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Volume I

Edited by
Bennett Zon

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General Editor's Preface

It was while listening to Joseph Kerman's keynote speech at the 1995 Maynooth International Musicological Conference that I was first struck with the idea of a conference dedicated to the study of music in nineteenth-century Britain. It was in response to what seemed to be Joseph Kerman's suggestion that the advent of the 'New Musicology' arose in part out of some vague and general feeling that good musical sources were drying up. His printed version of the text does not bear out this sentiment to any great extent, although there remains in his writing a certain trace of scepticism about the future of some categories of source study. Needless to say I do not share in this concern, because, as I listened to him, I began to think of an area of musicology rich in sources, but which lay virtually untouched, in relative terms, by modern scholars. This was music in nineteenth-century Britain, and it was this topic which was to form the basis of the very first Music in Nineteenth-century Britain conference, held at the University of Hull in July 1997.

The essays included in this, the first, volume of *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies*, comprise a selection of papers given at that conference. The Hull conference, as Nicholas Temperley indicates in his preface to this volume, was predicated on debunking, and to some rationalizing the origins of, the 'Land ohne Musik' reputation. The present collection of essays follows on from this work, each providing a window of discussion for future research. From Temperley's 'Xenophilia in British Musical History' to Richard Kitson's reevaluation of James William Davison, the breadth of research indicates a study in its own advent. From historiographical issues to instruments and performing ensembles; from the Wesley family to local history; and from repertoire, genre and concert life to analysis and criticism: the richness of the study becomes immediately apparent in the reading of these wide-ranging explorations of the period. Not only do we have collected here research which covers new ground with new sources, we also have the beginnings of a revision of attitude – an attitude engendered admittedly as much by nineteenth-century musicians and writers as by more modern musicologists. This set of essays, however, marks a transition in its own right. It describes precisely what Joseph Kerman, in his keynote speech at Maynooth, hesitantly calls 'Musicology in Transition'. With this volume, and with the second biennial conference already arranged for Durham, 1999, we have the clearest indication possible of musicology in transition.

It remains for me to thank various individuals who helped inaugurate the Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain conferences, as well as those

involved in the preparation of this volume. Special thanks go to Nicholas Temperley, not only for providing the conference with the inaugural keynote speech, but also for his ongoing endorsement of my efforts with regard to nineteenth-century British music studies. In terms of administration, Philip Olleson, Leanne Langley, Rosemary Williamson, and I formed the first working committee of the biennial conference, and although my thanks to them have been expressed many times before, I wish to acknowledge formally their great help and commitment. Philip Olleson, in addition to assisting with the organization of the conference, also provided extensive and invaluable editorial advice for the preparation of the present volume, and for this I am especially grateful. I would also like to express my deepest thanks to Rachel Lynch, commissioning editor at Ashgate, who has shown nothing but the strongest support for the endeavours represented in this book. It was to Rachel that I first took the idea of a series of books called Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain, and it is to Rachel that *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies* owes its existence. Finally, I would like to thank my wife Clare, who was administrator of the Hull conference. Without her help the Hull conference, as well as the present collection of essays, would have never got off the ground.

Bennett Zon
Hull, 1999

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Barbara Mohn gained her MA in musicology, English literature and medieval and modern history at the University of Bonn. After a period as a visiting student at the University of Exeter, and post-graduate researcher in London, she is completing her PhD thesis on English oratorio in the nineteenth century. She is currently an editor at Carus-Verlag, Stuttgart and her publications include works on oratorio and Mendelssohn.

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Nicholas Temperley was born in England in 1932 and educated at Cambridge, where he received a PhD in 1959 for a dissertation on 'Instrumental Music in England, 1800–1850'. He was on the music faculty at Cambridge from 1961 to 1966, and since 1967 has taught musicology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He has devoted much of his career to the study and revival of nineteenth-century British music. He wrote *The Music of the English Parish Church* (Cambridge, 1979) and edited Volume 5 of The Athlone (later Blackwell) History of Music in Britain series, *The Romantic Age, 1800–1914*, and *The Lost Chord: Essays on Victorian Music* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1989). He has published editions of works by Crotch, Loder, Pierson, Pinto, Sterndale Bennett and S. Wesley, as well as a volume of English songs from 1800 to 1860 (*Musica Britannica*, 43, with Geoffrey Bush) and *The London Pianoforte School, 1766–1860* (20 vols, 1984–87).

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Caroline Wood is Lecturer in Music at the University of Hull. Her main research interest is French opera of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but a recent invitation to look at the music collection at Burton Constable has led to the present study.

