EDITED BY
JEREMY DIBBLE
AND JULIAN HORTON

BRITISH MUSICAL CRITICISM AND INTELLECTUAL THOUGHT 1850–1950

British Musical Criticism and Intellectual Thought 1850–1950

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British Musical Criticism and Intellectual Thought

1850–1950

Edited by
Jeremy Dibble and Julian Horton

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In Memoriam

Peter Evans

(1929–2018)

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Peter Evans, formerly a Lecturer in Music at Durham University and Professor of Music at Southampton University. Peter had an immense knowledge of British music of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries both as a practical musician and as a musicologist, and was a pioneer of studies in this field. It is hoped that this collection of essays stands as a fitting tribute to his work and his generous support of others who have latterly followed his lead.

Jeremy Dibble
Julian Horton

Durham, May 2018

Introduction

Trends in British Musical Thought, 1850–1950

Jeremy Dibble and Julian Horton

The last forty years have undoubtedly witnessed a renaissance of interest and scholarly activity in British music of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. Our view of this period, in terms of its musical repertoire and historical context, is now much more richly detailed and our appreciation of its cultural issues, complexities and tensions is that much greater; moreover, our familiarity with the music has been greatly aided by the supporting literature of monographs, essays and articles, by the research evinced at conferences (such as the biennial 'Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain' meetings) and by the increasing availability of commercial recordings, live performances and broadcasts. Yet, while we may now have a more thorough understanding of the period in terms of its chronology, its works and composers, its key educational institutions, performing venues, conductors and performers – indeed a more complete picture of British artistic trends, stylistic influences and prevailing aesthetic characteristics – we lack a proper contemporary perspective of the world of criticism and intellectual thought which fruitfully coexisted alongside its creators and music-makers. Certainly, the diversity and individuality of this somewhat neglected facet of British musical life has yet to be fully understood or evaluated. This study, in the form of a series of individual essays, seeks therefore to identify its main participants,[1] its key writings and publications, and those central features of an intellectual tradition which developed quite independently of its continental counterparts in Germany, France and Italy. Just as Britain's geographical 'separateness' had determined its own course of intellectual development, so it can be demonstrated that the nation's understanding and appreciation of music was governed by a set of criteria entirely different from those that informed, for example, Germany's most prominent musical thinkers (where the emphasis

[1] It has been necessary to exclude a number of important figures such as J. A. Fuller Maitland, H. C. Colles, Edwin Evans, Arthur Eaglefield-Hull, Samuel Langford, A. H. Fox Strangways, W. J. Turner and Neville Cardus, in the interests of space and detailed discussion.

was essentially on metaphysics, dialectics and aesthetics), even though, as we know, German musical *processes* of composition deeply influenced British music before the First World War. National musical life was coloured by the lionization of Handel and Mendelssohn, by Anglican liturgical music, choral societies, the popularity of the domestic piano, the ascendancy of the cathedral organist, and the notion that concert music and opera were essentially foreign commodities; as such, British musical criticism at the beginning of the nineteenth century emerged from very particular circumstances and with a set of quite different philosophical precepts, social values and aspirations.

While the fourteen essays contained in this volume are ordered to provide an approximate chronology of its focal authors, the essays themselves also set out to define the prevalence and development of several core binary discourses. Perhaps the most fundamental of these is a peculiarly British predilection for empiricism in preference to Hegelian Idealism. An indebtedness to Locke, Hume, the Scottish Enlightenment and the desire for tangible evidence profoundly informed both John Stuart Mill's Utilitarian Rationalism and the Darwinian revolution during the nineteenth century; as Bennett Zon explores in Chapter 2, Herbert Spencer's hugely influential 'Social Darwinism' shaped a vision of musical history and criticism which many writers, especially those at Oxford such as John Stainer, Hubert Parry and Henry Hadow, adapted and promulgated. The lasting effect of their intellectual precepts was considerable. That is not to say that Idealism passed entirely unnoticed: in Chapters 3, 6 and 7, Jeremy Dibble, Julian Horton and Karen Arrandale examine a counterbalancing Oxford tradition of British Idealism, which undoubtedly left its mark on Ernest Walker, Donald Francis Tovey and Edward Dent; but the force of Parry's brand of evolutionism is still irresistibly felt in many of the critical processes and conclusions. Furthermore, a powerful symptom of British empiricism, which we can observe in many of the figures featured in this volume, is the tendency to adduce musical evidence and inference from a close scrutiny of the musical texts, an analytical process which has as much to do with practical engagement either as a performer or as a composer as it does with reception.

The purple prose of Walker and Tovey, who sought, as a symptom of their fundamentally empirical approach, to find the *mot juste* in their critical writings, was echoed in style (if not in spirit) by George Bernard Shaw, in whom, as Harry White shows in Chapter 5, the cult of Wagner reached its apogee. For Shaw, the ardent socialist, atheist and reformer, Wagner became the means to lambast the British musical establishment's obsession with religion, and, even more so, with academicism. Technical brilliance, once the quintessential index of genius (as demonstrated by Mendelssohn, for example), had been superseded by Wagner's belief in drama, feeling and *inspiration*. Yet, ironically, Shaw

(for much of his life until his famous *volte-face*) could not see past what he perceived as a similar academic pedanticism in Brahms or in Parry's, Stanford's or Tovey's erroneous admiration of so-called German 'conservatism'. Wagner also proved to be an important focus for Ernest Newman, whose belief in German music and musicology (which included a high regard for Heinrich Schenker) fuelled not only a general personal disdain for contemporary British criticism but also the yearning for a new, even more empirically generated desire for *objectivism*. (Newman's views are extensively documented by Paul Watt in Chapter 4.) Cleaving to a new secular world, inspired by Comtian positivism and the example of German musicological process as shown by writers such as Guido Adler, Newman aspired to a scientific method of biography and musical criticism, which sought to discard the subjective meanderings and bias of his fellow authors and newspaper columnists.

