

■ MUSIC IN 19TH-CENTURY BRITAIN ■

The Singing Bourgeois

**SONGS OF THE VICTORIAN
DRAWING ROOM AND
PARLOUR**

SECOND EDITION

DEREK B. SCOTT

An **Ashgate** Book



THE SINGING BOURGEOIS

for my mother, Jean

The Singing Bourgeois

Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour

Second Edition

Derek B. Scott

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Introduction to the First Edition

This is not the first book in the Open University Press's *Popular Music in Britain* series to challenge assumptions about a particular body of music. At issue, here, is the myth constructed around 'Victorian parlour song', a term almost always used as if it denoted a clear-cut genre characterized by stereotyped musical and literary features. In fact, there was a remarkable variety of musical forms and styles of song acceptable in the Victorian middle-class home. Some of these, indeed, were firmly established well before Victoria came to the throne, such as the 'refined' traditional air and the English operatic air – though nothing now seems to immediately evoke an atmosphere considered more quintessentially Victorian than 'The Last Rose of Summer' (from a volume of Moore's *Irish Melodies* published in 1813) or 'Home, Sweet Home!' (from Bishop's English opera *Clari* of 1823). Religious nonconformists were brazenly eclectic in commandeering whatever musical features could be made to function in their interests and favoured a strong, tuneful idiom which also frequently found its way into the parlour. Later, the music of the blackface minstrel show and the 'respectable' type of music-hall song were added to the drawing-room repertoire. The desire to categorize a particular portion of all this as 'Victorian parlour song' by reference to an arbitrary selection of musical and literary criteria has created a 'parlour song' consensus in its own way as misleading as the 'folksong' consensus attacked by Dave Harker.¹ It is to avoid such categorization that I call this book *The Singing Bourgeois*.

The 'parlour song' consensus, it should be stressed, is not something that has been as systematically constructed by key mediators in the same manner as the 'folksong' consensus but results rather from a sloppy use of terminology (for example, using the term 'parlour song' sociologically but actually trying to define it musicologically). There again, some writers use the term with the intention not of referring to the whole range of songs sung in the middle-class home, but of pinpointing those songs aimed directly at the domestic market. Yet, this is unhelpful because the real target of the sheet-music publication of almost all Victorian song is the middle-class home.

Even when some of the diverse ingredients of bourgeois song began to solidify under the influence of the Ballad Concerts promoted by the music publisher Boosey, it remains difficult to formulate an empirical definition of what constitutes the typical Boosey ballad. Here is an attempt from *The New Grove Dictionary*

of Music and Musicians: 'The texts were sentimental verses about love, gardens and birds, the music simple strophic settings marked by easy melody, stereotyped accompaniments, and maudlin harmonic progressions.'² One of the three 'typical' examples chosen to illustrate this, Sullivan's 'The Lost Chord', is *not* about love, gardens, or birds; it is *not* a simple strophic setting; it is melodically awkward in parts rather than easy (see Chapter 7); and its piano accompaniment is unusual in having been contrived to suggest a church organ. Whether its harmony is maudlin or not is a question which needs to be considered in relation to 'presentist' value judgements discussed below. It is evident that a 'parlour song' or 'drawing-room ballad' is going to be more easily defined sociologically as a song designed or appropriated for bourgeois domestic consumption.

In the nineteenth century the description 'parlour song' is extremely rare, although 'drawing-room ballad' is often encountered (and with increasing frequency after the establishment of Boosey's Ballad Concerts in 1867). In the first half of the century the description 'popular song' was very common; like 'favourite' and 'celebrated' it was used by publishers to suggest widespread demand. A guarantee of quality followed, because a song could be popular in a commercial sense only by attracting sufficient numbers of musically literate bourgeois consumers. Naturally the bourgeoisie thought the songs they enjoyed were of unquestionable merit and took comfort in the knowledge that, if a song was described on its sheet music as 'popular', it automatically implied that it was regularly performed in 'respectable' homes.³

In the succeeding pages I choose to employ the term 'drawing-room ballad' rather than 'popular song' in order to avoid possible confusion about the class orientation of this material. I must stress, however, that I use it as a generic and not a specific term until we reach the 1870s; from then on there was, indeed, a move towards a standardization of songs which were accorded this label (there is more on this subject in Chapters 6 and 7). I would like to argue that used generically 'drawing-room ballad' helps to locate a cohesive body of song of a class-aligned nature. The tightly controlled, written-out structures of songs produced for the drawing room are singularly adaptive to bourgeois individualist ideology; the performer implicit in these structures is an interpretative servant of the songwriter. This is not to say that bourgeois songs cannot be appropriated by the working class, who – as will be seen in Chapter 9 – have the possibility of constructing new meanings in the way they 'consume' them. Conversely, the bourgeoisie are able to appropriate working-class musical practices and through the effort of mediation assimilate oppositional elements.

Apart from the easy judgements that have been made in categorizing bourgeois domestic song, our understanding of this music has been hampered by the contempt now heaped upon it from some quarters. The expression 'presentism' has been coined to describe a critical vision which implies that our present values are objective rather than historically conditioned. 'Informed' critics of the nineteenth century were equally convinced of their objectivity in describing Restoration comedy as the result of an embarrassing lapse of artistic standards. The status of an artistic genre is better regarded as 'whatever is valued by certain people in specific situations, according to particular criteria and in the light of

given purposes.⁴ The modernist musicologist's scorn for bourgeois domestic song arises from its failure to meet the criteria of the Western 'art music' tradition, in which an assumption is made that art progresses under its own laws independently of the material basis of the society within which it is produced.⁵ The movement of art is therefore interpreted as a succession of styles, each led and perfected by creative geniuses. Modernist theory accepts with equanimity the absence for centuries of 'important' female composition, and even that an entire country may be without any real music – before Smetana, for example, 'there had been no genuine Czech music.'⁶ From this perspective, which still so often sets the terms of the debate, a figure as important to British musical life in the nineteenth century as Sullivan can be dismissed in half a sentence,⁷ having failed to illustrate a purely musical-historical movement.

