to Elgar, whose astonishing reception there in the early 1900s climaxed in Richard Strauss’s famous toast at the 1902 Lower Rhine Music Festival, following a performance of *Gerontius*: «to the welfare and success of the first English progressive, Meister Edward Elgar, and of the young progressive school of English composers».

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7. «The Music of the Future»

Strauss’s acclamation suggests, as it was no doubt intended to, a split in British musical life that reflected the often vitriolic continental debates between the adherents of the supposedly traditional Brahms school and the visionary and experimental «music of the future» represented by Liszt and Wagner, and (latterly) by Richard Strauss himself. In London, the new music benefited from the advocacy of a group of German immigrants dedicated to the cause, outstanding among them the pianist Edward Dannreuther. Soloist in the London premieres of concertos by Grieg, Liszt and Tchaikovsky, he was at the same time well-versed in German literature and philosophy, and the author of a monograph on Wagner’s operatic theories; he also played a major role in promoting Wagner’s music there – at first in private, then during the early 1870s through the public concerts of the London Wagner Society.

Wagner himself had first visited London in 1855, a disastrously uninformed engagement by the Philharmonic in opposition to Berlioz, when his free and impassioned conducting caused as much discord with the orchestra as his music did with the critics. But in 1877 a festival devoted to his music, designed to raise money to compensate for the losses at the Bayreuth Ring the previous year, was a notable artistic success, foreshadowing performances of the Ring, Tristan and Die Meistersinger on the London stage in 1882, and a concert version of Parsifal two years later. Under the influence of Richter, overtures as well as «bleeding chunks» from the operas (Tovey’s phrase) started to appear regularly in concert programmes; and during the 1890s Wagner’s music came into its own in London, generating a wave of unbridled enthusiasm, both in the Opera House and in the concert hall – especially when conducted by such authentic Wagnerians as Richter, Mottl and Siegfried Wagner, the composer’s son.

At the same time Wagner became a figurehead of the London avant-garde, who included such decadents of the «aesthetic movement» as Oscar Wilde and the artist Aubrey Beardsley. Wagner’s ideals seemed to chime perfectly with their search for an exquisite and refined beauty, an autonomous and international «art for art’s sake» that rated sensuous pleasure over ennobling moral and ethical influence. The latter concept of the social utility of the arts represented the prevailing orthodoxy in musical circles (compare the oft-reprinted Music and Morals by Rev. H. R. Haweis, which validated the Victorian oratorio culture). Karl Beckson pithily sums up the change: «In short, for fin-de-siècle England, Wagner was drafted for the task of overthrowing Victorianism.»

54 Dibble, Edward Dannreuther and the Orme Square Phenomenon, in Music and British Culture, ed. Bashford and Langley, 275–298; see also Ganz, Berlioz in London; Langley and McVeigh, «An Audience for High-Class Music».
Eager audiences were surely enthused more by the highly charged emotional appeal and the thrilling orchestration of Wagner’s music than by those qualities that appealed to the aesthetes. But the connection became more explicit in the following decade when London embraced the startlingly modernist operas of Richard Strauss, a living representative of Wagnerism in the British perspective. As has been seen, his virtuosically orchestrated tone-poems caught the mood of the 1900s, and even a score as inherently demanding as *Ein Heldenleben* was quickly absorbed into the mainstream repertoire. None of this, however, prepared London audiences for the impact of *Elektra*, introduced by Beecham at Covent Garden in 1910. With its lurid libretto and its densely dissonant score, *Elektra* was demonised as representing the worst excesses of degenerate modernism (even Ernest Newman found it «as abominably ugly as it is noisy»). Yet the production created an extraordinary whirlwind of anticipation and the opening night was attended – quite exceptionally – by the royal family. According to Beecham, the opera was (apart from the death of the King) «the most discussed event of the year». *Salome* provided just as much of a succès de scandale in the autumn, although its staging required the personal intervention with the censor of Prime Minister Asquith. Strauss’s highly charged opera was of course based on a play by Wilde, no doubt recalling for many the disturbingly erotic illustrations by Beardsley – even if the London production had to be toned down in places, with the Baptist’s head prudishly replaced by a cloth-covered platter.