A second significant binary discourse which concerns this volume's essays is the interaction of nationalism and internationalism. The very narrative of nationalism is, of course, an intrinsically fascinating subject; the motivation of this volume is, to a large extent, predicated on a native critical tradition which is distinct from its Continental counterparts. Yet, ironically, the outlook of figures such as Davison, Chorley, Stainer, Parry, Walker, Tovey, Newman and Dent was almost certainly international, though with a strong emphasis on the dominance of the Austro-German axis. Nevertheless, it is possible to perceive a craving for the distinctive, characteristic leader or 'genius' in Walker's need to produce *A History of English Music* in 1907, appraised by Jeremy Dibble in Chapter 3, and in Shaw's advocacy of Elgar, although, of course, by the time Vaughan Williams was ready to set out his own compositional agenda, localism and nationalism had become watchwords for a new aesthetic movement in the 1920s and 1930s in which the imperative of folksong and ethnocentrism was never far below the surface. However, while home-grown nationalism was undoubtedly an important factor in British musical criticism of this period, a taste for other nationalisms, particularly those of central Europe and Russia, also gained rapid momentum at the end of the nineteenth century with the popularity of both Dvořák and Tchaikovsky. Russian music, in particular, gained a place in British affections, not only with its conductor advocates such as Thomas Beecham and Henry Wood, but also through critical voices such as Rosa Newmarch and Michel-Dmitri Calvocoressi, who, as Philip Ross Bullock explains in Chapter 8, did much to establish not only the reputation of Tchaikovsky (who ultimately rivalled Wagner for space in concert programmes), but also Glinka, the more exotic accents of 'The Five' and Stravinsky. After the 1917 Revolution, Newmarch, who was unimpressed with Bolshevik anti-liberalism, turned her enthusiasms to the nationalist ideals of Leoš Janáček and

Sibelius, leaving Calvocoressi, somewhat younger, to explore the next generation of Soviet scholarship together with Gerald Abraham.

A much more sharply defined British–Continental divide can be identified in a further binary discourse of 'Intellectualism' and 'Anti-intellectualism', the causes and effects of which are traced in detail by Sarah Collins in Chapter 9. Albeit more esoteric than the issues of empiricism, objectivism and nationalism, it informed a great deal of British critical thought in music during the inter-war period and it helped to shape a response to the European avant-garde and to address questions of modernity in a different fashion. The irony within this discourse, however, is that British music of this period was no less 'intellectual' than any other comparable forum of creativity, save that many of its most conspicuous practitioners (who were often critics at the same time) cultivated an aversion to technical nomenclature and the idea of 'over-thinking' the process of composition. British composers were 'doers' rather than 'thinkers', a notion reinforced in one sense by the tradition of composers as Professors of Music in our ancient universities, and in another by the autodidacticism of figures such as Elgar and Delius, who either lacked or renounced formal musical education. Moreover, systems such as dodecaphonicism were considered 'academic' (a word which still carries pejorative connotations) and irrelevant to a post-war democratic society for whom musical comprehension and practical involvement were considered urgent; it might be argued that this was also the realization of the imperatives established by *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1878–89), by Parry's democratic ideal of the composer and his public, and by Percy Scholes' *Oxford Dictionary of Music*, to reach out not only to the professional but to the amateur as well. In this sense, Vaughan Williams and Howells were deeply conscious of their legacy.

An additional dualism of theory and analysis can be observed as a by-product of these preoccupations. Anti-intellectualism of the kind manifest in the widespread British suspicion of Schoenberg's dodecaphony married a feeling that composition should be spontaneous rather than mechanical with a marked hostility towards theoretical abstraction. This is most obvious in the 'common-sense' compositional aesthetics of Vaughan Williams and Herbert Howells, considered by Aidan Thomson and Jonathan Clinch in Chapters 11 and 13 respectively. It also coloured Bernard Shaw's complaints of academic sterility in Brahms' music, and, in a more conservative garb, the discomfort with experimentation for its own sake that is a hallmark of Davison's and Chorley's criticisms of 'progressive' German music, which Peter Horton examines in Chapter 1. Differently conceived, it also inflected Tovey's writings, notably in his resistance to the kinds of pedagogical theory developed by Prout, and more generally in the conviction that the essence of a form reveals

itself in the sensitive reception of great works, not in any attempt to construct theoretical models or ideal types after the manner of Germanic *Formenlehre*. Tovey, in brief, favoured *analysis* over *theory*, a predilection passed on to the post-war generation via Hans Keller, as Patrick Zuk relates in Chapter 14, and which remains in force today as a major factor differentiating British and North American attitudes.

In part, Tovey's anti-theoretical mentality is a product of his orientation towards the 'naive' listener comprising the readership for what became the *Essays in Musical Analysis*. This lay emphasis connects with a sociological dichotomy between amateur and professional. On the one hand, amateur contributions loom large in the critical and scholarly literature. Peter Horton's appraisal of mid-nineteenth-century critical writing in Chapter 1 highlights the significance of amateurs such as Charles Gruneisen in this time, a critical lineage finding perhaps its most caustic expression in Bernard Shaw. On the other hand, and doubtless as a consequence, the period is shot through with anxieties about insufficient professionalism, often coupled with concerns about low critical standards. Ernest Newman's call for a rigorous critical methodology exemplifies this well, as Paul Watt clarifies in Chapter 4; exasperation with lax critical values is likewise a theme in Séamas de Barra's assessment of Bernard van Dieren, Cecil Gray and Philip Heseltine. The charge of academicism is closely related to this dichotomy: critics of the school of Stanford, Parry and the professionalized musical culture of the Royal College complained of the aesthetic stultification and mediocrity that professional training could produce. In Chapter 9, Sarah Collins explores the clash of aristocratic, entrepreneurial and professional cultures that these debates reflect. Amateurism embraced the aristocratic polymath and the capitalist entrepreneur, professionalism the quasi-*Biedermeier* values of the bureaucratic middle class. The aesthetic terrain thus staked out broadly polarized ideas of progress and restoration respectively.

Other, less obviously dualistic themes can also be traced. Although judgements of taste and value range widely, concerns about vulgarity exercised British critics to an unusual degree. The term's meaning and connotations changed across the period in question. In the later nineteenth century, it was largely pejorative, conveying the impression of technical refinement pursued as an end in itself at the expense of good taste. Later on, it acquired more positive associations, implying a style unaffected by academic pedantry. This particularly English sensibility found prominent expression in Elgar reception, crystallizing in the *furore* surrounding Edward Dent's entry on the composer for the 1930 edition of the *Handbuch der Musikgeschichte*, variously considered by Karen Arrandale and Sarah Collins in Chapters 7 and 9. In this context, vulgarity serves as an indicator for other key themes. Elgar's 'outsider' status as

a Catholic autodidact roused Anglican professional suspicions, but resonated positively with amateur commentators, most prominently Shaw.