An alternative theoretical framework exists, in which the nineteenth-century bourgeois songwriters can be seen as inextricably bound to and providing a cultural response to the society of which they form a part. Song production can be located in terms of its function and use, its relationship to class dominance and hegemonic struggle. The bourgeois 'popular song' was the first product which showed how music might be profitably incorporated into a system of capitalist enterprise. It is in the production, promotion, and marketing of the sheet music to these songs (and the pianos to accompany them) that we witness the birth of the modern music industry. As already noted, for whatever apparent reason a song was originally written (say, for an English opera), it was possible for it to be tailored to the requirements of amateur music-making in the middle-class home.

Class is a problematic term which warrants a few words of explanation. Class is only discernible in a relationship: when I use the term 'middle class' or 'bourgeoisie' I refer in the eighteenth century to merchants, artisans, and shopkeepers; in the nineteenth century I refer to the capital half of the capital/labour relationship. It is important to remember that class is a process; the middle class is constantly changing and adapting. It can be argued that the term 'middle class' immediately hypostasizes this process. The description 'bourgeoisie' is preferred by many writers on the Victorian period to avoid the seeming contradiction of a dominant class being given a label which carries a suggestion of a fixed hierarchical position beneath the aristocracy.

Along with coercion, a class manifests its supremacy by exercising *hegemony*, a key political term employed by Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* to describe 'intellectual and moral leadership'.⁸ The dominant culture in a society is hegemonic: it aims to win its position of ascendancy through consent rather than impose itself by force. Hegemony is a process of struggle which often calls for compromise: for example, in the later nineteenth century membership of a trade union was finally accorded respectability. The state apparatus is invaluable in establishing hegemony; the dominant culture is mediated through institutions such as schools, in, for instance, the choice of songs for teaching purposes (a topic touched on in Chapter 9). It might be thought that the diversity of ideology found in bourgeois songs (drinking v. temperance, belligerence v. compassion) argues strongly against the theory of hegemony. Gramsci, however, argues that bourgeois hegemony necessitates an alliance of fractions, a 'historical bloc'; it

therefore follows that the dominant culture is not homogeneous but subject to (and able to tolerate) conflicting strands within the hegemonic alliance. Since the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 the middle class had held a share of power, but the middle class did not become the hegemonic class until the nineteenth century, after a long period of struggle marked by important victories in 1832 (the passing of the Reform Bill) and 1846 (Repeal of the Corn Laws). There should not, then, be any surprise to find the eighteenth-century middle class enjoying the satire in Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* directed at a government which was in part middle class. The power bloc which allows stable class rule is only achieved through struggle between various contending classes and fractions; only one class within the alliance may exercise hegemony, but the dominant culture (although in itself hegemonic) will contain evidence of the conflicts within that alliance. Notice that a key Victorian term *respectable* has a hegemonic function: it connotes adherence to a code of what is socially acceptable and thus seeks to impose a behavioural conformity which sanctions the existing social structures. The terms 'polite' and 'wholesome' are used in a similar fashion, to lay down the correctness of certain social values.

I should now explain what I mean by 'dominant culture', and clarify the standpoint from which I view the relationship of art to the society within which it is produced. One of the sources of Gramsci's theory of hegemony was a statement by Marx: 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.'⁹ In feudal society paying homage to one's lord seemed natural, just as consumerism seems natural in a society based on generalized commodity production. A quotation from Marx's 'Preface' to his *Critique of Political Economy* sheds further light on the subject: 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness.'¹⁰ A little earlier in the same work Marx introduces the notion of economic base and ideological superstructure, a model which gave rise to a type of Marxist theory now commonly referred to as 'vulgar Marxism', 'reflectionism', or 'economic determinism'. This asserted the primacy of the economic base and reduced the complex relationship between that and the world of ideas to one of rigid determinism. The seductiveness of reflectionist thinking can be illustrated by the argument that playing the piano was considered such an essential accomplishment for well-bred Victorian girls because the major commodities of the music industry were pianos and sheet music (and today musical literacy is no longer valued because records are a more important commodity than sheet music). An argument like this, of course, begs many questions, including why playing the piano was more important for girls than boys. Evidence that economic determinism was already gaining theoretical ground in the late nineteenth century is shown by Engels' desire to emphasize that the economic element is not the sole determining factor.¹¹ Recent Marxists have been at pains to stress the dialectic between social existence and social consciousness rather than fall back on the mechanical metaphor of base and superstructure.

The culturalists and structuralists of the 1970s, with their contending paradigms, were at least agreed in attributing *relative autonomy* to the artist (albeit for

different reasons). Culturalists stressed that social existence, including cultural experience, influences and conditions consciousness rather than determines consciousness, allowing an active role for human agency. Structuralists underlined the importance of differing pre-existing systems of signification present in each field of creativity – if ideological signs determine consciousness then it is always with the understanding that those signs mean different things to different social groups. My own approach is oriented towards culturalism in so far as I seek to examine these songs in relation to the class outlook of the Victorian bourgeoisie. The concept of the ‘hegemonic bloc’ I also find helpful in contributing to an understanding and explanation of the internal conflicts within the bourgeoisie (who ought not to be viewed as monolithic). Overall I adopt what may be called the ‘popular culture’ perspective as opposed to the ‘mass culture’ perspective. The latter tends to focus on the depraving effects of the ‘culture industry’, whereas the hallmark of the ‘popular culture’ perspective is that meaning is made in the consumption – here is a space for relative autonomy and hegemonic negotiation. The ‘popular culture’ perspective does, of course, pose a challenge to the uncritical acceptance of ‘high culture’. I should add, in concluding this section, that there is no easy one-to-one relationship between art and social history: for example, it is possible to find melancholy songs in times of economic buoyancy (or when a war is going well) and optimistic or romantic songs in times of depression.