Bennett Zon is Lecturer in Music at the University of Hull, where he divides his teaching between musicology and composition. As a musicologist he is general editor of the Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain series (Ashgate), and editor of *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies*. He is also part owner of the nineteenth-century mailbase on the web. He is author of *The English Plainchant Revival* (Oxford University Press, 1999) and is currently working towards completion of *Historicizing Music: The Evolution of Musicology in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. As a composer he has held numerous international commissions, ranging from St John's College, Cambridge, to the Concerto Soloists of Philadelphia, and has had performances throughout America and Europe. He is currently writing his first symphony, commissioned by the Hull Philharmonic to celebrate the millennium.

Foreword

I first became interested in nineteenth-century British music when I was at school and heard Sydney Watson making some sweeping judgements about Victorian hymn tunes – how they were treacly, oily, sentimental and so on. But I loved these tunes, and could not quite understand what was supposed to be wrong with them. As I was showing interest in church music it was arranged for me to go to tea with Dr Fellowes at Windsor Castle, where he was a minor canon of St George's Chapel. Perhaps it was hoped that he would talk me out of my hang-up. At first he talked entirely about cricket. While his wife was making the tea he told me he had attended every Eton-Winchester match since 1882 (this was about 1949), and began getting into the details. I had to feign interest for a while. At last, with some help from Mrs Fellowes, I finally got him around to music, and I asked him what he thought of Barnby and Stainer. This was a slightly mischievous question, because I knew he had devoted most of his energy to the music of the Golden Age, and I expected some choice epithets like those that Watson had used. But he put up a spirited defence of Barnby, and said he was an excellent musician who had done a lot for the Bach revival. Then he told me how he had chatted with Stainer shortly before 1900, and how Stainer had confessed that he regretted having written so many anthems too easily, saying that people had told him they were 'just the thing they wanted'.

When the time came for me to choose a topic for my PhD work at Cambridge, I said I wanted to specialize in English music of the early nineteenth century. I met with a lot of opposition. The college organists and church musicians who dominated the Cambridge musical world in those days were still dazzled by Elizabethan and Jacobean music, so recently recovered. They were still trying to root out their instinctively Romantic musical thinking, and they probably felt that any emphasis on the nineteenth century was counter-revolutionary. The principal musicologist on the faculty, Thurston Dart, thought I was mad. More moderate advisers thought I was indulging in a gesture of rebellion, which would cost me my career. Everyone was sure the nineteenth century was a dark age of music and no good could come of messing about in it.

When it was clear that I was going to do it, I did get sympathy and support from my supervisors, first Philip Radcliffe and then Charles Cudworth. I had the satisfaction of exploring virtually unknown territory. But for a long time I felt I was on a lonely path. I had an eerie

feeling that I was facing the same prejudice that had confronted the Victorian composers themselves.

So I felt greatly honoured to be invited to address the inaugural conference for Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain, which was held in Hull in July 1997. The event was a milestone in the field of scholarship in which I have worked all my life. True, it was not quite the first conference devoted to nineteenth-century British music; there have been Victorian Studies conferences taking music as their theme, such as the one at Leicester University in 1979. But this was the first one organized by a music department, and that, I believe, was a new and significant step for which Bennett Zon deserves much of the credit. Moreover, I was astonished when I saw that 36 papers were to be given at Hull, and to hear that there were still more that could not be accommodated. I would be interested to know whether students are still steered away from this period by their advisers.

I doubt if the prejudice is dead yet. But it has been overtaken by more general changes. Professional musicology barely existed in Britain in the 1950s (in fact Dart would not accept the label 'musicologist' for himself, insisting that he was just a musician). Now, musicology is very firmly established here. The older, German-based musicology was about early music, about all the Renaissance period; and the opening up of the nineteenth century, even for German music, has come only in the last few decades. Strictly speaking, musicology assumes that any music is a worthy subject of study in its historical and cultural context, regardless of intrinsic value. Popular music has been opened up to scholarship, and it is a most promising area in nineteenth-century Britain, hardly visible in this volume. The 'new musicology' also plays down the importance of individual composers in cultural history.

Few of the chapters in this volume deal directly with the artistic value of the music they talk about. Some establish the factual and technical information on which future histories and evaluations will be built. Some, of course, do not talk about British compositions at all, but about musical life in Britain, or the reception of music of other nations. All this makes for a totally different climate from the one I knew as a student. But the old prejudice long guarded the musical life of nineteenth-century Britain against aggressive snooping, and kept it intact for the present generation.