Shaw's polemics on Elgar's behalf supply one example of the trends towards extremism and what now seems like music-historical eccentricity that wind through these writings. Polemical excess is manifest above all in the lengths to which critics were prepared to go to denigrate music they disliked. The tone is set by Davison's hostility towards virtually every Austro-German composer he encountered apart from Mendelssohn; it reaches a peak of aggression in Shaw's open contempt for Brahms and his British admirers, unpacked by Harry White in Chapter 5. This tendency found fresh expression in the inter-war years, aligning, as Séamas de Barra suggests in Chapter 10, with the irreverent anti-Victorianism of Lytton Strachey, in which spirit van Dieren rounded on Brahms and Wagner but lionized Busoni; Gray sidelined Mahler, Puccini, Vaughan Williams, Prokofiev, Berg and Webern; and both Gray and Heseltine exalted van Dieren. The convergence of critical trenchancy and eccentricity is nowhere clearer than in Constant Lambert's *Music Ho!*, appraised in detail by Christopher Mark in Chapter 12, which elevated Sibelius and viciously attacked Schoenberg and Stravinsky. These attitudes serve to emphasize both the problematic relationship between British musical thought and Continental modernism and the ironies that it engenders. The distinctively British values unearthed in this volume often compel the search for a national voice, but support for this voice is invariably sought in alternative foreign authorities (Nordic or French rather than Germanic modernism, for instance), and the means to these ends often employ manifest critical extremism in the name of aesthetic moderation or common sense.

It is worth, finally, reflecting briefly on the afterlife of these tendencies and their implications for our present critical and scholarly musical condition. Many of the factors pressing on British writers on music between 1850 and 1950 have since either alleviated or evaporated. The sense of institutional and infrastructural inadequacy that led to the founding of the Royal College of Music, compelled the establishment of a programme of full-time music education in British universities, and caused so much anxiety about the future path of British composition clearly has no modern equivalent. Present-day music critics do not need to bemoan the lack of an educational infrastructure, at least in the sense of a body of institutions devoted to professional musical tuition. The generations of British composers from Walton, Britten and Tippett through Maxwell Davies, Birtwistle, Ferneyhough, Finnissy and Goehr to Thomas Adès have placed Britain firmly within an international community of modern and post-modern composition. And the institutional frameworks for professional music criticism and scholarship are mature and functional, if not always unproblematically so.

At the same time, numerous discourses have emerged since 1950 which now command wide attention, but which have no comparably influential equivalent in Britain in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The field of popular-music journalism is most prominent in this respect, reflecting the growth of popular music itself in this time and Britain's important role in its development. This, in turn, finds a context in the complex relationship between modes of musical reproduction, which have changed beyond all recognition over the last sixty years, and the ways we consume, produce and disseminate music, a paradigm shift that has left scholarly commentators and journalists alike struggling to catch up.

Yet in other respects, this volume's recurrent debates seem all too familiar in the present. The contests between academicism and inspiration, experimentation and communication, which persist from Davison to Keller, map easily onto the current conditions of avant-garde composition, which seems increasingly trapped in a world delineated by universities, music colleges, the state-funded BBC and music festivals, while easily digestible forms of 'classical' composition prevail in the wider environment. The fresh travails facing music education, exacerbated by fiscal austerity and Government policies designed to focus attention on core scientific or market-orientated knowledge, recall the cries of philistinism that pepper our critical heritage and require us once again to rebuff the challenge that Britain is a mercantile rather than musical culture, a nation of shopkeepers rather than artists. The anti-intellectualism that drove a wedge between British critics and Brahms and Schoenberg especially finds a new lease of life in the rise of political 'post-truth', with its contempt for expertise, specialized knowledge and the burden of evidence. And the 2016 referendum on EU membership and the consequent complexities of 'Brexit' have reignited debates about British national identity, which seemed comparatively dormant even five years ago.

All of which only reinforces the need for a book of this kind. The renaissance in scholarship on music in Britain, propelled in no small measure by scholarship on the English musical renaissance, has greatly clarified the trajectories of British musical culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and their social and aesthetic causes. But the detailed and complex interactions between critical journalism, aesthetics and scholarship that attend this history have their own parallel story to tell, which, to the extent that it charts a lively and often unrestrained body of opinion, if anything resonates even more sympathetically with the critical needs of the British musical present. The literary tools honed by Davison, Chorley, Shaw, Newman, Lambert, Dent and Keller may yet serve us well.

Chapter 1

Avoiding 'Coarse Invective' and 'Unseemly Vehemence': English Music Criticism, 1850–1870

Peter Horton

> We shall endeavour, while encouraging all controversies likely to interest the musical public, to eschew such as cannot be entertained without the manifestation of party feeling, or private animosities. We see no necessity to avoid – as some of our friends advise us – all discussion on musical subjects with contemporary journals, but we shall aim at so conducting our argument, as not to shock our readers by coarse invective, or offend our adversaries by unseemly vehemence.[1]

When, in December 1844, the music critic and journalist J. W. Davison (b. 1813) penned his *apologia*, he was well aware that the reputation of *The Musical World*, whose editor he had been for some eighteen months, was in danger of being sacrificed on an altar of frivolity, 'violent language and directly personal remarks'.[2] He continued:

[1] J. W. Davison, 'Enlargement of the Musical World', *The Musical World* 20 (1845), 1. For an overview of music criticism in nineteenth-century Britain see Stephen Banfield, 'Aesthetics and Criticism', in Nicholas Temperley, ed., *The Romantic Age* (London: Athlone Press, 1995), 455–73. The careers of Davison and Henry Chorley are covered by Henry Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner, Being the Memoirs of J. W. Davison* (London: William Reeves, 1912) and Robert Terrell Bledsoe, *Henry Fothergill Chorley: Victorian Journalist* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), and that of Edward Holmes in E. D. Mackerness, 'Edward Holmes (1797–1859)', *Music and Letters* 45 (1964), 213–27. Leanne Langley has written widely on the nineteenth-century musical press in England, in particular 'The English Musical Journal in the Early Nineteenth Century' (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1983), 'The Musical Press in Nineteenth-Century England', *Notes: Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association* 46 (March 1990), 584–91, and 'Italian Opera and the English Press, 1836–1856', *Periodica Musica* 6 (1988), 2–10.

[2] Davison, 'Enlargement of the Musical World', 1.

> We freely confess our faults, and will not attempt to deny that strong personal motives have frequently engaged us in disputes, of which both the matter and the manner were wholly at variance with the due we are so proud to owe to our subscribers and the public. Let us here – while in the act of confession – promise amendment – and let this be an answer before-hand, to all who may think proper to attack us in an unbecoming spirit – that we shall not level ourselves to their standards by emulating their ill taste.