The historical specificity of this book now needs explaining. I start in the eighteenth century in discussing the foundations of bourgeois domestic song styles not because there is any kind of absolute beginning there, but because the performance of the politically combative *Beggar’s Opera* seems a more significant cultural moment than, say, the publication of Yonge’s *Musica Transalpina* (a collection illustrating the importance of bourgeois taste in the late sixteenth century). I close the survey around the year 1898 when the drawing-room ballad of the Boosey type was wilting in the face of the challenge from Tin Pan Alley as the United States of America moved to dominate the commercial music industry. That year, too, musical comedy from the United States was exciting interest after the sensational London première of Kerker’s *The Belle of New York*. Furthermore, dissemination of music was soon to be transformed: the pianola had arrived in 1897 and the English Gramophone Company set up business the following year.

In the first chapter I have tried to locate the roots of that distinctive character which lends a homogeneity to nineteenth-century bourgeois song-types. There is some inevitable cramming in my attempt to condense within a single chapter everything in the eighteenth century which I thought relevant. Chapter 2 examines the early amateur music market, and Chapter 3 follows this up by concentrating on the opportunity taken by women, who were so crucial to this market, to write songs themselves. Chapter 4 considers the manner in which the ethnic cultures of Celts and Afro-Americans were subject to assimilation by the English and North American bourgeoisie (symptomatic of this was the creation of two new ‘American’ instruments, the five-string banjo and the ‘concert D’ uilleann pipes). Chapter 5 has a religious theme; it deals chronologically with the

range of sacred music which became available and discusses the emergence of the 'sacred song' as a branch of the drawing-room repertoire. All these chapters are concerned mainly with pre-1870 developments.

After 1870 a period of rapid growth begins which sees the development of a more organized music industry, so Chapter 6 returns to the subject of the music market during these years and the changes being brought about by the increasing professionalization of music. Chapter 7 tries to demonstrate the extent of formula following during the post-1870 ballad boom. For that purpose it has been necessary to include detailed analyses in order to show how my conclusions have been obtained (a Glossary of Musical Terms is at the rear of the book). A problem I feel I have not resolved in this chapter is how to explain artistic distinction without romantic mystification. The next two chapters are on subjects which range over the entire period: Chapter 8 looks at bourgeois song in the context of the growth of English nationalism and the continuity/discontinuity debate concerning British imperialism; Chapter 9 deals in brief with bourgeois song and hegemony (a whole book could be written on the subject). At various points the reader is referred to additional relevant material via the footnotes. In the final chapter I give an account of the dilemma facing ballad composers as a result of the challenge from the United States and the simultaneous feeling of exhaustion which had overtaken the British ballad.

In the main, given fair representation of song types and influential composers, my selection of songs for the purpose of analysis has been directly related to their degree of commercial success, in the belief that the producer/consumer relationship is clearest where the mutual rewards are apparently highest. Nevertheless, failure is also important, since it helps to define the tolerances of the genre when pulled in the direction of either of the polar extremes of novelty or familiarity. In Chapter 7 I discuss a failure like Adams and Weatherly's *The Light of the World* because it shows that the application of a familiar formula does not guarantee success, thus offering further confirmation of the relative autonomy of the consumer.

The contemporary relevance of a study of nineteenth-century bourgeois domestic song extends beyond the insight it provides on the workings of the commercial music industry and on the continuing resonances of this music which may be felt in twentieth-century gospel and country music. To the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie it was never simply a question of how best to produce and consume a particular musical product, but how to put into practice the belief that music-making was of benefit to everyone's development as a human being. Any future society which thinks practical musicianship to be life enhancing will have to address the same question. There was a genuine, if ideologically motivated, attempt in the mid-nineteenth century to promote the *musica practica* that Barthes regards as having almost disappeared from high culture.¹² Of course, drawing-room ballads were never popular in any truly democratic sense; Victorian domestic music was class based and reinforced bourgeois ideology (particularly that of the family). All the same, there was a search for a kind of music which would permit maximum participation. In recent times punk rock may be seen as a determined though brief attempt to develop a proletarian democratic style

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derived from the 'garage band'.¹³ Vastly different in almost every respect as the music of the Sex Pistols was from that of Stephen Foster, they each represented the ultimate simplicity and directness in their respective genres and thus helped to demonstrate the enormous potential for diversity of expression those qualities may contain.

Introduction to the Second Edition

This book originally appeared in 1989 as part of the series *Popular Music in Britain* published by the Open University Press. In revising the work for republication, I have had to confront two problems. The first is that the work has been cited a fair number of times in the past ten years and, moreover, was adopted as a key text for *A832 Victorian Popular Music*, one of the modules of the Open University's MA in Humanities. It was, therefore, a matter of concern for me that the pagination of the original should be maintained. Hence, for this edition I have chosen to add a completely fresh general chapter rather than to expand existing chapters. I have also provided an extensive bibliography which I hope will benefit other researchers of nineteenth-century British and American popular song. I have appended references to recent research by others (and myself) in a new section at the end of the notes to chapters.

My second problem relates to the period in which the book was written (the 1980s), and the stage that cultural theory had reached during that decade. This was a time when Cultural Studies, Literary Theory, and the New Art History were creating turmoil in academia. Initially, the new cultural theorizing taking place in the UK was heavily indebted to the work done in the 1970s at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (University of Birmingham) which, in turn, relied upon the ground-breaking work of Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson. Then, the influence of Continental thinkers increased and, while some were accommodated easily enough (the Frankfurt School), others (for example, Barthes and Kristeva) caused battle lines to be drawn up between two contending camps: culturalists on one side and structuralists on the other. British structuralism gave way rapidly to poststructuralism but struggled harder and longer against the claims of culturalism. Now, the whole point of this over-general history lesson is to point out that my book bears some of the scars of this cultural theoretical warfare. Within three years of its publication, I found myself drawn firmly into the poststructuralist camp. The deciding factor, for me, was my difficulty in accounting for some sort of inner expressive essence when I embarked upon further research into questions of sexuality, gender, and ethnicity in music. I shall expand no further, except to say that if I had written this book in the 1990s it would have turned out rather differently from the product before you.