Scholars who are attracted to the music of nineteenth-century Britain have the advantage of exploring a landscape that is still largely unfamiliar. They have an abundance of sources, because the period is only a century old, and because the Victorians had a lucky obsession with documentation and statistics. They have a fascinating age to deal with, the summit of Britain's greatness in many fields and also a time of

profound changes in society and ideology. They have a period that excites enormous interest in the scholarly world, but for which other scholars lack the expertise to deal with music. This volume helps to show where music fits into the picture.

Nicholas Temperley

PART ONE
Introduction

CHAPTER ONE

Xenophilia in British Musical History

Nicholas Temperley

This chapter addresses the 'Land ohne Musik' idea. I know it is a stale topic, but at the same time it has to be *the* topic for any introduction to the area of nineteenth-century British music. Now that we are getting serious about the history of British music in the nineteenth century, it is time to review the historiography. I'm sure there are few scholars who still think that Britain is, or ever was, a land without music. But I am equally sure that those who work in this field are aware of the ghostly presence of this idea, and have had to deal with it in one way or another. I would like to take this opportunity to bring the question to some sort of resolution.

Another old chestnut is 'The Dark Age of British Music'.[1] I suggest that it is essentially the same idea as 'Das Land ohne Musik', since both cover a period that generally includes all or part of the nineteenth century. A 'dark age' implies a 'light age' to follow, and the term came into use at about the same time as the 'English Musical Renaissance' idea, that is, about the turn of the century.[2] When historians began to talk about a rebirth or a renaissance, they could highlight the dawn by emphasizing the darkness that had come before it. But the Victorians themselves could not see any approaching dawn, and believing that there was something wrong with them, they kept saying 'The English are not a musical people'. This was translated as 'Das Land ohne Musik'. But all these formulations are rooted in the same belief: that nineteenth-century Britain was an unmusical place.

I would like to look at three nineteenth-century statements of this belief, one British and two foreign. Among many British examples, one

[1] Some writers use 'English' when they mean 'British', as can be seen by a glance at the 'Select bibliography'. I am using it in the strict sense, to refer to England alone – except, of course, when I quote other writers who have used it more loosely. 'British' includes Scotland and Wales, but not Ireland: the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century was 'of Great Britain and Ireland'.

[2] A possible source for this phrase was a short-lived French journal called *La Renaissance Musicale*, first published on 6 March 1881. It supported the Wagnerian avant-garde and French nationalism.

of the most significant is found in *The Musical World*, which spoke of 'the old-fashioned and still fashionable twaddle in high quarters – that the English cannot be a musical people'.[3] Notice especially the word 'old-fashioned' implying that the idea was far from new in 1841,[4] and the words 'fashionable' and 'high quarters', to which I will return later.

The Belgian historian and critic François Fétis addressed the subject in his 'Letters on the State of Music in London', published in the *Revue musicale* and translated as a special treat for readers of *The Harmonicon*.[5] Fétis wrote that 'An English composer beholds neither glory nor profit in the effects of his labour; who, then, shall induce him to write? ... We need not wonder if in London we find only arrangers, who esteem their labours no more than the public'. The important thing to notice here is that Fétis was not himself delivering an unfavourable judgement of contemporary British composers. (He praised several of them quite warmly later on in his *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, more especially John Field and William Sterndale Bennett.) Rather he was reporting on the low opinion that the English had of their own composers.

So it was with Robert Schumann. In 1837 he was at pains to repudiate the saying 'Englischer Komponist, kein Komponist'.[6] 'Old prejudices have been weakened by the names of Field, Onslow, Potter, Bishop, etc.', he wrote, but above all he drew his readers' attention to the creative power of Bennett.[7] Schumann's stand in support of Bennett had no chance of being popular with his readers. It is a testimony to his courage and honesty.

In an age of growing musical nationalism, only the English played down the value of their own music. As Warren D. Allen put it in his valuable survey of music histories, 'The opposite of chauvinism appears in English histories of music during the Victorian era'.[8] Nationalists of other countries, certainly including many Germans, were only too happy to take them at their word. It gave them a cast-iron justification for doing what they wanted to do anyway – to eliminate Britain as a possible competitor for musical prestige. F. J. Crowest wrote in 1881:

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[3] *The Musical World*, 15 (1841), 155.

[4] Much earlier instances are cited in P. M. Young, *A History of British Music*, London, 1967, p. 281.

[5] F. Fétis, 'Letters on the State of Music in London', *The Harmonicon*, 7 (1829), 276. Fétis's facts were challenged in detail by the editor, William Ayrton, but his general point hit the bull's eye.

[6] R. Schumann, 'An English composer is no composer', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 24 February 1837.