8. The New Internationalism

Modernism in the arts was inherently internationalist: the post-Impressionist exhibition of 1912, for example, brought together the work of French artists such as Matisse with the modernist Russian and British schools. London certainly saw itself as a cosmopolitan artistic centre to rival Paris; but in the musical world it took on a rather different aspect, in part articulating a reaction against the Austro-German symphonic tradition. A parallel can be drawn here with the widespread reaction after 1870 against Germany’s growing economic and political strength, built on the modern efficiency of her manufacturing base. Just as Ernest Williams’ pamphlet *Made in Germany* (1896) popularised the idea of «foreigners malevolently filching Britain’s markets», musical rhetoric matched the political:

«How long will it be before we realize the fact that where the foreign musician is there is the enemy? He may come to this island in shoals, but he comes for one purpose only – the money he can take back across the water [...] Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Weber, Wagner – they all gave

59 Ibid., 264.
themselves with a simple and perfect sincerity to the service of German art, and, in doing so, made Germany august. But what have they done for us?»

Indeed, this kind of splenetic musical discourse rehearses widespread popular attitudes towards Germany: after all Britain had much longer been under the German yoke as far as music was concerned, even if it had only recently begun to perceive itself in such a light.

The issue was exacerbated when German music itself began to be associated with a nationalist agenda in the late 19th century. British perceptions of this shift were, however, somewhat mollified by the notion of «two Germanys»: the older civilized «Kultur» contrasting with the more recent aggressive militarism. The Schlegels’ deceased father in Howards End was clearly identified with the former, in a passage significantly placed immediately before the concert description mentioned above; and in practice, Austro-German symphonies and tone-poems, together with Wagner extracts, maintained a strong centrality at the main concert series right up to 1914.

Nevertheless, there was undoubtedly a growing artistic sympathy with a broad range of other national musics, such a distinctive feature of late romanticism across Europe. Prominent in this shift was the music of two nations with whom Britain was to sign political accords: the French entente cordiale of 1904, and the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907. The programmes of Henry Wood at the Queen’s Hall Saturday series can be viewed as an explicit assertion of this outward-rippling cosmopolitanism, in strong contrast with the programmes of Richter. Table 1 juxtaposes two extreme but entirely characteristic programmes to illustrate this point.

| Richter Concert, St James’s Hall, 20 May 1895 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Wagner          | Kaisermarsch    |
| Weber           | Overture (Oberon) |
| Wagner          | Good Friday Music (Parsifal) |
| Brahms          | Variations on the St Antony Chorale |
| Wagner          | Ride of the Valkyries (Die Walküre) |
| Beethoven       | Symphony No. 5  |

| Queen’s Hall Saturday Concert, 3 April 1897 (conducted by Wood) |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Liszt           | Hungarian Rhapsody No. 4 |
| Borodin         | Polovtsian Dances (Prince Igor): first performance in England |
| Tchaikowsky     | Symphony No. 6  |
| Dvořák          | Symphonic poem, Der Wassermann |
| Grieg           | Suite No.1, Peer Gynt |
| Wagner          | Prelude to Act 3 (Lohengrin) |

Forsyth, Music and Nationalism, 260–262. In fairness it should be added that Forsyth’s main point here is to identify how Britain could learn from Germany in developing a musical national identity.
Whether it can be argued that Britain betrayed a special affinity with the music of ›oppressed‹ nations remains to be proven, especially as neither France nor Russia can be said to come into this category. Rather, London accepted without too much ideological debate the inventiveness and appeal of several, very different, national musical styles, absorbing them into a repertoire already notably eclectic.

9. Eastern and Northern Europe

London thus enthusiastically embraced several diverse European national and often nationalist trends. One particular favourite may have been closely allied to the Brahms symphonic tradition, but Dvořák’s music was at the same time inflected by tinges of Czech folk dance. The appreciation of British audiences at his very first appearance in London in 1884 initiated a new phase in his creative life that transcended the political difficulties associated with his music in Vienna. Symphonic successes directly led to a Philharmonic Society commission (Symphony No. 7, surely his finest, with its characteristic Czech furiant scherzo, was first performed there on 22 April 1885). At the same time his credentials as a successor to Mendelssohn in the choral sphere led to another triumph with the oratorio St. Ludmilla for the Leeds Festival (15 October 1886 and repeated in London a fortnight later); even if his over-dependence on traditional oratorio idioms paradoxically caused the work to be quietly dropped from the canon thereafter.