In returning to the theoretical framework of this book, I do wish to add a few words designed to defend it against a misreading made by some of my critics. So,

let me assure readers that, while I was somewhat monolithic in my characterization of the Victorian bourgeoisie, I was well aware of the pitfalls of mapping high- and low-status music onto high- and low-status consumers in a simplistic manner, and such was certainly never my intention. I readily acknowledge that a middle-class factory owner could enjoy a blackface minstrel song, and a factory worker could enjoy singing in Handel's *Messiah* or playing Mendelssohn's music as a member of a brass band (see pages 87, 105, 193 and 197). On the other hand, I refer those who argue that such examples show there is *no* relation between musical taste and social class to the empirical data gathered by Pierre Bourdieu (especially in his book *Distinction*). There is also a strong argument to be made for the effectiveness of different styles in articulating distinct class interests (*cf.* the work of Richard Middleton). Furthermore, the field of the popular that opened up in the nineteenth century was one in which different classes and class fractions fought over questions of intellectual and moral leadership (or what Gramsci termed 'hegemony'). This struggle concerned matters of cultural status and legitimation, and popular culture functioned frequently as an area of compromise over values, allowing the working class to adopt evasive or resistant strategies. In other words, popular song could and, I argue, did function as a site for the contested meanings of social experience.

Another matter that raised critical hackles in some quarters was the Marxist perspective I adopted. I continue to argue, however, that to begin to understand matters relating to music and class in the nineteenth century, it is important to know how ideas of class were being reformulated during that epoch, when a new perception grew of classes as socio-economic groupings with the capacity to effect social change. From this perspective, most familiar from the writings of Marx and Engels, some groups were regarded as left over from a previous 'mode of production' (for example, the aristocracy and peasantry were perceived as residual feudal elements), while others were seen to represent a modern clash of class interests (for example, capitalists and the working class). Ideas of 'class struggle' and 'class consciousness' developed in the nineteenth century and their relationship to song is duly considered in this book. For Marx, the crucial determinants of class position in economic terms were, first, whether or not one had ownership of the 'means of production' and, second, whether one had the ability to purchase labour power or needed to sell one's own. For me, this still remains the most convincing analysis of the class divisions (described in terms of working class, middle class and upper class) that arose during the time of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. It is important to note, however, that the new conceptualization of class saw social position as something that could be, at least partially, attained by anyone, whereas the former ideas, based on notions of hierarchy and rank, were linked to a belief that these were determined at birth.

It will be clear from the above that I remain unrepentant and, thus, I forego asking the reader to pity the lot of someone who, in a reworking of Strepson's sorry condition, is a Marxist down to the waist but finds his legs are fanatical about Gilbert and Sullivan. There again, I like to think that had the great castigator of capitalism lived a little longer he would have found much to enjoy in *Utopia Limited*, an opera that chose the unlikely subject of political economy as the target of its satire.

Derek B. Scott
10 April, 2000

1 *The Foundations of the Drawing-room Genre*

The multifaceted edifice of bourgeois 'popular song' was built upon foundations laid in the eighteenth century: the most important of these were the English opera, the collections of arrangements of 'traditional airs' and the Table Entertainments pioneered by Dibdin. The not insignificant part played by nonconformist hymns will be considered elsewhere in this book, as will the influence in mid-century of Afro-American music. Bourgeois song was obviously indebted to aristocratic musical practice and to the cosmopolitan musical character of eighteenth-century London. In the first half of the century rich merchants aped the manners of the upper class. An interest in the art patronized by the aristocracy was a proof of social distinction for the upwardly mobile. Hogarth satirized this behaviour and depicted in *Marriage à la Mode*, 4 (1745), a merchant's daughter who aspires to upper-class values by listening to a castrato singer and collecting 'decadent' art objects. The court remained the focal point of musical activity during the reign of George II, although the first regular series of public subscription concerts started in 1729 at Hickford's Room in James Street. The nobility inherited a music tradition almost completely bound to either the church liturgy or the court ceremonial, and in the early 1700s they supplemented it by importing Italian *opera seria*.

The flowering of opera in Naples, which occurred slightly later than in Venice, provided the model for imitation in Hanover, London, and Vienna. The most popular of all Italian operas in London, *Il Trionfo di Camilla, Regina de Volsci*, was originally written for Naples in 1696 by Giovanni Bononcini (1670–1747). It received 111 performances from 1706–28 but always either completely in English or in a mixture of English and Italian. It therefore came to be considered an English opera and had just concluded a successful run in the English Opera Season at Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre before *The Beggar's Opera* opened there in 1728. The enormous success of the latter, a work pointedly intended to appeal to the middle class, demonstrated the potential size of the new audience for a composer who, like Handel, would be willing to make appropriate concessions. Bononcini abstained from pursuing this opportunity, being more inclined towards the private concerts of the aristocracy in Britain and Europe.

The work which established Italian opera in its native tongue in London was Handel's *Rinaldo* (1711). London was a cosmopolitan town, the home of many Italian musicians, Handel himself, as a German who acquired fame writing

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Italian operas for the English, personally testifies to this cosmopolitan character. Aaron Hill, the director of the theatre in the Haymarket, had concocted a libretto from bits of Tasso and Ariosto and suggested Handel set it to music when he met him in London on his first visit to England. Handel agreed, so it was speedily translated into Italian by Giacomo Rossi.

Handel was successful in providing aristocratic entertainment but his real sympathies lay with the bourgeoisie. Although he received royal patronage, he never held an official court position and was often out of favour with certain members of the aristocracy whose resentment became overt when they organized a rival 'Opera of the Nobility' in 1734. During the 1700s Handel was increasingly aware of the possibility that a large commercial public might be catered for by a new art-form. The public reactions to *The Beggar's Opera* and Carey and Lampe's burlesque *The Dragon of Wantley* (1737) showed wide-spread scorn for *opera seria* which was damaging his box-office receipts. His solution was to blend the music of Italian opera, the German Passion, and the English choral tradition, to create an original and eventually highly successful hybrid, the English oratorio. In Italy the term meant, more or less, a concert performance of a sacred opera during Lent, when the Pope had decreed that opera houses were to be closed. Handel pleased the middle class by using English as the language of his oratorios, and the biblical subject matter was more to their taste than that of the opera. In a period of expanding empire it was easy to identify with God's chosen people and their heaven-sent victories. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the major European countries were engaged in commercial wars for the control of overseas markets. Britain's sea-power was crucial, so it is no surprise to learn that the patriotic song 'Rule, Britannia!' dates from this time (1740). By the end of the Seven Years War (1763) Britain had outstripped her rivals in the building of a colonial empire and had secured both North America and India.