[7] Ibid., 3 January 1837.

[8] W. D. Allen, *Philosophies of Music History. A Study of General Histories of Music 1600–1960*, revd edn, New York, 1962, p. 124.

'We have the continental reputation of being the Great Unmusical Power of Europe – strong enough in commerce and steam, but devoid of musical talent, invention, and discrimination'. German music histories of this period tend to ignore British music altogether, or to give perfunctory mention to a few composers. Emil Naumann's five-volume history of music (completed in 1885) was so deficient that Sir Frederick Ouseley, when editing a translation, had to add special chapters on British music.[9]

A subset of this idea was the illusion that the English (as opposed to the Scots, Irish and Welsh) had no 'national' music or folk song. William Chappell in 1859 blamed this on Burney's *History* and Crotch's *Specimens*.[10] George Alexander Macfarren had to publish an article to refute the belief,[11] but the idea was too deep-seated to be so easily eradicated. 'Das Land ohne Musik' had become dogma.

The idea spread not only in space, but in time. Just as nineteenth-century European critics took the Victorians at their own valuation, so did twentieth-century historians. Alfred Einstein, in his *Music in the Romantic Era*, gives space only to Sullivan, and even then strictly as a satirist. Carl Dahlhaus, in his book *Nineteenth-Century Music*, follows suit, declining to evaluate or discuss Sullivan's music as such. Leon Plantinga's is the only non-British general history of nineteenth-century music that gives serious consideration to a number of British composers. It is the same with general histories, where music itself is often slighted. The classic *Portrait of an Age: Victorian England* by G. M. Young makes no mention of music at all, not even when discussing the accomplishments of young ladies for the marriage market. Here he goes beyond negative judgement of English composition to the ludicrous extreme of pretending that music played no significant part in Victorian life. From judgements like these the 'Land ohne Musik' idea was reformulated as the 'Dark Age of Music'.

The British arrived late in the arena of musical nationalism, perhaps because they had felt unchallenged in most other contests. A few intellectuals such as Ayrton, George Hogarth, Chappell and Macfarren asserted British claims to musicality; but musical nationalism did not become a movement until late in the century.[12] That was when the

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[9] F. A. G. Ouseley, chs 31, 46, in E. Naumann, *History of Music*, 5 vols, London, [1886].

[10] William Chappell, *Popular Music of the Olden Time*, London, 1855–59, vol. I, pp. vi–vii.

[11] G. A. Macfarren, 'The English are not a Musical People', *Cornhill Magazine*, 18 (1868), 344–63.

[12] I have discussed Macfarren's early efforts in 'Musical Nationalism in English Romantic Opera', in N. Temperley (ed.), *The Lost Chord*, Bloomington, IN, 1989, pp. 143–57. See also Jean Marie Hoover, 'Construction of National Identities: Opera and Nationalism in the British Isles', PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1999.

Musical Renaissance idea was adumbrated, then proclaimed. Rural English folk music was discovered, the Golden Age and Henry Purcell were elevated, Henry Davey announced that the art of composition had been an English invention. But the belief that Britain in recent times had been an unmusical nation was still unchallenged. The terminology was changed to represent a temporary rather than a permanent state. Darkness was now followed by light, or death by rebirth.

This has turned out to be a durable concept. Was it a verdict based on a consensus of independent aesthetic judgements? Or was it a historical construct derived from factors outside music?

Table 1.1 points to the correct answer to this question. It shows the time limits of the 'dark age' and the 'renaissance' as assessed by a series of writers, arranged in chronological order. I have tried to include all authors who have offered a serious assessment of nineteenth-century British musical composition, and who have made a clear statement about a dark, lean or low period followed by a rebirth or improvement. Some authors, such as Gerald Abraham, Cyril Ehrlich, Eric Mackerness, Percy Young and myself, are missing, because we did not subscribe to any judgement of that kind.

Nobody has put the beginning of the 'dark age' earlier than 1695, the year of Purcell's death. Some have put it as late as 1800, or left it undefined. There is an even more striking lack of agreement about the end of the 'dark age' and the starting-point of the 'renaissance'. This critical change of direction is marked by the upward-pointing arrow. The result of these two uncertainties is that there is stark divergence in the evaluation of the nineteenth century itself. For some writers, it is the dark age; for others, it is the dawn. Colles saw a 'precipitous ascent' just where Blom saw a 'nadir'.