Other rather more exotic sonorities also caught the British imagination. Edvard Grieg was only the most prominent representative of the piquancy and suggestive timbres of Scandinavian music. His unaffected evocations of the natural beauty of Norway, spicing folk (or folk-inspired) melodies with delicately scented chromaticism, proved a breath of fresh air in fin-de-siècle London – a more wholesome version of Teutonism than the Germanic, perhaps. Grieg’s success from 1888 onwards was built on the popularity of his drawing-room piano music – indeed he stayed at the house of his publisher Augener whenever he visited London, highlighting the commercial relation of concert appearances with publication. His artistic reputation suffered somewhat from Shaw’s sniffy comments («As to Mr. Grieg, at the Popular Concerts, I tried to get in on Saturday, but found the room filled with young ladies, who, loving his sweet stuff, were eager to see and adore the confectioner.»). But others recognised Grieg’s tantalizing Nordic vistas as a significant departure from the norm: something that was to be far exceeded by the impact of Sibelius in 1905. Of course it was Finlandia that

62 I am indebted to John Lowerson for this observation.
most appealed to the popular audiences, but the new language of Sibelius' first symphony impressed Ernest Newman much more profoundly:

«I have never listened to any music that took me away so completely from our usual Western life, and transported me into a quite new civilization. Every page of it breathes of another manner of thought, another way of living, even another landscape and seascape than ours.»  

However, the «national school» that really enthused the British public around 1900 was the Russian: not only the overt emotionalism of Tchaikovsky’s westernized symphonies (the *Pathétique* took London by storm in 1894 and was by far the most successful work to emerge from the 1890s), but also the vivid iridescence, the primeval energy, the exotic orchestration of the music of Borodin, Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. The sheer intensity and excitement of Russian music became a trademark of the Queen’s Hall, as a result of the enthusiasms of Henry Wood, who used it to assert his own exuberant individuality against Richter and the more staid scions of the Philharmonic. In this he was egged on by the remarkable Rosa Newmarch, whose mission was «the cultivation of British taste to respond to the humanity in all music, however unknown and unusual, regardless of cultural-political boundaries».  

In the last years before the war, even Wood’s Russian penchant was trumped by the arrival of Russian modernism in the form of the Diaghilev *Ballets Russes* in 1911, and especially by the London performances of Stravinsky’s ballets *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*. In 1913 Sir Joseph Beecham, the wealthy pill magnate and father of the conductor, went still further in promoting an extraordinary Grand Season of Russian Opera and Ballet at Drury Lane, including not only Chaliapin in Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov* and *Khovanshchina*, but also Stravinsky’s ballet *The Rite of Spring* (directed by Nijinsky, shortly after its infamous Paris premiere). If *The Rite* proved beyond many, the season as a whole was a glittering success, attracting the unwonted attention of London’s intellectual and artistic set as well as the usual moneyed classes – a triumph of marketing for the latest continental modernism.  

10. France  

The other emerging radical voice was that of France, where the modern school of composition was projected as an act of cultural heroism after the devastating 1871 defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. French music itself retained few such political
connotations in Britain, although the 1904 *entente cordiale* did have a tangible manifestation in the Paris tour of the London Symphonic Orchestra in January 1906, when works by Parry, Stanford and Elgar jostled in programmes with Berlioz and Saint-Saëns.

The latter was already well-known in London, alongside that quintessentially Victorian composer Gounod, but it was largely as a result of the visits of the proselytizing Colonne and Lamoureux that more challenging French music by Franck, d’Indy and others came to special prominence there. During the 1900s Fauré was a frequent visitor to London, while the still more novel music of Debussy and Ravel altered musical perceptions entirely, ushering in a revolutionary idiom that was seen as a new departure transcending the Wagnerism that had first inspired it. Wood recalled the riveted attention of the Promenade audience when he introduced Debussy’s *L’après midi d’un faune* in 1904:

«The beauty of the harmony, the exquisitely beautiful orchestration, the atmosphere so fresh and original, created the deepest impression. In fact I received more letters asking for a repetition than I had ever received before on the production of a novelty.»

Critics such as Arthur Symons (author of *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*) naturally linked Debussy’s music with French symbolist poets, and, by extension, with the world of the English decadents. When *Pelléas et Mélisande*, to a libretto by Maeterlinck, received its Covent Garden premiere in 1909 it was specifically placed in the context of the aesthetic movement in London.