That Davison should have felt it necessary to perform such an undertaking says much about the rumbustious nature of early Victorian journalism. At a time when freedom of expression, provided that it was not blasphemous, treasonable, or seditious, was prized, opinions were voiced and reputations traduced with little or no concern for those affected. Davison had himself been far from blameless. With a liking for satire, he had appropriated from *Punch* the character of 'Jenkins', a fictitious journalist supposedly on the staff of *The Morning Post*,[3] and grafted his identity onto that of Charles Lewis Gruneisen (b. 1806), the *Post*'s music critic. To Davison, who had aspirations as both composer and pianist, Gruneisen's lack of musical expertise and background as a foreign and war correspondent made him quite unqualified to write about music. Indeed, less that than a month earlier he had published, under the title 'An *Amateur* Critic' [my italics], a 'memoire' of 'Jenkins Greeneyeson, Esq., A.S.S.':[4]

> Was not he Jenkins – the universally laughed at – the generally looked at – the individually wondered at – not merely jocular himself, but the cause of jocularity in others? … At this point of the career of one of the most stupendous intellects on record, we must pause awhile, lest, dazzled by excess of light, we become giddy and incapable of the heavy task we have set ourselves – that is sketching the principal incidents in the life of Jenkins Greeneyeson.[5]

The discovery that the writer of these words was one of the country's leading critics might strain credulity, but the episode demonstrates the great variety of writing about music, in newspapers, journals and books, which was on offer in early Victorian England. It was a time when all forms of journalism flourished as never before, encouraged by the removal of the 'taxes on knowledge',[6]

[3] Leanne Langley, 'The English Musical Journal in the Early Nineteenth Century', 580. *Punch* itself had been established only in 1840.

[4] J. W. D., 'An Amateur Critic', *The Musical World* 19 (1844), 403–5.

[5] Ibid.

[6] See Langley, *op. cit.*, 31–2. Taxation on newspapers, advertisements and paper was 'progressively reduced and repealed' between 1833 and 1836, when newspaper duty was fixed at one penny per copy.

the growth of a professional middle class, the steady increase in literacy,[7] the advent of cheaper printing and the rapid expansion of the railway network. Together they contributed to the appearance of over 800 new journals between 1840 and 1850,[8] including a small number which carried reports on musical events. Before examining critical writing on music in the 1850s and 60s more closely, a brief glance at the 1820s and 30s, where the roots of this explosion of writing about music are to be found and several of the leading practitioners began their careers, will help to set the scene.

❧ *Music Criticism before 1850*

Although various attempts had been made to establish specialist musical journals in England from the early eighteenth century onwards, it was not until over 100 years later that any title survived for more than a year or two. The *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, founded in 1818 by Richard Mackenzie Bacon (b. 1776), however, lasted for over ten years. Bacon had been inspired by his belief that 'it is rather a matter of wonder we have no periodical work exclusively devoted to the subject'.[9] Significantly, he promised that a 'not … inconsiderable portion of our pages, will be devoted to criticism' because, he observed, 'music and musicians are almost entirely abandoned to the meagre, hasty, crude, and but too often partial and personal effusions of the journals of the day'.[10] But despite being everything that a serious musical journal should be, the *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* failed to retain enough subscribers and publication ceased in 1830.[11] Since 1823 Bacon had also faced competition from *The Harmonicon*. Edited by the writer, impresario and musical antiquary William Ayrton (b. 1777), who had written for *The Morning Chronicle* since 1813, each issue combined literary material with a selection of short pieces of music, a number of them newly commissioned. But this also fell victim to commercial pressures and ceased publication in 1833. Almost immediately Clowes and Ayrton began a fresh collaboration with a similar, cheaper and more 'popular' journal, the *Musical Library*, which maintained the same broad coverage as its predecessor, but in less depth. Its lifespan, however, was also short: the literary portion lasted until July 1836 and the musical

[7] Having remained at 52% between 1650 and 1820, literacy had increased to 76% by 1870. See https://ourworldindata.org/literacy/(accessed 7 January 2017).

[8] Langley, *op. cit.*, 34.

[9] 'Plan of the Work', *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* 1 (1818), 3.

[10] Ibid., 5.

[11] Later issues appeared increasingly behind schedule: volume 10, dated 1828, was not published until 1830.

supplement until February 1837. Thereafter Ayrton served as music critic for *The Examiner* (1837–53).

It was only a matter of time before a journal would be established whose lifespan would be measured in decades rather than years: that milestone was passed in March 1836 with the issue of the first number of *The Musical World*; it would run until 1891 and occupy an increasingly influential role in English musical life. The journal was conceived by J. Alfred Novello (b. 1810), proprietor of the publishing firm, and was initially edited by his brother-in-law, Charles Cowden Clarke (b. 1787). Its coverage was broad: leading and miscellaneous articles,[12] reviews, and lists of new publications. As Clarke was a man of letters, he relied upon the assistance and expertise of the organist and writer H. J. Gauntlett (b. 1805),[13] whose trenchant, opinionated writing brought welcome gravity to the new journal but probably narrowed its public appeal. At the end of 1837 Novello sold the venture[14] and, after several changes of editor, the appointment in 1843 of J. W. Davison, who held the post until 1885, introduced a long period of stability, during which it occupied pride of place among English musical journals.[15] Concurrently Davison was also music critic on *The Times* (1846–79).

Six years later Novello re-entered the periodical-publishing arena when his purchase of Joseph Mainzer's publishing business brought with it *Mainzer's Musical Times and Singing Circular*, which was relaunched in 1844 as *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*. Not until the engagement in 1846 of Edward Holmes (b. 1797), whose contributions 'gave a literary tone to the publication, which had not been aimed at before',[16] did it offer much criticism, but thereafter its coverage broadened and, alone among nineteenth-century British music periodicals, it is still in existence today.

Musical journals were far from the only means of disseminating criticism. In addition to newspapers – principally the *Daily News*, *The Morning*

[12] The first, by the seventy-year-old Samuel Wesley, was entitled 'A Sketch of the State of Music in England, from the Year 1778 up to the Present' and represented a coup for the journal. Unfortunately Wesley's memory was not always accurate and a second edition had to be accompanied by an errata note.

[13] Gauntlett's series of articles 'Characteristics of Beethoven' was particularly noteworthy (*The Musical World* 1 (1836), 21–5, 53–8, 117–22, and 197–202.

[14] See Langley, *op. cit.*, 575.

[15] John Ella acted as interim editor (January to October 1838), followed by Edward Holmes and Egerton Webbe (October 1838 to April 1839), Henry Smart (May 1839 to March 1841) and George Macfarren, senior (April 1841 to April 1843). See Langley, *op. cit.*, 574.