The upward-pointing arrow tends to move farther and farther to the right as you go down the page and the date of the source gets later. This cannot altogether be explained by the tendency to downgrade the immediately previous age and to boost one's own era. Both Davey in 1895 and Howes in 1966 perceived a rebirth in about 1880; on the other hand both Ouseley in 1885 and Hadow in 1931 saw a revival beginning in about 1800. The 1830s marked a downturn in the view of two historians but an upturn in the eyes of four others. Fellowes, discussing only cathedral music, saw two revivals, one about 1837 and another, following a mid-Victorian trough, in about 1885.

So it is the *idea* of darkness followed by rebirth that commands agreement among historians. Opinions about *which* music is dark and which is reborn vary too widely to amount to a consensus of aesthetic judgements.

There is further variation. In two branches of British music to which I have given close attention, namely piano music and parochial church

Table 1.1 Chronologies of the 'dark age' and 'renaissance'

Source	1700	1714	1760	1800	1837	1850	1880	1900
Ouseley, 1886	↘	'lowest ebb'		↗	'good music of every kind'			
Hueffer, 1889					↗ 'great improvement of the "Spirit of Music"'			
Davey, 1895	↘	'disrepute'					↗	'awakening'
Fuller Maitland, 1902				↘ 'low point';	'unfruitful'	↗	'Renaissance'	
Walker, 1907	↘	'dark stretch'	↘	'nadir of composition'	['dark stretch' continues?]	↗	'Renaissance'	
Bumpus, 1908			↘	cathedral music 'stood still'	↗			
Forsyth, 1916	↘	energies devoted to imperial expansion					↗	'national awakening'
Hadow, 1931	↘	'dark age'		↗	'dawn and progress of the English Renascence'			
Colles, 1934					↗	'precipitous ascent'		
Fellowes, 1941		↘	'poverty' of cathedral music, 'lean period'		↗	'great revival' ↘	'sentimentalism' ↗	'revival'
Blom, 1942	↘	'decline'	?→		↘	'nadir'	↗	'Renascence'
Mellers, 1946	↘	'dark ages'						↗
Howes, 1966							↗	'Renaissance'
Long, 1971	↘	church music in 'decline'						↗ 'awakening'
Pirie, 1979		↘	'darkest hour'					↗ Renaissance'
Banfield, 1985					↘ songs: 'overall impression of worthlessness'			↗
Beedell, 1992			↘	'decline'			↗	
Stradling & Hughes, 1993							↗	'Renaissance'

music, I found patterns that were quite different, both from each other and from the preponderant modern view of a renaissance just before 1900. In piano music there was a summit of achievement in the 1790s, followed by a slow decline that lasted well into the twentieth century.[13] In Anglican parish church music, there are two distinct chronologies, one of urban, the other of rural church music. For urban church music the high point seemed to come in the 1860s, followed by a slight decline and then a second rise after 1900, and an apparently terminal decline after 1950. For rural church music, now often called West Gallery Music, the apogee was about 1800 or 1810, followed by a slow decline towards extinction at the end of the century.[14] In all these cases I am speaking not of musical activity or quantity, but of the quality of original music, measured by my own judgement and by the staying power of compositions. Another example is cathedral music, where William Gatens arrived at a considered judgement that the High Victorian period was a summit of achievement; this is the very period for which Fellowes constructed a special valley between early and late Victorian revivals. In opera, Eric Walter White sees a rebirth in 1834 followed by an eclipse after the failure of the Pyne-Harrison company in 1869.

The change of terminology ('Land ohne Musik' to dark age followed by renaissance) came with the rise of English or British nationalism in the late Victorian era.[15] This, it now seems clear, had little to do with music, but was motivated by the emergence of Germany, and to some extent the United States, as economic, political and potentially military rivals. So long as Britain was clearly the world leader among nations, we welcomed foreign imports, including music. But an era of protectionism was coming. In this new climate, British-born composers suddenly found that they were admired and encouraged by their compatriots. New sources of income were forthcoming; works were commissioned; critics were friendly. The 'inducement' to compose ambitiously, which Fétis had found lacking in 1829, was now there. Composers responded to it, and were in turn rewarded. At last, a cumulative momentum could be built up and the rebirth was on its way. I am not in any way denying that it took place.

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[13] See N. Temperley (ed.), *The London Pianoforte School 1766–1860*, 20 vols, New York and London, 1984–87, vol. 1, Introduction.

[14] See N. Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church*, 2 vols, Cambridge, 1979.

[15] Scottish, Welsh, and Irish nationalism, reacting against domination by England, are another story altogether, and will not be discussed here.