The traditional court composer's commemoration of a victory would be a work like Handel's 'Dettingen Te Deum', written to celebrate the fortunate outcome of the last great charge in British history led by the king himself, at the battle of Dettingen in 1743 (his horse having accidentally bolted in the direction of the enemy). Now, Handel also had an alternative means of response to national conflict and chose to celebrate the victory over the forces of feudalism at Culloden, in an oratorio, *Judas Maccabeus* (1746). Prince Charlie was the grandson of the dethroned monarch James II, and the focal point of pro-Stuart sympathy among the aristocracy. The true patriot was called upon to reject feudalism in the cause of establishing a middle-class democracy. It is ironic that an old song revitalized for the cause in the 1740s, 'God Save the King', probably originally referred to 'the king over the water' (still suggested by 'Send him victorious', and in an early version the epithet 'true-born'). Handel identified with the aims of middle-class liberals, having for ever turned his back on feudal Germany and become naturalized as English in 1726. *Judas Maccabeus* caught the bourgeois mood and was to be one of his most regularly performed pieces. The English are represented by the Israelites who are fighting a Roman aristocracy, and the Duke of Cumberland (alias 'the butcher') is undoubtedly intended for comparison with the divinely favoured eponymous hero.

It is worth while pondering the kind of freedom for which English soldiers were being asked to sacrifice their lives, if need be. The agrarian revolution had destroyed the ancient village communities, and the system of co-operative husbandry had been replaced by individual farming. Furthermore, the effect of the Enclosure Movement was to dispossess small tenants and cottagers in the interests of capitalist farmers. The result of political reformation meant that people were more and more bound together by self-interest rather than gaining freedom. The liberty being fought for was the freedom to sell one's own labour-power or hire that of others, depending on whether one owned or had been stripped of property. After the suppression of the '45 rebellion, the Highland chiefs were, in Dr Johnson's description, changed from 'patriarchal rulers' to 'rapacious landlords'.¹ In the later eighteenth century enforced clearances took place in the Highlands to make room for profitable sheep-farming.

The rightness of the Protestant religion is strongly hinted at in the Rev. Morell's libretto (despite the obvious anomaly that the Israelites worship a tribal deity), with the anti-papist slant of the cries of 'down with the polluted altars' and the recommendation to hurl 'priests and pageants' to 'the remotest corner of the world' in order to avoid deception by 'pious lies'. The enemy Rome also suggests Catholicism and its association with the Jacobite cause. Performers in oratorio, of course, were not under the same suspicion of popery as those in Italian opera.

The religious revival which took place in the later eighteenth century was important to the emerging industrial bourgeoisie. Methodism began to acquire respectability, and the middle class in industrial areas took advantage of the organizing experience to be gained from Methodist meetings which relied upon lay leadership and devolution of responsibility. Success in industry was also more likely to result from the sort of skills that were emphasized in Dissenting schools. The subject of nonconformism and its influence on bourgeois song is treated later.

Before the industrial revolution, middle-class town-dwellers were merchants, artisans, or shopkeepers. Social change was set in motion by the cotton industry, and the inventions of Arkwright and Crompton which, together with Watt's steam-engine, created the factory system. Because of steam power the British coal deposits were of immense significance, and scores of mines were opened. The mining of copper and iron was needed, too, for the production of the machinery itself. Arkwright was a typical example of the new industrial hero: he was a Preston barber in 1768, a mill owner in 1771, and thereafter he was continually adding to his accumulation of capital the royalties he received from machinery built to his patents (whether or not the invention he had patented was actually one of his own). When British industrial production figures began to climb, war was once more to prove a decisive factor in crushing foreign competition and securing captive markets (1793–1815).

A transformation in political and intellectual life is indicated by the birth of classical economics: Adam Smith attacked mercantilism and advocated free trade in Book IV of *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) and, according to Engels, 'reduced politics, parties, religion, in short everything to economic categories.'² In music the effects of bourgeois democratic ideas were seen in a deliberate

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popularization and simplification of style. Even a composer like Haydn, who had spent most of his life in employment at the Esterházy court, working within the traditions of aristocratic musical entertainment, reveals his republican sympathies by deliberately accommodating himself to this 'democratic' tendency in his London Symphonies of 1791–5 (e.g. the slow movement of the *Surprise Symphony*, No. 94). He also wrote twelve canzonets to English words, one of which, 'My Mother Bids Me Bind My Hair', became a firm favourite in the drawing-room repertoire. Haydn was much influenced by the music of Handel which he heard, and the kind of simple descriptive effects that can be traced from a work like Handel's *Israel in Egypt* to Haydn's *The Creation* were again a beloved feature of bourgeois song.

The middle class did not reach a position of political dominance overnight, but significant milestones were 1832, when the Reform Bill was passed, the boom in railway investment (essential for the development of capital-goods industries like iron and coal) which helped to shake off the 1842 depression, and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. The importance of the Reform agitation was the new polarization of class antagonism between labourers and capitalists (rather than labourers and aristocracy) which followed. E. P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class*³ sees Chartism as the inevitable result, and so, incidentally, did Disraeli:

In treating the House of the Third Estate as the House of the People, and not as the House of a privileged class, the Ministry and Parliament of 1831 virtually conceded the principal of Universal Suffrage . . . its immediate and inevitable result was Chartism.⁴

The importance of riding out the 1842 depression was that afterwards Britain was no longer dependent on one main industrialized sector, and the ensuing boom years were a contributing factor in setting English unrest apart from that on the continent in 1848. The importance of the repeal of the Corn Laws was that it gave a victory to the industrial bourgeoisie over the landed aristocracy, leaving the latter economically and politically weaker.