[16] *A Short History of Cheap Music* (London and New York: Novello, Ewer & Co., 1887), 35.

Chronicle, *Morning Herald*, *The Morning Post*, *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* – a number of mid-nineteenth-century weekly, monthly or quarterly magazines contained regular musical columns, of which *The Athenaeum* (1808–1921), *The Atlas* (1826–62), *The Examiner* (1808–81), *Fraser's Magazine* (1813–69), *The Illustrated London News* (1842–2003), *Literary Gazette* (1817–62), and *The Spectator* (1828–present) were among the most prominent. With so many opportunities, a substantial body of critics had come into existence by the middle of the century. Few were able – or chose – to devote themselves solely to criticism, while several wrote for two or more titles simultaneously.

❧ *Who was Who: A Selection of Critics*

Music criticism attracted people from a variety of backgrounds, by no means all musical. Several had a background in journalism, among them Davison's *bête noire*, Charles Gruneisen, and George Hogarth (b. 1783). Gruneisen had been appointed foreign editor of *The Morning Post* in 1833, served as a war correspondent in Spain and, between 1839 and 1844, in Paris, from where he began to send music reviews; on his return to England he succeeded Hogarth as music critic of *The Morning Chronicle*. Hogarth had likewise moved from general to music journalism, contributing to *The Harmonicon* and subsequently to *The Morning Chronicle* (1834–45?), *Daily News* (1846–66) and *The Illustrated London News* (1853?–1870). He also provided leading articles for early numbers of *The Musical World*[17] and in 1835 published *Musical History, Biography and Criticism*.[18] Eleven years later he became editor of a new periodical, *The Musical Herald*, to which we shall return later.

The Irishman Desmond Ryan (b. 1816) had turned to music and drama criticism in 1836 on abandoning medical training. In addition to writing for *The Morning Post*, *The Morning Chronicle*, the *Morning Herald* and *The Musical World* (of which he was sub-editor from 1845 to 1868), he wrote and translated song texts and libretti (including George Macfarren's *King Charles II* – see below). In 1866 he took legal action against *The Orchestra*[19] over its insinuation that, by organizing occasional concerts at which the performers gave their services *gratis*, he would be obliged to review them favourably. The court found in his favour and awarded him £250 damages. Embarrassingly it also emerged that in 1857 he had been 'double booked' and, having submitted in advance a review for a performance which never took place, had lost his

[17] In its first year of publication Hogarth was responsible for twelve articles or instalments.

[18] *Musical History, Biography* and *Criticism* (London: J. W. Parker, 1835).

[19] 'Ryan v. Wood', *The Orchestra* 124 (10 February 1866), 309–11.

job. Edward Holmes was another with a strong literary bent. A school friend of John Keats, he was a member of the literary and musical circle which met at Vincent Novello's home and included William Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Keats, Charles and Mary Lamb and many musicians among its number. On the establishment of *The Atlas* in 1826 he became its music critic and later contributed to *The Musical World*, *The Spectator* and, as mentioned earlier, *The Musical Times*. Unlike some of his colleagues, he remained receptive to new music, not least that of Berlioz (see below), whom he came to know personally, and who commended his work.

Holmes was one of several organist-critics, of whom the best-known was Henry Smart (b. 1813), a distinguished recitalist, organ designer and composer who briefly edited *The Musical World*, succeeded Holmes at *The Atlas* and later wrote for *The Sunday Times*. Direct in manner, his musical sympathies were more with Beethoven, Weber and Mendelssohn than with the avant-garde 'New German School' of Schumann and Wagner. Gauntlett, who practised as a solicitor before abandoning law, was another who combined criticism with organ playing and design. As mentioned earlier, he contributed a number of articles to *The Musical World*, but thereafter seems not to have held a regular post as a critic, making his writings difficult to identify. The violinist John Ella (b. 1808), in contrast, turned his back on a performing career in favour of promoting high-class chamber-music concerts under the auspices of the Musical Union. His pioneering introduction of analytical programme notes insured that the performances also had an educative role.

In conclusion, we reach the two best-known names in mid-Victorian music criticism, J. W. Davison and Henry Chorley (b. 1808). Their prominence has led to their being regarded as archetypal representatives of their profession, whereas their custom of relying on satire, damning with faint praise or, almost as a matter of principle, criticising anything new, placed them somewhat apart from many of their colleagues. Davison has already been encountered, but Chorley, who wrote for *The Athenaeum* from 1833 until his retirement in 1868, was no less influential.[20] In addition to his weekly column on music, he had wider literary aspirations and wrote several novels and plays. His musical taste was, as he wrote, formed early: 'It has been my fortune (or *mis*fortune as may be) to undergo very few conversions with regard to Music and its masters. I hope that I know more than I did – but I have not come to like what I disliked ten years ago, or the reverse.'[21]

[20] Among weekly journals *The Athenaeum* acquired a particular reputation for its coverage of music, not least because of Chorley's regular contributions.

[21] Henry F. Chorley, *Modern German Music*, 2 Vols, Vol. I (London: Smith, Elder & Co., [1854]), ix.

In his critical writing he made no secret of these likes and dislikes. The former included Italian opera, as represented by Rossini, French opera by Meyerbeer and Gounod, and the music of Mendelssohn, whom he revered; modern German music – the 'Music of the Future' – and, initially, the operas of Verdi were among the latter. He regularly travelled to the Continent and the fruits of these expeditions can be found in both his journalism and his volumes of collected writings.[22] For all his idiosyncrasies – the frequent objections to things he did not like can become wearisome – one has to admire his honesty (see below). Of Davison it only remains to say that, while writing remained his main occupation, he was also active as a composer, musical editor and pianist, regularly acting as accompanist at chamber concerts in London. Like Chorley, he numbered Mendelssohn among his friends and at first was equally antagonistic towards the 'Music of the Future'.[23] His writings – and especially the less temperate columns for *The Musical World*, with their frequent use of satire – are as individual as Chorley's. But how did these Victorian critics regard themselves and their role in music and society?

❧ *The Role of the Music Critic*

Although well established in England by the mid-nineteenth century, music criticism nonetheless remained an activity that was rarely discussed. Indeed, not until the fifth edition (1954) of George Grove's *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (first published in 1878) did it merit an entry. It is thus fortunate that Chorley and Hogarth both left some thoughts about the role of the music critic and the musical journal. Writing in connection with the Leipzig music fair, Chorley invites admiration for his concern to uphold professional standards:

> I should conceive it to be a coarse impertinence were I to attempt to record the good and bad fortunes of the classical and romantic musical journals of Leipsic, – to discuss the knowledge, the style, and the success of any one among the confraternity of writers, great or small …
>
> As far as concerns Music, the press, as a patron or a punisher, is, comparatively, a new power … But the demand for what is to pass as criticism, has grown faster than the supply … The persons who can addict themselves to the literature of Art … are, of necessity, few in every country. If artistic criticism be embraced

[22] Chorley's principal writings on music are *Music and Manners in France and Germany: A Series of Travelling Sketches of Art and Society* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1841); *Modern German Music*; and *Thirty Years' Musical Recollections* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1862).