If my interpretation is right, the negative factor in the nineteenth century was not an absence of musical talent or inventiveness, but a failure of confidence. This has two consequences that I think are important for future research: we can focus on the belief itself and try to explain it; and we should rid ourselves of the belief when studying and evaluating British music of the nineteenth century.

Explaining the 'unmusical Victorians' idea

Clearly, the Victorians and their predecessors were not generally inclined to kowtow to foreigners. It was a time of self-confidence, bordering on truculence, not only in military, naval and political affairs, but in such matters as science, technology, manufactures, currency, sport, dress, language, domestic manners and habits, and all kinds of other things. Even in the visual arts there was not much sense of inferiority. We have to find the reason for an inferiority complex that pertained specifically to music. Here are some of the explanations that have been put forward.

One, favoured by some of the earlier writers, might be called the luck of the draw: that after the early death of Purcell, Britain simply did not get lucky enough to draw a first-rate composer until, let us say, Elgar. This theory is difficult to take seriously today. It adopts the view that musical geniuses arrive fully packaged from heaven, Mozart being the supreme example. Nowadays we find it easier to believe that even the most gifted people need a conducive environment to develop greatness. Mozart certainly had one. The lack of one in Britain is exactly what we are trying to explain.

Some writers have tried to connect unmusicality with phlegm, which is the humour most often associated with the British. Fétis wrote that 'their habitual calm renders them less disposed to the cultivation of music'.[16] This explanation, also, is difficult to take seriously. For one thing, music can express calm just as well as excitement; for another, we had abundant energy for fighting, sport, money-making and literature.

Another old theory points to Handel as the root cause of the trouble. Ernest Walker (1907) considered that British composers' inventiveness was crushed by pressure to imitate Handel, even 100 years after his death, and then by the similar domination of Mendelssohn. The passage was retained by Jack Westrup when he revised Walker's book in 1952.[17]

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[16] Fétis, 'Letters on the State of Music', p. 276.

[17] E. Walker, *A History of Music in England*, Oxford, 1907, pp. 235–6, 261; 3rd edn, pp. 271, 294–5. See also Naumann, *History*, vol. 4, p. 912.

I did my best to squash it as long ago as 1960,[18] but it is still alive and kicking. Even if it were true, it would surely be a manifestation of the sense of inferiority, not a cause of it. The living Handel may have taken active steps to crush his rivals, but after his death there was only his music to carry on the job. We still need to explain why British composers felt unable to develop independently of Handel's music.

Henry Davey, who in 1895 published the first history of British music based on original research, was inclined to put it all down to the over-centralization of power and wealth in London after 1700, which deprived British composers of the multiple opportunities open to musicians in countries like Germany and Italy.[19] Henry Hadow agreed.[20] This theory may account for any deficiency of musical life in the provinces. But in London foreign composers enjoyed enormous success. Why could not native composers do the same? Again, this is not really an explanation.

Some writers have blamed the Puritans. They are a tempting target, and one can not even be accused of any unacceptable prejudice if one attacks them. Now there were certainly groups of people in the nineteenth century who still retained much of the Puritan ethic. And although the Puritans never disapproved of music as such, they did frown on several of the main opportunities for music, including the theatre, dancing, Sunday recreation, and organs and choirs in worship. But again, their strictures would have fallen just as hard on foreign music as on the native product. And it is now generally agreed that Britain was exceptionally hospitable to foreign music in the nineteenth century.

Hadow offered a second and more convincing reason (his first being over-centralization): 'the almost formal exclusion of music from a liberal education'. He published an essay called 'The Place of Music in Humane Letters', based on a set of lectures delivered at the Rice Institute at Houston, Texas, in 1926[21] (and it is worth remembering that the Americans adopted and even augmented British negative attitudes in their thinking about their own music). It is indisputable that music did not hold in Britain the high intellectual status that it enjoyed in Germany or France. But that does not in itself explain why the British welcomed foreign music and assumed it was superior to their own.

Ann Beedell, in her interesting book *The Decline of the English Musician 1788–1888*, even suggests that the abrupt emigration of the hero of her book, William Castell, in 1826 was due to the 'failure of English

[18] N. Temperley, 'Handel's Influence on English Music', *Monthly Musical Record*, 90 (1960), 163–74.

[19] H. Davey, *History of English Music*, London, 1895, revd 1921, pp. 336–7, 443–4.

[20] W. H. Hadow, *English Music*, London, 1931, p. 105.