The English opera

The work which pointed most clearly to the cultural appetite of the growing urban middle class and set in motion major changes in operatic entertainment was *The Beggar's Opera* by John Gay (1685–1732). It was in every respect the antithesis of *opera seria*: instead of gods and heroes the characters were highwaymen and prostitutes; instead of broad spans of embellished melody the tunes were simple and direct; instead of a falsetto the protagonist was a tenor, a rarity in *opera seria*. Gay satirized the court and aristocratic entertainment at the same time as he carefully instilled into his work a moral purpose which, while designed to appeal to the taste of a middle-class audience, was calculated not to offend the aristocracy at large.

Ironically, Gay had really written a play rather than an opera and originally

intended the songs to be sung entirely without accompaniment. When Colley Cibber refused him the opportunity of performances at Drury Lane, it was John Rich, at whose theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields the piece was first seen in 1728, who persuaded Gay to allow his resident musical director Johann Pepusch to provide accompaniments. This alteration of Gay's plans did not work to the play's advantage throughout. The pace of Act 3: scene 13, for instance, where Macheath sits in the condemned cell drinking and singing snatches of ten different songs, is seriously impeded. In consequence of its being a last-minute decision, Pepusch's arrangements are fragmentary and sketchy, and because of this the unusual convention arose that all revivals of the work became musically 'updated'. Arne and then Bishop, who both produced later versions, were among the first to build a tradition which has lasted to the present day. Frederic Austin's 1920 arrangement of the score, which ran for over three years at the Lyric Theatre, Hammer-smith, has been the most acclaimed revival so far this century. *The Beggar's Opera* also provided the stimulus for Brecht and Weill's revolutionary landmark in the history of modern musical theatre, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, written to commemorate the bicentenary of Gay's pioneering drama in 1928. This time, however, the shafts of political satire were aimed from the perspective of the proletariat rather than the bourgeoisie.

The source for the majority of Gay's tunes was the collection *Pills to Purge Melancholy*⁵ by the bawdy Restoration poet Tom Durfey (or, spelt in the quasi-aristocratic manner he preferred, D'Urfey). This fact is clear because they are cited by the names they bear in this collection, even when they exist under different titles elsewhere. Most of the Scottish songs are from Thomson's *Orpheus Caledonius*,⁶ to which Gay's patroness, the Duchess of Queensbury, subscribed. Many other songs are originally from theatrical productions, and among them are simple, tuneful pieces by Purcell, Eccles, Leveridge, and even Handel and Bononcini. They are sometimes not simple enough, however, as the incorrect version of Handel's march from *Rinaldo* demonstrates. No doubt the reason for this error was that it was notated from memory, either from its regular performance by the band of the Royal Horse Guards, or its previous parody as a tavern song, 'Let the Waiter Bring Clean Glasses'. Gay may have been entirely unaware that he had converted what in *Rinaldo* was a march of the Christians into a march of the highwaymen.

Allan Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725), which he described as a Scots pastoral comedy with songs to ballad airs, is often considered a forerunner of *The Beggar's Opera* and other ballad operas, as they came to be labelled. The truth is that, until the success of Gay's opera, it was a spoken play with just four songs. Only following an Edinburgh production of *The Beggar's Opera* did Ramsay augment its musical substance to twenty 'sangs'. Theophilus Cibber adapted this version for performance in London as *Patie and Peggy* (1730). The latter's father, Colley, who had shown initial lack of enthusiasm for Gay's piece, had already leapt onto the bandwagon with his own ballad opera, *Love in a Riddle* (1729). That same year in Dublin the major theatrical centre outside London, Charles Coffey produced *The Beggar's Wedding*.

The success of ballad operas depended on their librettists alone since it was

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they who selected the tunes to which they wished to write new or parodied words. It is not surprising to find prestigious literary figures such as Henry Fielding joining the growing numbers attracted to this genre. Fielding was also not averse to creating political controversy, as *The Welsh Opera* of 1731 shows. Here political satire is directed at both parties and even involves the Royal Family. In 1737 the government had had enough and passed the Licensing Act in response to continuing satirical attacks. From now on there were to be only two legitimate theatres in London, Covent Garden and Drury Lane, and all plays were subject to a well-regulated system of censorship. The limitation on theatre numbers lasted until 1843, but the strict enforcement of censorship begun by the Act lasted until 1968.

There were also completely original works, like Thomas Arne's *Thomas and Sally* (1760), composed to a libretto by Isaac Bickerstaffe. This has a small cast, lasts under an hour, and was performed at Covent Garden as an 'afterpiece' opera. Although described by Burney as having 'very little musical merit',⁷ it was an immediate and lasting success. For the most part Arne writes the simple strophic settings (that is, the same tune for each verse) which dominate ballad opera. The melodic style, however, is more ornate than the ballad airs, indicating a return to the influence of the Italian aria which, because of its aristocratic ties, was felt to be more refined than the English song. Another Italian feature is the use of the declamatory musical style known as recitative instead of spoken dialogue. Arne also has a penchant for Scottish elements of a fashionable artificiality: the overture contains a 'Scotch Gavotte' which demonstrates this quality in its title and style.

The reason for the opera's appreciation must be attributed in part to the hero's chauvinism; he arrives on stage fresh 'From ploughing the ocean and threshing Mounsiour'⁸ (Britain was in the midst of the Seven Years War). Thomas is a forerunner of the jolly Jack Tar who is later given enormous popularity by Dibdin. He constantly employs nautical metaphors and even interprets the squire's attempted rape of his beloved Sally as 'A pirate just about to board my prize!'⁹ The moral of the piece is one that became a great favourite of the Victorian bourgeoisie, who never tired of recommending it to those who lacked fortune or position; it is summed up in Sally the milkmaid's remark, 'Virtue commands me – Be honest and poor'.¹⁰ The emphasis throughout is on true-heartedness, thus contrasting markedly with the fickleness of the characters in *The Beggar's Opera*, an arrangement of which Arne had produced at Covent Garden the year before.