Not that acceptance of the unfamiliar idiom was immediate. Ravel’s String Quartet, programmed by the Parisian Quartet in two concerts of modern French music given in December 1907, was deemed by some to be the work of a madman. But one critic gave a more balanced view:

«The whole conception is foreign to the traditions which have been sacred to us for generations, and if we persist in regarding the work from our usual point of view, we can scarcely form a favourable opinion of it. […] The harmonies used throughout are of the most novel order, but they are logical, and that is much […] The work of Ravel is logical, but the ideas of which it is built are beyond the comprehension of the majority of us at present.»

Significantly, however, the same critic indicated that a Fauré piano quartet and the Debussy string quartet had already been eagerly accepted as a regular part of the modern repertoire.

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69 Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, vol. 2, 127.
The new currency of French music was reflected in British interactions too: even Vaughan Williams was temporarily seduced by the new French idioms, travelling to Paris to study with Ravel in 1908. The youthful Thomas Beecham elected to make a speciality of French music, using it to define a particular orchestral sound to match his musical ambitions, and setting it alongside British music of a similar refined voluptuousness and sensuous harmonic experimentation, such as that of Cyril Scott (‘the English Debussy’) and Delius, the dissident Bradford composer who emigrated to Florida before settling in France.

11. British Music

Of course, Stravinsky and Debussy were a world away from the Mendelssohnian oratorio and Brahms symphonic tradition that had dominated late Victorian British music. What then was the attitude of British composers towards this free-trade cosmopolitanism? I have deliberately left consideration of British music itself to the end of this article, since the history of British culture in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras has normally been presented almost entirely as a narrative of the rise of the so-called English Musical Renaissance on the one hand and of Elgar on the other.

But in reality the picture is simultaneously more complex and more straightforward. In the decades around 1900 London’s rich musical life and the thirst of its audiences for new and different musical experiences encouraged a prodigious mix of diverse repertoires; and the colossal expansion of concert opportunities in London (unimaginable a century earlier) certainly required an abundance of new music. British music had to fight its own corner in an open market, and to concert promoters and audiences it represented just one more type of new repertoire to add alongside those already discussed.

It was the free market environment that both inspired and facilitated the directions in which concert programming was to lead. Or (put another way) programming was a means of stimulating a market, providing a shopfront for the next product: additionally, when there were numerous concerts on offer in different venues, the mix of programming formed an ideal opportunity for market-testing. Manns at the Crystal Palace had shown the way here; by the late 1890s the profusion of concerts, including the novel Promenade Concerts of Newman and Wood at the Queen’s Hall, allowed repertoire to operate as a crucial device in the market. In this context, British audiences showed no signs of chauvinism about the music they wanted to hear.

This is not to deny that the need for a national music was strongly articulated by writers and critics at the time, as for example J. A. Fuller-Maitland in his English

71 I am indebted to Leanne Langley for stimulating discussion on the argument offered here.
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Music in the XIXth Century (1902). Apart from anything else, it was an issue of national pride: after all, even Norway had its national music. To some extent this mission is enshrined in Grove’s great lexicographical project, the Dictionary of Music and Musicians (1879–1889).\textsuperscript{72} Naturally, too, the concept was encouraged by the composers themselves (Parry, Stanford and so on); and their own construction of the notion of an English Musical Renaissance has influenced musicologists ever since.\textsuperscript{73}

However, this construction should also be viewed in the context of the return of protectionism to the political agenda in the 1880s. In the uncertain years of the late 19th century there were renewed calls for the protection of British industries from «unfair» competition from Europe and America. This was a period when «every country in «the civilised world», including Britain’s own settled dominions and India, introduced protection, leaving Britain the only wholly free-trading economy».\textsuperscript{74} In 1903 Joseph Chamberlain’s calls for Tariff Reform, linked with closer ties for the Empire, came centre stage. Once again, as in the 1830s, the British music agenda paralleled wider calls for special protection.

This attitude was aggressively reinforced by Cecil Forsyth’s polemical Music and Nationalism as late as 1911: «The French, the German, and the Italian composer has each his protected mark at home, where he is ensured a hearing both by the wishes of his compatriots and by the actual legislation of his country. The English composer, on the other hand, has no such home institution on whose sense of patriotism and fair play he can rely.»\textsuperscript{75} But it should be recognised that the reference is essentially to opera (+patriotically subventioned+ abroad), following the failure of the Royal English Opera House in 1892 and of subsequent attempts to revive the concept with state funding: even Forsyth admits to their being many more opportunities for concert performance of British music.