[21] W. H. Hadow, *Collected Essays*, London, 1928, pp. 272–89.

musical culture', which she puts down to the refusal of leaders of opinion such as Locke, Johnson, Chesterfield or even Burney to admit music to full status as an art and an intellectual pursuit.[22] But this again runs up against the awkward fact that music of all kinds was enormously popular in Britain throughout this period; Beedell herself describes the 'craze' for music in the later eighteenth century and the success of organizations like the Philharmonic Society in the nineteenth. Castell was a mediocre violinist in the London theatres. Clearly, his living did not depend on whether the music he played was highly regarded by the intelligentsia. It only had to find an audience. It is abundantly clear from Beedell's own account that he left because he was not a very good musician, had messed up his finances and wanted to get away from his wife.

But certainly, Britain differed radically from the other great European powers in its attitude to its own music. I believe we must look for an explanation in some unique characteristic of British society. Surely the most striking difference between Britain and most other countries at this time was its liberalism: its greater political, economic and social freedom. Another European country provides a parallel case. The Netherlands suffered an even steeper musical decline, if measured by the production of famous composers; it began earlier, with the death of Sweelinck in 1621. And The Netherlands, like Britain, was notable for a relatively liberal social system. In both nations, liberalism nourished explosive growth in economic and political power. Is there some way in which it could also have caused a decline in musical self-confidence?

Already in the eighteenth century, Britain was known for upward social mobility of a kind that was hardly possible in France, Spain, Italy or the Holy Roman Empire. Social-climbing was resisted by those already at the top. One way in which the truly blue-blooded could separate themselves from the ambitious parvenu was by cultivating *foreign* art, literature and music, which were still beyond the climber's grasp. Italian opera was well suited to this purpose, and so it was cultivated, for the most part, as a snobbish entertainment, not as a serious intellectual pursuit. It was desirable not for its intrinsic qualities, but simply because it was exclusive.

But, it will be argued, by the nineteenth century royal and aristocratic patronage had lost their monopoly in Britain; the nobility could no longer control musical taste. In Dent's view this fact was itself the reason for what he called 'the English attitude towards music'.[23] By

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[22] A. Beedell, *The Decline of the English Musician 1788–1888*, Oxford, 1992, pp. xiii, 38–49.

[23] E. Dent, 'Early Victorian Music', in G. M. Young (ed.), *Early Victorian England*, Oxford, 1934, p. 252.

1830, he wrote, 'the magnificence of the aristocracy had become more restrained, while the middle classes, whose rise to power was perhaps the most significant factor in Victoria's reign, had not yet attained artistic culture'. I think Dent missed the point here. The middle classes had been rising in power for centuries, and had been the chief consumers or promoters of the madrigal, the consort song, the Restoration semiopera and much else of the greatest English music. Although they did not yet control politics in the nineteenth century, they were a formidable economic, social and cultural force. Institutions like the Philharmonic Society were run by professional musicians, not noblemen. This was surely a heaven-sent opportunity to overthrow the philistinism and xenophilia of the nobility, and to assert musical values that were rooted in middle-class taste.

I have argued this myself in the past, but I no longer believe it. True, middle-class life in Britain was self-supporting; but it was always coloured by the hope of rising in the social scale, and this amounted to a strong inducement to ape aristocratic tastes. The temptation was much weaker in countries like Austria where the class boundaries were fixed and impenetrable. Fétis was struck by this in 1829, when he wrote that in England 'the taste of the aristocracy is a law to which all must bow'.[24] And *The Musical World*, in a passage already quoted, dismissed the idea that the English were unmusical as 'fashionable twaddle' emanating from 'high quarters'.

In the freely capitalistic climate of Britain, success involved becoming a gentleman or lady. Middle-class music-lovers were under great pressure to adopt the preference of their betters: for Italian opera, French ballet and so on. Performers and composers were obliged to cater to these preferences.

An outward sign was the effort of musicians to seem as foreign as possible by the use of titles like Signor and Madame. This hardly changed until the 1880s, the time when Covent Garden stopped translating German, Russian and English operas into Italian. Fuller Maitland wrote in 1902:

> It is to be observed that among the better classes of English female singers are an increasing number who boldly call themselves 'Mrs.', and who do not appear to have suffered any pecuniary inconvenience from the abandonment of 'Mme.', which was *de rigueur* for married musical ladies not so long ago.'[25]

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[24] Fétis, 'Letters on the State of Music', p. 276.

[25] J. A. Fuller Maitland, *English Music in the XIXth Century*, London, 1902, pp. 281–2. Ironically, Fuller Maitland himself used a foreign term, 'renaissance', to christen the new movement itself. This was well before the word had begun to be widely used, in English-language writing, for an earlier period of musical history. See also note 2 above.