[23] Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 71.

> as a trade, it is of all trades the poorest: an ill-remunerated labour, carried on in the midst of a life of apparent show and dissipation.[24]

In contrast Hogarth's remarks 'To the Reader' in the first number of *The Musical Herald* reflect the theory, rather than the practice, of criticism:

> Music ought to have a journal appropriated to itself – a journal not addressed merely to the limited circle of artists and connoisseurs, but calculated for the instruction and entertainment of *The People* … and there is thus a desideratum which the present publication is intended to supply …
>
> The literary portion will be adapted … to the instruction as well as entertainment of the general reader. It will include articles … on the history of music, and its present state … on the lives and characters of the greatest musicians … on the objects of the art and the best means of their promotion … Brief reviews will be given … together with notices of the principal musical performances, and such other articles … as may be of general interest.[25]

It was a bold ambition and was immediately followed by an article entitled 'Musical Education in England'. In both, Hogarth made a strong case for the value of the periodical press in providing musical education. It was a view that other critics would have endorsed. Some, however, believed that their brief included two further elements: to protect readers from unwholesome music, and to reprimand composers who purveyed such unhealthy fare (as did Davison after Wagner's controversial visit to London in 1855):

> we have felt it our duty to warn all who love music and venerate the works of the great masters … against the preaching and practice of Richard Wagner and his followers – sham prophets … dangerous enemies to music, the more dangerous from their subtle intellect and uncompromising bigotry, men, themselves degenerate, envious of those who possess the generating power.[26]

Such an attitude – and Davison's outburst was an extreme example – can only be interpreted as a belief that English music was in danger of being infiltrated by 'degenerative' foreign influences, from which the critical fraternity was duty-bound to protect it. It also implies the acceptance of an agreed scale of values, which, embracing the concept that everyone and everything had its allotted place, was very much of its time.[27] Insofar as music was concerned,

[24] Henry Chorley, *Modern German Music*, II, 64–6.

[25] 'To the Reader', *The Musical Herald* 1 (1846), 1.

[26] *The Musical World* 33 (1855), 414.

[27] See, for example, Mrs C. F. Alexander's hymn 'All things bright and beautiful', with its lines 'The rich man in his castle, The poor man at his gate, God made them, high or lowly, And order'd their estate'.

one of the touchstones for evaluating compositions was by comparing them with those of the most admired contemporary composer, Mendelssohn, whom George Grove would describe as having been 'long looked upon as half an Englishman'.[28] Indeed, Mendelssohn's popularity was partly due to the fact that his frequent visits, with public appearances in London, Birmingham and elsewhere, had made him such a familiar figure. His music, too, was approachable: although new, it generally adhered to classical formal structures, which, even if they broke new ground (as in the 'symphony-cantata' *Lobgesang*) did so in an intelligible way. But while critics understood and were receptive to Mendelssohn's music, most were left bemused by the works of the so-called 'New German School', whose principal representatives were Liszt, Schumann and Wagner. As this is an area in which present-day critical judgements differ radically from those of the mid-nineteenth century, this chapter will focus on specific spheres of contemporary music: the 'New German School' (or 'Music of the Future' – Schumann, Wagner and Berlioz), Gounod, Meyerbeer, Verdi, and present-day English music.

❧ *'Music of the Future' I: Robert Schumann*

Unlike Mendelssohn, Schumann neither visited England nor had more than a handful of English acquaintances. As a result, by the time of his death in 1856 his music was still little known,[29] and what had been heard had left critics bemused or hostile. Why was this? There are several potential reasons. First, that he, much more than Mendelssohn, was a pioneer who, in extending the boundaries of music, 'broke' the rules. Second, that he was 'not Mendelssohn', the acceptable face of modern German music. Third, that by never visiting London he remained an anonymous figure. Last, the ignorance and suspicion of his music led to his being tarred by association with the 'Music of the Future'. It was to counter the pernicious influence of the last that Davison reviewed Schumann's cantata *Das Paradies und die Peri* so scathingly on its introduction to London, at a Philharmonic Society concert in June 1856:

> Robert Schumann has had his innings, and been bowled out – like Richard Wagner. *Paradise and the Peri* has gone to the tomb of the *Lohengrins*.

[28] 'Mendelssohn', in George Grove, *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. II (London: Macmillan & Company, 1878–90), 293.

[29] It has only been possible to find references to three public performances of Schumann's music in London before 1850: twice at the Musical Union (Piano Quartet in 1843, Piano Quintet in 1848), and two piano pieces – Arabesque and Nocturne – played by Lindsay Sloper in 1848.

> When … is all this trifling to cease? How many times more shall we have to insist that the new school – the school of 'the Future' – will never do in England? If the Germans choose to muddle themselves with beer, smoke, and metaphysics, till all things appear to them through a distorted medium, or dimly suggested through a cloud of mist, there is no reason why sane and sober Britons should follow their example … We put it to Professor Bennett, who took such care to introduce the Peri in her best attire, that, but for her moral deformity, she might have passed for something decent and becoming – we put it to Professor Bennett … a musician and composer of genius and attainments, who knew Mendelssohn intimately, and worships John Sebastian with his soul – to Professor Bennett, the champion of English instrumental music among foreigners, and the spoiled child of his own country … we put it to Bennett, whether such a tuneless rhapsody … was fit for those whose delicate ears … have been nourished with the pure, and sweet, and healthy strains of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Spohr, and Mendelssohn? We anticipate his answer – 'No'. …
>
> Imagine – oh, uninitiated reader! … three uninterrupted hours of music 'without form and void', three hours of organised sound *without a single tune!* We are not exaggerating … if Robert Schumann is allowed to represent the school of 'the Future'… a still greater peril will be incurred – for though Richard is more subtle, uncompromising, arrogant, and fearless, Robert is more specious. *His* music, at times, more nearly resembles music than the monstrous combinations of *Tännhauser* [*sic*] and *Lohengrin;* yet inasmuch as, in principle, it is just as vicious and bad, for that reason it is all the more dangerous.[30]

That the conductor, William Sterndale Bennett, was a friend of over twenty years standing seems not to have concerned Davison, who was not alone in accusing Schumann of being unable to produce a melody or write attractive music. Chorley liked it no better and informed his readers that reviewing the cantata had been 'an ungrateful task' and that 'Familiarity … only confirms and increases our disapproval of it',[31] while *The Examiner* (Ayrton?) complained about 'loud, complicated and unproductive accompaniments' and the 'more or less opaque' 'fog … of Neo-Germanic mystifications' through which the 'few beauties have to struggle'.[32] *The Literary Gazette* also played the nationalist card, opining that it was 'not attractive to the English public', so it was left to Hogarth (?) in *Daily News* to declare it to be 'a work of great genius and power,

[30] *The Musical World* 34 (1856), 408.