There is no space here¹¹ to discuss the stage entertainments of composers like Samuel Arnold (whose *Inkle and Yarico* (1787) concerned slavery in the West Indies and was contemporary with Wilberforce's agitation), James Hook, Thomas Linley, or Stephen Storace (whose *The Cherokee* was the first English opera based on the American Wild West). Charles Dibdin, although he too created some pieces in the ballad-opera vein, such as *The Waterman* (1774) and *The Seraglio* (1776), will be treated separately in connection with his more original entertainments.

The most 'popular' type of opera towards the close of the century was a light

sentimental comedy which contained a mixture of original music, favourite tunes from other operas, and traditional airs. Musical director of Covent Garden at this time was William Shield (1748–1829), and those of his operas which were most admired were of the afterpiece variety rather than full length, and used traditional airs alongside freshly composed music. *Rosina* (1782) contained the tune now sung to the words ‘Auld Lang Syne’, and was, indeed, responsible for the spreading of this melody’s popularity throughout Britain. The song ‘The Plough Boy’, with its attractive ‘whistling’ piccolo part, comes from *The Farmer* (1787), one of the many operas he wrote in partnership with the Irish dramatist John O’Keefe.

An authentic composition of Shield’s which became a war horse of the Victorian drawing room was ‘The Wolf’, from his and O’Keefe’s *The Castle of Andalusia* (1798).

At the peaceful midnight hour,
Every sense, and every pow’r
Fetter’d lies in downy sleep;
Then our careful watch we keep.
While the wolf in nightly prow,
Bays the moon with hideous howl.

Gates are barr’d – a vain resistance;
Females shriek, but no assistance;
Silence, or you meet your fate!
Your keys, your jewels, cash and plate.
Locks, bolts, and bars, soon fly asunder,
Then to rifle, rob, and plunder.

It held a place throughout the nineteenth century as one of the half-dozen best-known bass songs. Shield’s ‘The Wolf’ does much to encourage a cult for the low-pitched menacing song. Not that it is so very alarming: no one had heard the ‘hideous howl’ of a wolf in Britain for over half a century. It is specifically aimed at the wealthy: ‘Silence, or you meet your fate!’ might be taken by the average person as a threat of death, but the main emphasis is on the fear of losing possessions rather than one’s life. The precious possessions whose possible loss chills the hearts of the drawing-room audience are the vanities of luxury – jewels, cash, and plate.

The reason needs to be explored why, at this stage of evolution of the English opera, a drawing-room classic should emerge. As noted above, the words relate to the fears of the wealthy bourgeois, but why did the song survive musically? A song such as ‘The Wolf’ presented itself as unaffected, realistic, while at the same time imaginative and polished. Yet, some of its features, for example, the excessive use of sequence (the repetition of a melodic phrase at a different pitch) borrowed from *opera seria*, would have sounded routine and old-fashioned in the nineteenth century. The principal explanation for its continued musical fascination would seem to be the possibilities it offered for a melodramatic rendition. The tempo moves from a gentle, rocking rhythm for the sleepy world, to a slightly quicker, atmospheric section for the prowling wolf, to a vigorous final section for the

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robbing and plundering. The stimulating effect of the increases in speed, which are coupled to similar increases in loudness, only wanted the addition of a dramatic flair on the part of the singer to be sure, in the language of the day, of creating astonishment in the listener.

The next operatic composer relevant to this survey, John Braham (1774–1854), one of the most celebrated tenors of the first half of the nineteenth century, contributed three perennial favourites to the drawing-room repertoire, the song ‘The Anchor’s Weigh’d’, the duet ‘All’s Well’, and the recitative and aria ‘The Death of Nelson’. None of them display any willingness to venture beyond the simplest harmonies. ‘The Anchor’s Weigh’d’ moved thousands to tears with its yearning pauses and its pathetic farewells uttered by the sailor lad parting from his true-love. ‘All’s Well’ contained the drama of excited questioning between the voices but elsewhere they sing in the plainest sweetest-sounding harmony. This duet was the first to give wide popularity to the partnership of tenor and bass, a blend of voices chosen by Balfe in 1857 for perhaps the most famous of all drawing-room duets, his setting of Longfellow’s ‘Excelsior’. Braham’s duet originally appeared in *The English Fleet in 1342*, an opera written for Covent Garden in 1803 in return for what was, by the standards of the time, the enormous sum of one thousand guineas.

Many Victorians expected the tenor aria ‘The Death of Nelson’, from the opera *The Americans* of 1811, to confer immortality on the name of Braham. Instead he acquired the anonymity which Auden said all great artists should aspire to, when, in 1931, the editor of *The Oxford Song Book*¹² included this by now traditional song with the composer given as unknown. This neglect was unkind, even if an old rumour was believed that Braham based his piece on a French sailors’ song, for it would still have required extensive reworking in order to accommodate S. J. Arnold’s lengthy stanzas. The Oxford version also omits the preceding atmospheric recitative ‘O’er Nelson’s Tomb’ and rejects Braham’s most imaginative music, the first fourteen bars of verse 3, in favour of a repeat of the equivalent bars in verses 1 and 2.¹³

RECIT. O’er Nelson’s tomb, with silent grief oppress’d
Britannia mourns her hero now at rest;
But those bright laurels ne’er shall fade with years,
Whose leaves are water’d by a nation’s tears.

ARIA ‘Twas in Trafalgar’s Bay
We saw the Frenchmen lay;
Each heart was bounding then:
We scorn’d the foreign yoke,
For our ships were British oak,
And hearts of oak our men!
Our Nelson mark’d them on the wave,
Three cheers our gallant seamen gave,
Nor thought of home or beauty;
Along the line this signal ran:
‘England expects that every man
This day will do his duty!’

And now the cannons roar
Along th' affrighted shore –
Our Nelson led the way:
His ship the 'Vict'ry' named –
Long be that 'Vict'ry' famed,
For vict'ry crowned the day!
But dearly was that conquest bought,
Too well the gallant hero fought
For England, home, and beauty!
He cried, as 'midst the fire he ran:
'England shall find that every man
This day will do his duty!'