In the nineteenth century the preference for foreign musicians was gradually extended to Germans, then, in the 1890s, to Russians and other Slavic peoples, though their languages never enjoyed the same cachet as French or Italian. But a more deadly aspect of British aristocratic taste than xenophilia was the one identified by Hadow and Beedell – the rejection of music as a serious intellectual pursuit. Here the British nobility were emphatically at odds with their continental peers. John Hullah declared that in England, unlike the Continent, the upper classes were ignorant of and indifferent to music. And now the upwardly mobile had to imitate this, too!

In Britain, a musician had no chance of becoming a gentleman by practising his craft. Burney's great ambition was to be accepted as a man of letters, and only when he did so was the door opened to gentlemanly society. Cyril Ehrlich, in his seminal book on the musical profession, has written: 'Success, whether achieved within the profession or by marrying money, required more than musical talents: sensitivity to niceties of social behaviour and confidence to brazen out solecisms, an eye for the main chance, and careful bookkeeping.'[26] He is thinking here mainly of financial success. But he also cites a mid-nineteenth-century guidebook on the choice of a profession (by a lawyer named Byerly Thomson) as saying that whereas the professions of law, medicine and the church assign 'a certain position in the social scale', a musician may be 'an itinerant fiddler, and of the lowest grade of society; or a man of the highest attainments, moving in the most exclusive circles, and occupying an exalted position in the literary world'.[27] The key word here is 'literary'. Making music in itself led to neither financial reward nor social acceptance, because gentlemen did not make music. Musicians were thus divided into those with a liberal education who had access to polite society, and those who did not. Ehrlich sees a 'widening social gap between the two breeds'.

In the Victorian world, social standing – respectability and gentlemanliness – was everything. It was not only the route to wealth. Still more importantly, perhaps, it was the key to less measurable sources of happiness such as friendship, self-respect, confidence, esteem. It was pursued with a desperately competitive intensity, by all except those who already had it and those who had no hope of attaining it: in other words, by our friends the middle classes. Social standing could not be

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[26] C. Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain Since the Eighteenth Century: A Social History*, Oxford, 1985, p. 32.

[27] H. B. Thomson, *The Choice of a Profession: A Concise Account and Comparative Review of the English Professions*, London, 1857; cited in Ehrlich, *Music Profession*, p. 43.

won by serious composition, because the arbiters of taste continued to confer their favours on continental music. Therefore composers who were not born to the purple were driven by almost irresistible pressure to give up their hopes of greatness, and to follow rather than lead. Percy Young put it bluntly, in an aside to his discussion of Stanford: 'To get by in the social round, the British composer needed to resemble his betters. At the end of the road of musico-social respectability was the lure of a knighthood: for most composers knighthood was the kiss of death. It was a token of achievement in anything but creative activity.'[28] He quotes the well-known comparison of Brahms and Sullivan by Dr Paperitz, a teacher in Leipzig:

> Of the two I think Sullivan had the greater natural musical talent; but Brahms will not write a note he doesn't think worthy of his gift ... As for Sullivan, he settles in London, and writes and publishes things quite unworthy of genius. He is petted by royalty, mixes in aristocratic circles, acquires expensive tastes which oblige him to prostitute his talents for money-making works. As a consequence, his modes of expression deteriorate, and England and the world are robbed of the fruit of his God-given gifts.[29]

If Paperitz was thinking of the Savoy operas when he spoke of prostitution, I am sure nobody here would accept his judgement for a moment. But his general point has all too much truth in it.

And why did Brahms not have to mix in aristocratic circles (though, incidentally, Liszt and Wagner did so)? Because in Germany, creative musical achievement in itself conferred eminence and high status.

Social emulation of the upper classes was the spur that energized the middle classes to the great achievements of the Victorian age. It was highly desirable, no doubt, in the army, and navy, the civil and colonial services, the law, medicine and business. It did no damage in the arts of the word: fiction, poetry, drama, oratory, where the English language naturally reigned. In music, emulation of the upper classes was disastrous, because they had long since downplayed its value and adopted foreignness as their shibboleth. That is the point of my argument.

Some Victorians were well aware of this, and they saw that the only kind of musician who could escape was one who was born a gentleman. (Ladies were excluded because of a different set of prejudices.) There were few enough gentleman musicians, for as Ehrlich points out, 'the vast majority of gentlemen ... were born and bred away from music'.[30]

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[28] Young, *History of British Music*, p. 517.

[29] Samuel Midgley, *My 70 Years' Musical Memories*, London: Novello, 1930, pp. 21–2; cited in Young, *History of British Music*, p. 509.

[30] Ehrlich, *Music Profession*, p. 72.