[31] 'Music and the Drama', *The Athenaeum* 1496 (28 June 1856), 816.

[32] 'The Theatrical and Musical Examiner', *The Examiner* (28 June 1856), 406.

of which the beauties will develop themselves more and more as it is oftener heard and better understood'.[33]

Given such hostility, it was a brave decision by Bennett to begin his final season as conductor of the Philharmonic Society in 1866 with another performance. Chorley simply ignored it, while Davison's response was oblique: a brief notice (10 March) in *The Musical World* which observed that despite being 'received somewhat frigidly', there was 'a good deal of applause … and there can be no doubt that [it] … found many admirers'.[34] Overshadowing this was a long (planted?) letter from the pseudonymous 'Shaver Silver', who declared it to be 'a work which I simply do not like'.[35] A week later Davison reprinted his review from *The Times* (12 March), in which he acknowledged 'the persevering efforts of some devoted adherents' who had enabled Schumann to make 'decided progress in this country'. His own opinion had moderated and had a surprising conclusion: 'We are inclined to doubt whether ten times ten years would ever make *Paradise and the Peri* … sound like aught else than a laboriously complex piece of clever dullness containing *many beautiful passages* [my italics]'.[36] In contrast, the critic of the recently established *The Reader* believed Schumann's time was coming and had little but praise for the 'little known but great work':[37] 'The performance … was heartily enjoyed by at least a considerable minority, and tolerated without overt weariness by the rest of the audience … There is now no doubt that our English prejudice against Schumann's music is wearing out.'[38] Within a few years it had indeed disappeared, but *Das Paradies und die Peri* never attained the popularity of such works as *Elijah* or Gounod's *Mors et Vita* and, perhaps because of the English preference for sacred choral works, remains a rarity in the concert hall.

❧ *'Music of the Future' II: Richard Wagner*

The surprising appointment of Wagner to conduct the Philharmonic Society Concerts in 1856 followed the resignation of Michael Costa at the end of the 1855 season and the decision of the Directors to look overseas for a replacement.

[33] Quoted in *The Musical Gazette* 1 (1856), 280. The editor, George Lake, reprinted a brief extract from *Punch* which placed the contradictory opinions of the *Daily News* and *The Times* alongside each other.

[34] 'Philharmonic Society', *The Musical World* 44 (1866), 155.

[35] 'Haydn, Schumann, Rubenstein, Wagner, Berlioz', *The Musical World* 44 (1866), 154.

[36] 'The Philharmonic Concerts', *The Musical World* 44 (1866), 171–2.

[37] 'Music. Schumann's "Paradise and the Peri", at the Philharmonic Society', *The Reader* 7 (10 March 1866), 262.

[38] Ibid., 261.

After approaches to Berlioz,[39] Spohr and Peter Lindpainter had come to nothing, Wagner's name had been suggested by the leader, Prosper Sainton, who, it later emerged, 'had no personal cognisance of Wagner's capacities … but … [considered that] a man who had been so much abused must have something in him'.[40] Wagner, short of money, unaware of the working conditions and with virtually no knowledge of English, accepted the engagement.[41] His name was not wholly unknown, as the premieres of *Rienzi*, *Der fliegende Holländer* and *Tannhäuser* had been reviewed in the press, while Chorley had seen the last in Dresden in 1845:

> in truth, I have never been so blanked, pained, wearied, *insulted* even (the word is not too strong), by a work of pretension as by this same 'Tannhäuser'. I could not have conceived it is possible that any clever person could deliberately produce what seems to me so false, paradoxical, and at such fierce variance with true artistic feeling … before I sat through the opera.[42]

Five years later Chorley was in Weimar for the premiere of *Lohengrin*, which, he considered, 'though not a work to be ignored, is still less one to be generally accepted'.[43] It was not that nothing pleased him – he considered the Prelude to Act 3 to be 'one of the most captivating and joyous inspirations we ever heard' – but his overall impression was 'of power and perversity perpetually jostling and neutralizing each other'.[44] It was the same with Wagner's conducting which, with its liberal use of rubato, tempo changes, and exaggerated dynamics, he liked no better. Other critics initially gave it the benefit of the doubt. Davison began his typically witty review of the first concert (12 March 1856) with a pen portrait, in which he described his subject as 'a short spare man, with an eager look and a capacious forehead' who conducted 'with great vivacity, and beats "up" and "down" indiscriminately'.[45] In his opinion the performance of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony was 'all "sixes and sevens" – now firm, now "shaky", now overpoweringly grand, now threatening to tumble to pieces. To us it was *most unsatisfactory*. To others it was evidently otherwise, since they praised it loudly.'[46]

[39] Berlioz had already been engaged by the New Philharmonic Society for the 1855 season.

[40] William Ashton Ellis, *Life of Richard Wagner* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1906), 5, 46.

[41] Ibid., 46.

[42] Chorley, *Modern German Music*, Vol. I, 360–1.

[43] 'Music at Weimar', *The Athenaeum* 1194 (14 September 1850), 980.

[44] Ibid., 918.

[45] 'Philharmonic Concerts', *The Musical World* 33 (1855), 171.

[46] Ibid.