At last the fatal wound,
Which spread dismay around,
The hero's breast received:
'Heav'n fights upon our side!
The day's our own!' he cried.
'Now long enough I've lived!
In honour's cause my life was pass'd,
In honour's cause I fall at last,
For England, home, and beauty!'
Thus ending life as he began,
England confess'd that every man
That day had done his duty!

The singer is frequently interrupted by fanfare-like musical punctuations which are designed to arouse those whose emotions have not already been overtaken by patriotic sentiment.

The image shows a musical score for the lyrics "Twas in Tra-fal-gar's bay We saw the French-men lay,". The score is written on a grand staff with three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom two staves are the piano accompaniment. The lyrics are placed below the vocal line. The music features a vocal melody with some rests and a piano accompaniment with fanfare-like punctuations, including a prominent sixteenth-note figure in the right hand and a similar figure in the left hand.

The well-known words concerning England, home, and beauty, are set tranquilly and lyrically to obtain maximum dramatic contrast.

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For Eng-land, home and beau-ty, For Eng-land, home and beau-ty!

p

The tragic final verse begins with a conventional switch to the minor key to convey melancholy; and the receipt of the fatal wound is recorded loudly and sonorously in the depths of the accompaniment.

At last the fa - tal wound, (Which)

p

ff

The words attempt to engage the listener's sympathy by continual use of the possessive pronoun 'our': 'our ships', 'our men', 'our Nelson' (twice), 'Heav'n fights upon our side!' Ostensibly this is because it is sung by a participant in the battle of Trafalgar; yet notice the lines '*His* ship the "Vict'ry" named' (not *our* ship), and 'Three cheers *our* gallant seamen gave' (not *we* gallant seamen). It is clearly aimed at those who did no fighting and invites them to bask in the glory of victory, sharing the pride of being part of a nation which has produced such a hero as Nelson. Naval victories of previous years are conjured up by the quotation of words from the eighteenth-century patriotic song by Garrick and Boyce, 'Heart of Oak'. Nelson's famous call for Englishmen to do their duty could not fail to swell the patriotic breast of the industrial bourgeois faced with no more immediate danger than a decline in the rate of profit.

Braham's junior by twelve years, Sir Henry Rowley Bishop (1786–1855) was a composer of immense importance to early nineteenth-century theatre music. Over a dozen of his songs, taken in the main from stage productions, remained in the drawing-room repertoire for the rest of the century and beyond. Even in 1918 there were prestigious musicians who believed his songs had 'put on immortality'.¹⁴ Bishop's only compositions at all familiar today are the song 'Home, Sweet Home!' and the dance 'The Dashing White Sergeant', taken from a song of that title composed to verses by General Burgoyne in 1826.

It was in one of his English operas (in reality, for the most part a spoken play) *Clari, or The Maid of Milan* (1823) that his famous song 'Home, Sweet Home!' was first heard, sung by Miss Maria Tree. It functioned in this domestic drama as an all-pervading melancholy tune which stamped its character on the entire piece. Yet, in 1829, Bishop decided something fresh was required to exploit the success of his song and put on a drama called, not surprisingly, *Home, Sweet Home!*

The tune of the verse exists in a Goulding and Dalmaine publication of 1821, *Melodies of Various Nations*, edited by Bishop. Here, also, are several other airs by Bishop masquerading under such descriptions as 'Portuguese' or 'Hindostanee'. His air labelled 'Sicilian' had words by the fashionable poet Thomas Haynes Bayly: 'To the Home of My Childhood in Sorrow I Came'. Bishop later deposed on oath in court that he had composed the tune himself, being unable to locate a genuine Sicilian air. The words of the second version, which now includes a refrain, are by John Howard Payne, an American actor and dramatist, who ironically never had a settled home. Widespread as the song's fame was in the late 1820s, its celebrity and cultural importance increased towards the end of Bishop's life when it became a favourite of the 'Swedish Nightingale', Jenny Lind. Bishop, however, seems to have felt greater financial satisfaction than musical pride in its success.

Jacqueline Bratton, in *The Victorian Popular Ballad*,¹⁵ quite rightly points out that it is an 'assemblage of talismanic words', but she is misled by its emotional associations in describing it as a 'wailing, tear-laden tune'. One has only to listen to a tune like Tucker's 'Sweet Genevieve', which aptly suits that description, to realize how very plain Bishop's melody is by contrast. Even so, it has an Italianate quality in its simplicity, more reminiscent of an aria such as Handel's 'Verdi Prati' (from *Alcina*, 1735) than an English air. A typical operatic feature is the musical decoration around the significant words 'There's no place like Home!' (completely ironed out in many late Victorian editions). The accompaniment is a variant of an eighteenth-century cliché known as the Alberti bass. Another cliché is the trilling accompaniment to 'The birds singing gaily', although its naïve simplicity almost disarms criticism. Harmonically the song also demonstrates the same artlessness: it consists of no more than four different chords throughout. The melody, except for two of its moments of brief ornamentation, uses only the notes of the major scale and is of narrow range. Each line of the verse and refrain comes to rest on either the first or the third degree of the scale. Bishop constantly requires a hushed vocal tone and asks for the voice to be slightly raised just once, for the penultimate 'There's no place like Home'.

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HOME, SWEET HOME!

John Howard Payne

Sir Henry Rowley Bishop

Andante larghetto

The first system of the piano accompaniment features a treble and bass clef. The treble clef part begins with a series of eighth notes, while the bass clef part provides a steady accompaniment of eighth notes. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4.

The second system continues the piano accompaniment. It includes a dynamic marking of *ff* (fortissimo) in the bass clef part towards the end of the system.

The third system includes the first line of lyrics: 'Mid plea - sures and pa - la - ces though we may roam, — Be it

The fourth system includes the second line of lyrics: e - ver so hum - ble there's no — place like Home! — A charm from the

The fifth system includes the third line of lyrics: skias seems to hal - low us there, — Which, seek — through the