Certainly in the real world of the concert hall – and in spite of the protestations of the Society of British Composers or the ever-vocal firebrand Holbrooke, who organised chamber concerts specially for British composers – the latter did have ample outlets. Wood in particular was overwhelmed with requests for performances at the Promenade Concerts, which he obliged with numerous performances of works by the younger British generation (he largely ignored both Parry and Stanford). Similarly, following his espousal of Scott, Holbrooke and Delius, Thomas Beecham was besieged with requests for premieres. But the market could

\textsuperscript{75} C. Forsyth, Music and Nationalism: a Study of English Opera (London, 1911), 139.
also prove harsh. British music was specially promoted by the Leningrad Symphony Orchestra in 1910/11 and in the centenary season of the Philharmonic (1912), partly as a political response to accusations of partiality towards the Austro-German repertoire, but the outcome was in each case financially disastrous.76 Audiences did not necessarily respond to special pleading in this way.

Yet there were successes too. The great symphonist Elgar is justifiably the name most strongly associated with the 1900s; and his *First Symphony* (1908) created a public fervour quite as powerful as Tchaikovsky’s *Sixth* had done a decade earlier. The composer of music wracked by the complex emotional turmoil of an outsider – a shopkeeper’s son from rural Worcester, virtually self-taught, never part of the musical establishment – was acclaimed as the voice of Edwardian Britain. Ever the patriot, the composer of the Pomp and Circumstance marches and other imperial celebrations, Elgar nevertheless allied himself quite openly with the Austro-Hungarian Richter; and he set his musical language deliberately within a Wagnerian context, while espousing the traditional forms: oratorio, symphonies and concertos, orchestral variations.77 Elgar himself sought to transcend musical parochialism: asked what he thought about folk music, he famously retorted, «I don’t think about it at all. I am folk music!»

In order to distinguish themselves in such a competitive market, British composers became acutely aware of the need to acquire a distinctive voice; and by 1900 it had become evident that neo-Brahmsian idioms would no longer suffice. Some positioned themselves in a more radical frame. Intriguingly, Shaw had already pointed to the way back in the 1880s, as Phyllis Weliver has recently demonstrated. Thus in an unpublished short story about Berlioz, as well as in the novel *Love among the Artists* (written in 1881/82), Shaw espoused a progressive stance that anticipated both the modernist position of the alienated progressive working «for the sake of music itself, without regard to the public», and a radical musical idiom emulating the composers of the «music of the future».78 The students of the Wagnerian Frederick Corder at the Royal Academy of Music – including Bantock, Bax and Holbrooke – strode out on different paths in this very direction, adding the influence of Richard Strauss to the mix during the 1900s.

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Others distanced themselves altogether from the Austro-German tradition: accepting «the need to purge their music of Teutonic elements» in the words of Hughes and Stradling.\footnote{Hughes and Stradling, \textit{The English Musical Renaissance}, 140.} As we have seen, some British composers allied themselves with the ideals of the modern French school. Orientalism provided another inspiration: Holst’s music of the 1900s reflected his interest in Hindu philosophy and Sanskrit literature, resulting in the stylised four sets of \textit{Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda} (1908–1912) and the Indian opera \textit{Sävitri} (1908), among others.

Yet of much more long-term significance, and in many ways providing the most radical solution, was the English folksong movement, most famously associated with the collecting activities of Cecil Sharp and Ralph Vaughan Williams. The latter’s earliest English folksong settings date from 1903, and other works drawing on the experience (for example, the song cycle \textit{On Wenlock Edge}) soon followed. This embracing of Britain’s musical past also extended to the lost glories of the Elizabethan heritage (\textit{Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis}, 1910). But neither penchant should be viewed as mere nostalgia. Vaughan Williams’ agenda was closely related to the currently fashionable utopian socialism of William Morris’s Arts and Crafts Movement, a rural vision of a pure and unified society, unsullied by industry and machines.\footnote{For a critique of this phenomenon see G. Boyes, \textit{The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival} (Manchester, 1993); also P. Mandler, «Against ‘Englishness’: English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia», \textit{Transactions of the Royal Historical Society}, 6th ser. 7 (1997), 155–175.} Here was a music that genuinely turned away on its own path, rejecting the Germanic culture promulgated by the early English Musical Renaissance.