As ever, opinions differed. While Davison accused Wagner of being unable to make the orchestra play quietly, *The Examiner* praised him for obtaining 'what is somewhat rare in England, a subdued instrumental accompaniment'.[47] Henry Smart's initial impression was likewise favourable: 'Nearly all the *points* he chose to make were well conceived, and he succeeded in commanding a degree of *piano* and a variety of colour, to which this orchestra … is by no means too prone.'[48] The second concert (26 March) included Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and three excerpts from *Lohengrin*. While the performance of the symphony's scherzo impressed Davison – 'the best we ever heard' – fluctuating and erratic tempi meant that he could find little positive to say about anything else. But it was the introduction of Wagner's own music which caused the greatest stir. London audiences had first encountered it a year earlier when, on 1 May 1854, the New Philharmonic Society had programmed the overture to *Tannhäuser*. It did not please. Davison dismissed it as 'a weak parody of the worst compositions, not of M. Berlioz, but of his imitators', adding 'So much fuss about nothing, such a pompous and empty commonplace, has seldom been heard'.[49] Not to be outdone, Chorley directed his readers to an earlier notice (18 December 1852) in which he had described it as 'a work not to be endured to the end without melancholy wonder at the pains which it has cost'.[50] On its repetition at the Philharmonic Society on 14 May 1855 it fared little better and even Howard Glover, critic of *The Morning Post* and more sympathetic than some to the 'Music of the Future', was at a loss to understand it:

> a succession of the most unhappy experiments we ever listened to. A few bars at the commencement, effectively instrumented for clarionets, bassoons and horns, may be praised; but, after these, we had nothing but 'confusion worse confounded.' Destitute of melody, extremely bad in harmony, utterly incoherent in form, and inexpressive of any intelligible ideas whatever.[51]

News of this strange work must have reached Buckingham Palace, as the overture was repeated at the seventh concert, a command performance in the presence of the queen and Prince Albert. This time (as Hogarth reported) it was 'admirably executed, and more favourably received than before'.[52] What is of particular interest is the queen's response (as Wagner recollected):

[47] 'The Musical Examiner', *The Examiner* 2459 (17 March 1855), 166.
[48] *The Sunday Times* (18 March 1855), quoted in Ellis, *op. cit.*, 188.
[49] *The Times* (3 May 1854), 9.
[50] *The Athenaeum*, 1312 (1854), 1399.
[51] *The Morning Post* (15 May 1855), quoted in Ellis, *op. cit.*, 275–6.
[52] *The Illustrated London News* (16 June 1855), quoted in Ellis, *op. cit.*, 307.

> She and Prince Albert sat directly in front of the orchestra, and after the Tannhäuser-overture … they applauded with a kindliness almost amounting to a challenge, whereat the audience broke into the liveliest prolonged applause. During the interval … the Queen sent for me … and received me … with the cordial words, 'I am delighted to make your acquaintance, your composition has enraptured me!'[53]

In the knowledge that in September 1860 she would request a performance of *Lohengrin* at Covent Garden, there seems little reason for us to question her enthusiasm.[54] But what could she recognize in the music that the critics could, or would, not? The answer probably reflects musical politics, as a young German champion of Wagner, Ferdinand Praeger (b. 1815), had muddied the critical waters. Praeger had settled in London in 1834 and from 1842 served as the English correspondent of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Unhappy about the way the press had pilloried Wagner and his music, he sought to redress the balance in a series of reports for the *New York Musical Gazette*. Davison reprinted excerpts in *The Musical World*, but their anti-English bias (including derogatory remarks about Smart's forthcoming opera *Berta* – 'We shall hear it and see whether H. Smart has any more pretensions to fame than that of being a nephew of Sir George')[55] antagonized English critics and, it has been suggested, was responsible for Smart's move to the anti-Wagner camp.[56]

'Richard Wagner has departed.' The four words with which Davison opened his editorial in *The Musical World* for 30 June 1855 must have brought gladness to his heart: Wagner's stay in England had not been comfortable and, with a majority of critics sceptical about his music even before his arrival, he had, to borrow a phrase, been on a 'losing wicket'. Davison's relationship with Wagner had been decidedly ambivalent: notwithstanding his dislike of the music, the man fascinated him and he continued to report on his career and devote copious pages to Wagnerian matters, among them the complete libretto for *Lohengrin*. But as with Schumann, public taste did not align with critical diktat and enthusiasm for 'Music of the Future' gathered pace. The first English production of a complete opera, *Der fliegende Holländer*, took

[53] See Ellis, *op. cit.*, 304.

[54] Ibid., 305. It is probable that Prince Albert's death (14 December 1861) led to the cancellation of the proposed performance.

[55] *The Musical World* 33 (1855), 362.

[56] See Ellis, *op. cit.*, 212–16. Ellis suggested that Praeger's comment could have provoked Smart's highly critical review of 'Two Songs by Richard Wagner' (*The Musical World* 33 (1855), 290–1), which ends thus: 'we sincerely hope no English harmonist of more than [one] year's growth could be found sufficiently without ears and education to pen such vile things as we have now had occasion to notice'.

place (as *L'Ollandese dannato* at Drury Lane) only in 1870, but seven years later London hosted a Wagner Festival. A year earlier Davison had attended the inaugural Bayreuth Festival, on which he reported at length for *The Times*. The tone of his articles, with their detailed accounts of the origin of the *Ring* cycle, could not have been more different from the carping of the 1850s. The old critic had truly been converted:

> About the wonderful things contained in the *Ring des Nibelungen*, its unique poem, derived from sources hitherto unexplored by dramatist or musician, and the many strikingly magnificent passages – sometimes, indeed, entire pieces – that cannot fail to interest, and in a great degree to edify, enough has been written.[57]

By 1876 Chorley's long reign at *The Athenaeum* had come to a close and it was his successor, Davison's old foe Gruneisen, who reported on events at Bayreuth. Even he admired the staging and 'magnificent orchestral beauties'[58] of the *Ring*, but still believed that *Rienzi* and *Der fliegende Holländer* were 'Wagner's finest productions, and will be the means of perpetuating his name as one of the great creators in the lyric drama, long after "Der Ring des Nibelungen" will have been forgotten'.[59]

Wagner and his music provide an extreme example of a characteristic response of the English when faced with something new and seemingly incomprehensible – if in doubt, reject it. The composer had not helped himself by making little effort to meet the press and, if the events of 1855 do nothing else, they illustrate the restricted vision of much English contemporary criticism. A notable exception was an essay, 'Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar', published just after Wagner's departure in *Fraser's Magazine*, a regular source of serious, independent criticism.[60] Factual, descriptive and nonpartisan, the article not only offered a respite from the overheated writings of many critics, but also introduced two further names: its anonymous author, the novelist George Eliot, and the first of her protagonists, Franz Liszt.

❧ *'Music of the Future' III: Liszt, the Forerunner*

The greatest pianist of his time, Liszt had toured England and Ireland in 1840 and 1841, when his playing and personality had made a profound impression upon Chorley:

[57] Quoted in Henry Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 524.

[58] 'The Bayreuth Festival', *The Athenaeum* 2549 (2 September 1876), 315.

[59] Ibid., 315.

[60] 'Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar', *Fraser's Magazine* 52 (1855), 48–62.