This does not mean, though, that Vaughan Williams distanced himself from conventional modes of performance: in practice he turned his musical experiences to use in symphonies and choral works for concert halls and provincial festivals like everyone else. A more innovative approach was that adopted by Percy Grainger – the Australian, Frankfurt-trained pianist who was another pioneer in English folk-song collecting. Grainger developed a «purer» approach towards programming, as for example a remarkable Aeolian Hall concert in 1912 made up solely of arrangements such as «My Robin is to the greenwood gone», a ramble upon an old tune for flute, English horn and six strings.\footnote{21 May 1912, programme in the Royal College of Music, Centre for Performance History.} But only one composer turned his back altogether on the demands of the market: in 1914 Rutland Boughton, disciple of William Morris, put on his first Glastonbury Festival, achieving for a few brief weeks of August a free-thinking and democratic utopia (the «Holiday School») enacted through communal music-drama.\footnote{M. Hurd, \textit{Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festivals} (Oxford, 1993), 67–75; Hughes and Stradling, \textit{The English Musical Renaissance}, 228–230.}
12. Conclusion

In the late 19th century new modes of travel as well as organisation were changing the face of the musical world, drawing on the professional management and marketing skills of impresarios and agents of global reach. It is a central paradox that this international transformation should have coincided with the period when nationalist musical agendas, often politically inspired, rose to the fore.

Jim Samson has argued that Britain as an advanced industrial country «tended to reduce European achievements to the status of passing fashions – ideas to be tried for size», with bourgeois consumers devoted to «canonic and popular repertoires, cultivating the performer and listener at the expense of the composer and accepting more-or-less uncritically the commodity status of music». 83 This article has explored those market forces that underpinned this commodity status, but it has been suggested that it was the ideology of free trade, together with a broad acceptance of Britain’s place in the wider world, that underpinned the eclectic repertoire.

As we have seen, there was undoubtedly a political dimension to Britain’s musical life. Yet, overall, Britain leaned towards a cosmopolitan view, encouraging an open market in an atmosphere of free trade that openly accepted the widest range of musical cultures. This contrasts markedly with the situation in Paris, where state intervention promoted a national agenda after 1871. The role of other national musics in Paris was also highly politicised: thus the private concerts of Countess Greffulhe explicitly reflected the French political alliances of the 1900s, as a form of diplomacy, with programmes that focussed on Russian music and even a performance of Gerontius. 84

While one strand of London’s musical society took a stand against German musical domination, this was only to a limited extent reflected in the practical musical life of the capital. It would be equally difficult to assert that there was a wave of pro-British musical sentiment among the public at large or among the intelligentsia much before 1914; in fact, to a large extent, nationality was not an issue. For the most part the repertoire was broadened by a cosmopolitanism, a genuine «free trade in music» – achieved in an atmosphere of openness, a passionate appreciation of good culture, and a general willingness to pay for the best that Europe could offer.


L'echange libre musical. Une perspective européenne sur la culture musicale de Londres au 19e siècle

La culture musicale de Londres au 19e siècle était caractérisée par l'existence d'un marché ouvert qui encourageait l'échange libre des produits et des producteurs. Il en résulta une situation musicale d'une vitalité et d'une richesse extraordinaires. Londres devint l'un des centres de la culture musicale européenne et profitait de son rôle de porte vers les États Unis et l'Empire britannique au point qu'à la fin du 19e siècle la variété et l'abondance de l'offre musicale menaçaient de submerger le marché local. Ce marché apparentemment libre était en fait réglé par l'influence des mécènes, la réception des critiques et des artistes et par l'action de ceux qui voyaient dans la musique un instrument de progrès social. Les musiciens et leurs agents proposaient eux-mêmes la représentation culturelle et sociale d'un produit essentiellement commercial. La Grande-Bretagne non seulement accueillait les visiteurs musicaux européens, mais s'appropriait leurs cultures musicales. Cette forme de colonisation musicale correspondait d'une manière de plus en plus adéquate à l’image que les Britons cultivaient de leur place dans le monde à la fin de l’ère victorienne.

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